



# DISSERTATION | DOCTORAL THESIS

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The Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization: A Case  
Study of the Catholic Church in Uganda

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Bernard Rabwoni

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Univ.-Prof. Mag. lic. Dr. Johann Pock

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|         |                                                                               |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AAS     | Acta Apostolicae Sedis                                                        |
| AG      | Ad Gentes divinitus: The Decree on the Church's Missionary activity           |
| AI      | Artificial Intelligence                                                       |
| AM      | Africae Munus: Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, Justice & Peace |
| ASDYFI  | African Synod Digital Youth Faith Influencers                                 |
| AMECEA  | Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa                 |
| C.M. S  | Church Mission Society (Church Missionary Society)                            |
| Can.    | Canon (Code of Canon Law)                                                     |
| CCC     | Catechism of the Catholic Church                                              |
| Cf.     | Confer, refer to, see the work cited                                          |
| DV      | Dei Verbum                                                                    |
| Ed(s)   | Editor(s), edited by                                                          |
| EG      | Evangelii Gaudium: On the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world         |
| EN      | Evangelii Nuntiandi: On Evangelization                                        |
| Et al.  | Et alli, et aliae, et alia, and others                                        |
| GS      | Gaudium et Spes                                                               |
| GSMA    | Groupe Speciale Mobile Association                                            |
| LG      | Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.                           |
| NITA-U  | National Information Technology Authority- Uganda                             |
| PACTPAN | Pan African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network                            |
| RM      | Redemptoris Missio: The Mission of the Redeemer                               |
| RTV     | Renewing the Vision (A frame work for Catholic youth)                         |
| UBOS    | Uganda Bureau of Statistics                                                   |
| UEC     | Uganda Episcopal Conference                                                   |
| UNESCO  | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation              |
| UNCCLA  | Uganda National Catholic Council of Lay Apostolate                            |
| USCCB   | United States Conference of Catholic Bishops                                  |
| VD      | Verbum Domini                                                                 |
| WYD     | World Youth Day                                                               |
| YEN     | Youth Engagement Network                                                      |

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### Overview

This chapter outlines the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Scope and Limitations, Conceptual or Theoretical Framework, Definition of terms and Organization of Thesis.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

#### Introduction

In the contemporary times, the rise of digital and social media platforms has transformed how people communicate, connect, and access information.<sup>1</sup> This digital revolution has reshaped communication across all spheres of society, opening new pathways for organizations in various sectors to reach and engage wider audiences.<sup>2</sup>

One sector profoundly affected by these technological advancements is the religious sphere, particularly the Catholic Church, which has a longstanding tradition of evangelization. For the Catholic Church, effectively sharing its message has always been central to its mission.<sup>3</sup>

This study examines how new media technologies are being integrated into youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda, a country with a young population and a rich religious heritage deeply connected to Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> Uganda thus provides a compelling context for exploring how religious organizations are adapting to the digital age. As the Church continues its efforts to evangelize, digital platforms have created a dynamic landscape that blends faith and technology in unique ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. B. Li, *Emerging Media: Opening a New Era in Future Communication*, in: *Emerging Media* 1, no. 1 (2023): 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543231205343> (Accessed May 20, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mark Knell, *The Digital Revolution and Digitalized Network Society*, in: *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy* 2 (2021): 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43253-021-00037-4> (Accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December 8, 1975, no. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Cavanaugh, *Catholicism in Uganda, the World's Youngest Christian Populace*, in: *Catholic World Report*, June 1, 2022. <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/06/01/catholicism-in-uganda-the-worlds-youngest-christian-populace/> (Accessed October 10, 2024).

While this digital transformation presents new opportunities to engage young people, it also brings challenges that could impact the Church's ability to fulfill its mission.<sup>5</sup>

With young people increasingly active on digital platforms, traditional methods of evangelization may no longer be sufficient for reaching this demographic.<sup>6</sup> As such, the integration of new media into the Church's approach to evangelization has become critical, offering a potential bridge between the Church's mission and the digital lives of youth.<sup>7</sup> However, this change calls for a detailed understanding of the role of youth within the Church, the nature of youth engagement, and the specific social and technological factors shaping their interaction with faith.<sup>8</sup>

This background section explores these aspects in detail, highlighting the importance of youth within the Catholic Church, recent trends in youth disengagement, the Church's evolving stance toward media, and the current challenges and potential offered by new media for youth evangelization. Through this analysis, we gain a deeper understanding into the ways the Church might effectively engage with young people in the digital age while remaining true to its mission.

### **1.1.1 Importance of Youth in the Church**

Youth play a vital role in both the mission and long-term growth of the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> As both the current and future generation of the Church, they bring energy, innovation, and the potential to spread religious values within their communities and beyond. Active youth participation is essential to a vibrant Church community: young people often lead community initiatives, participate in service projects, and encourage their peers to engage in religious activities.<sup>10</sup> For the Catholic Church, engaging young

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ochenia Faith Opade, Perspectives on Digital Evangelism: Exploring the Intersection of Technology and Faith, August 2021. <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJCHRT-IDAP2P2M>. (Accessed September 23, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. Loos and L. Ivan, Not Only People Are Getting Old, the New Media Are Too: Technology Generations and the Changes in New Media Use, in: *New Media & Society* 26, no. 6 (2024): 3588–3613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221101783> (Accessed October 25, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Israel Díaz, Considering the Efficacy of Digital Technology as a Means of Evangelization in Christian Religious Education, in: *Religious Education* 116, no. 1 (2021): 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2021.1872001> (Accessed January 29, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gladys Kerubo Ragira, Rispa N. Wepukhulu, and Savala Angeline, Role of Youth in the Church, in: *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 22, no. 12, Ver. 2 (December 2017): 49–52. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2212024952> (Accessed March 28, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Christopher Wells, Pope Francis: Youth Are Living Hope of a Church on the Move, in: *Vatican News*, March 25, 2023. <https://www.vaticannews.va>. (Accessed July 12, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Eric Amankwa and Ransford Kwabena Awuku-Gyampoh, Building the Twenty-first Century Church: The Role of the Youth, in: *Journal of Youth and Theology* 21, no. 2 (2022): 148–171. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24055093-bja10025> (Accessed December 5, 2023).

people is not merely a strategy but a central component of its mission to foster a supportive faith community that upholds Catholic values across generations.

The Catholic Church has long recognized the importance of youth in its mission. The Synod of Bishops, in its XVI Ordinary General Assembly on *Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment*, emphasized that youth are an integral part of the Church and represent its hope for the future. Their active involvement ensures the continuity of faith and shapes the Church's global trajectory.<sup>11</sup>

Pope John Paul II similarly underscored this in his Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (1985). In this letter, he highlighted the crucial role of young people in securing the Church's future presence and influence in the world.<sup>12</sup> This recognition highlights the Church's commitment to developing effective evangelization strategies that nurture faith among younger generations.

### **1.1.2 Youth Exodus from the Church**

Despite the Catholic Church's recognition of youth as essential to its mission and future, there has been a noticeable trend of declining religious affiliation among young people in many parts of the world. This trend, however, varies globally.<sup>13</sup> This trend is especially evident in Europe and North America, where only around one-third of young adults regularly attend religious services.<sup>14</sup>

Many young people are increasingly distancing themselves from the Church or leaving it altogether. Research identifies several factors contributing to this trend, including perceptions that Church teachings are outdated or irrelevant, cultural shifts toward secular values, and a disconnect between traditional practices and the lifestyle preferences of modern youth.<sup>15</sup> This trend, particularly prominent among millennials and younger generations, presents a significant challenge to the Church's ability to maintain a dynamic and sustainable faith community.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Synod of Bishops, XVI Ordinary General Assembly on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, Final Document, Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, no. 167, p.112.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. The Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* of Pope John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year, 1985.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Pew Research Center, The Age Gap in Religion Around the World, in: Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, June 13, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/> (Accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Springtide Research Institute, The State of Religion & Young People 2021, in: Catholic Edition: Navigating Uncertainty (Springtide Research Institute, 2021). <https://springtideresearch.org/product/catholic-edition-2021> (Accessed October 10, 2024).

The decline in youth participation underscores the Church's struggle to address generational shifts effectively. Some young people express a perception that the Church is more aligned with older generations, underscoring an increasing disconnect between youth and the Church's activities and teachings. If left unaddressed, this trend risks creating a generational void that could impact the Church's capacity to fulfill its mission in the future.<sup>16</sup>

This youth exodus poses a profound challenge to the Church's sustainability. With the older generation inevitably aging, the disengagement of youth threatens to weaken the Church's future presence and influence. Therefore, engaging young people in a meaningful and relevant way is of paramount importance for the Church to remain a vibrant force across generations.<sup>17</sup> Adaptation to contemporary needs and values is essential to bridge this gap, ensuring the Church remains a vital and enduring part of young people's lives.

### **1.1.3 Situation of Youth in Uganda**

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with the majority of its citizens under 30 years of age. Young Ugandans are central to the nation's social, economic, and cultural progress, yet they face several challenges, including unemployment, limited education opportunities, and complex social pressures.<sup>18</sup> These factors profoundly shape their values, preferences, and how they interact with institutions like the Church. Additionally, Ugandan youth are increasingly influenced by digital culture, exposing them to global trends and secular perspectives. This dynamic environment suggests that the Church's engagement with young people must be responsive to their evolving context, as many young Ugandans actively seek meaning amid rapid societal changes.

While a significant number of Ugandan youths identify with a specific faith and regularly attend church,<sup>19</sup> studies and observations indicate a waning interest in traditional Church activities. In particular, Catholic Church attendance among youth is

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Naomi Thompson, *Young People and Church Since 1900: Engagement and Exclusion*, Routledge, London 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315113012> (Accessed February 21, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. World Bank, *Demography and Economic Growth in Uganda* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011). <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/681721468108860854/pdf/631650ESW0P12100disclosed0120200110.pdf> (Accessed March 20, 2024).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Alicia, Matsuura, *The Rising Generation of Faith Holders: How Social Media is Shaping Millennials' Views on Religion*, November 25, 2019. <https://universe.byu.edu/2019/11/25/the-rising-generation-of-faith-holders-how-social-media-is-shaping-millennials-views-on-religion/> (Accessed September 10, 2021).

in decline across Uganda and other African countries.<sup>20</sup> Some young people perceive the Catholic Church as rigid or unengaging, and as a result, many are transitioning to Pentecostal or Evangelical churches<sup>21</sup>, which they see as more flexible and appealing.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to declining attendance, many young Ugandans appear to struggle with sustaining a strong faith in an increasingly secular environment. According to a report from the Youth Ministry of the Kampala Archdiocese, Ugandan youth today are raised in a world marked by atheism, individualism, consumerism, relativism, and a “culture of death.” They often experience manipulation by political figures, exposure to violence, drug abuse, and sexual immorality, resulting in greater rates of loneliness, depression, and confusion, frequently exacerbated by pervasive media influence. This media saturation has overshadowed traditional sources of guidance, such as the Church, family, schools, and community.<sup>23</sup>

A large portion of young Ugandans spend considerable time online, with social media playing a central role in their daily activities. Parental involvement in guiding youth is often limited, as many parents face time constraints or neglect their parental responsibilities.<sup>24</sup> This lack of guidance leaves young people without essential support at a critical point in their lives, further compounding their detachment from the Church. Although these trends present significant challenges, there remains hope for solutions through intentional engagement and supportive community structures.

#### **1.1.4 The Significance of Youth Evangelization in the Catholic Church**

Evangelization is foundational to the identity and mission of the Catholic Church.<sup>25</sup> At the heart of this mission is the involvement of youth, as the Church has the unique

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Godfrey Naanlang Danaan, Mass Media and Christian Evangelisation in the Digital Age: Towards Sustaining ‘Mission’ in the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos, in: *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5, no. 7 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v5i7.954> (Accessed June 26, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mugisa, S, *The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda*, Dissertation 2021. file:///D:/MUGISA-Samuel-Doctorate-Final-version-D4046.pdf (Accessed April 21, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Leonard Sanyu, *Consecutive Apostolic Journeys to Uganda*, in: Mariusz Boguszewski, Rafał Pokrywiński (eds.), *Catholic Church in selected African countries, Historical-pastoral perspective*, Pelplin: Bernardinum 2021, p. 154. Academia.edu (Accessed August 23, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Youth ministry Kampala Archdiocese, Uganda. <https://klarchdiocese.org.ug/about-us/administration/departments/youth-ministry/> (Accessed November 24, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Daniel A. Keating, *Mission and Evangelization*, in: Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe, (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2019; online ed., Oxford Academic, May 5, 2015). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566273.013.32> (Accessed April 29, 2023).

potential to offer hope and purpose to young people amidst their challenges and uncertainties.<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, emphasizes humanity's capacity for both great good and transformation, remarking, "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of the best..."<sup>27</sup> This hopeful vision calls the Church to actively reach out to youth and foster hope in their lives.

While trends indicate that the millennial generation is less religious than previous ones, it would be inaccurate to assume that young people have entirely abandoned faith. Many continue to long for fellowship, meaning, support and a sense of fulfillment rooted in spirituality.<sup>28</sup> The Church, described as "Mother and Teacher" (CCC 2030-2051), has a pastoral responsibility to reach out and provide young people with the spiritual guidance they seek.<sup>29</sup>

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis urges the Church to be active, present, and involved in the lives of people. He writes, "Let us go forth... to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined..."<sup>30</sup>. This message underscores the importance of engaging young people who may lack the strength, hope, and consolation that come from a relationship with Christ.

The *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment* acknowledges the struggles many young people face, describing Jesus as a profound source of hope: "The young, like everyone else, also carry wounds... Christ, who consented to endure his passion and death, comes close, through his cross, to all suffering young people..."<sup>31</sup> This document calls the Church to offer support through pastoral care, addressing the physical and psychological wounds that impact many young lives.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Charlotte, McCorquodale, New Directions in Youth and Young Adult Ministry Leadership: Where Have We Been and More Importantly Where Are We Headed?, in: Religions 12, no. 3 (2021): 146, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030146> (Accessed January 15, 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2015, no. 21

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Stanz, Julian, Mass exodus of young adults from the Church? Not so fast In. The Compass, the official Newspaper for the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin. <https://www.thecompassnews.org/2021/01/mass-exodus-of-young-adults-from-church-not-so-fast/> (Accessed November 27, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, CCC 2030-2051.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2013, no. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Synod of Bishops, XVI Ordinary General Assembly on Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment, Final Document. Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, no. 67, p. 49.

Furthermore, the Synod document reflects on how Jesus' life and encounters provide a source of inspiration for young people: "In Jesus, all the young can see themselves, with their fears and their hopes, their uncertainties and their dreams..."<sup>32</sup> By acknowledging and addressing both the wounds and aspirations of youth, the Church has an opportunity to offer a path of reconciliation, hope, and purpose. Through effective youth evangelization, the Church can help youth find meaning and joy in their faith journey.

#### **1.1.5 Evolution of Evangelization Methods**

The Catholic Church has a long history of evolving its evangelization methods to reach people in different times and contexts. Initially, evangelization relied heavily on in-person sermons, printed materials, and later radio and television broadcasts. Over time, the Church began to incorporate more accessible forms of outreach to meet changing communication styles. Today, as digital media becomes increasingly central to daily life, the Church faces a new opportunity to engage its followers. This evolution reflects the Church's adaptability, as it continuously seeks relevant ways to spread its message and foster a deeper connection with believers.<sup>33</sup> In the context of youth evangelization, adapting to new media offers a powerful way to engage young people on platforms they use regularly.

#### **1.1.6 The Catholic Church's General Attitude Towards Media**

The Catholic Church's stance on media has evolved significantly over time, reflecting a journey from initial caution to proactive engagement. Initially, Church leaders viewed modern media with skepticism, concerned about its potential to promote secularism or disseminate content contrary to Catholic values. Over time, however, the Church recognized the vast potential of media as a tool for evangelization and moral guidance. This shift is notably documented in several key Church documents that outline a framework for responsibly harnessing media to further the Church's mission. One of the foundational documents addressing the Church's view on media is *Inter Mirifica*, a decree from the Second Vatican Council issued in 1963. This document acknowledges the positive potential of media when used for evangelization, emphasizing that "marvelous inventions of human ingenuity under divine guidance"

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Heidi A. Campbell and Alessandra Vitullo, Assessing Changes in the Study of Religious Communities in Digital Religion Studies, in: *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 5, no. 1 (2016): 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2016.1181301> (Accessed December 10, 2022).

can advance the Kingdom of God and contribute to the salvation of souls if utilized properly. At the same time, *Inter Mirifica* cautions against the potential misuse of media, which could lead to outcomes contrary to God's will.<sup>34</sup>

Following *Inter Mirifica*, the 1971 pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* expanded on this perspective by highlighting media as “gifts of God,” designed to foster brotherhood and collaboration in God’s salvific plan. This document echoes themes from Pope Pius XII’s 1957 encyclical *Miranda Prorsus*, which underlined the moral responsibility of using media as a tool for positive influence.<sup>35</sup> *Communio et Progressio* underscored the Church’s duty to engage proactively with media to present the Gospel in accessible and impactful ways to a modern audience.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of media for evangelization was further reinforced by Pope Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*. In this 2011 document, he identifies media as essential for authentic communication, particularly in Africa, and emphasizes its critical role in promoting development, justice, and reconciliation. Pope Benedict highlights the Church’s responsibility to use media to educate and inspire in ways that are consistent with the Church's mission for social and spiritual growth.<sup>37</sup>

In his Messages for World Communications Day, Pope Francis has continued to stress the importance of media in the Church’s mission, especially with respect to social networks and digital platforms. He encourages the Church to use them to communicate the warmth and humanity of the faith. In 2014, he emphasized that effective communication is rooted in authenticity, shaped by the human heart and a moral approach to technology, rather than by the technology itself.<sup>38</sup> In his 2016 message, he specifically mentioned that emails, texts, social networks, and chats can serve as fully human forms of communication when used in a manner that reflects the values of the Church.<sup>39</sup>

Today, the Church uses a range of digital tools to reach broader audiences. Dioceses, parishes, religious institutes, and Catholic organizations worldwide operate websites,

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*: Decree on the Means of Social Communication, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963, no.1.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical letter *Miranda Prorsus*, the Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication *Communio et Progressio*, published in 1971. A.A.S., XXIV (1957), p. 765.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*—Pastoral Instruction for the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communications (Vatican City, Vatican Press, 1971) no. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Francis, Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, January. 24, 2014

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Francis, Message for the 50<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, May 8, 2016.

social media platforms, podcasts, and online streaming services. This digital presence allows the Church to extend its reach into areas and communities that missionaries might not be able to access physically, effectively breaking down geographical and cultural barriers. New media thus facilitates the Church's capacity to connect with people across the globe, fostering a relationship between faith and technology and allowing for faster, broader dissemination of the Gospel.<sup>40</sup>

Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) captures the Church's recognition of the moral obligation to engage with media for evangelization. He articulated that the Church "would feel guilty before the Lord" if it neglected this duty, underscoring the essential role media plays in spreading the Gospel in today's world.<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, the Catholic Church regards media as a powerful tool for evangelization, capable of fostering human connection and advancing God's Kingdom when used responsibly. While recognizing the inherent risks of misuse, the Church sees a proactive media engagement strategy as essential for reaching new audiences and continuing its mission in the digital age.

### **1.1.7 Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization**

The concept of a "new agora"<sup>42</sup> in modern evangelization refers to digital social networks, drawing a parallel with the ancient Greek agora, a central public space for artistic, spiritual, and political engagement. Pope Benedict XVI articulated this analogy, recognizing social networks as a new agora that holds significant potential for cultural exchange and spiritual dialogue.<sup>43</sup> This digital transformation is particularly relevant for young people, who are among the most active users of social media and digital platforms. These mediums provide unique channels for the Church to connect with youth, addressing their spiritual needs in a familiar and accessible environment.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Patrick Ryan, *Handbook of Civic Education, Readings for Students and Young People*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2015, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. EN no.14.

<sup>42</sup> In this study "new Agora" refers to "digital Social networking sites". "Agora" was a central public space in ancient Greece. The best-known of an ancient Greek Agora was situated on the northwest of the Athenian Acropolis and was surrounded by the hill of the Areopagus on its southern border. The Agora was a center of the artistic, spiritual and political life of the city. It also served as a marketplace where merchants used to sell their goods. Pope Benedict XVI described digital social networks as a new "agora".

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Evangelidis, Vasilis, *Agoras and Fora: Developments in the Central Public Space of the Cities of Greece during the Roman Period*, in: *The Annual of the British School of Athens* 2014, 109: 335–56. [CrossRef].

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

In response to this digital shift, the Catholic Church has increasingly embraced new media to reach younger audiences. By utilizing social media, video sermons, mobile applications, live-streamed events, and interactive online communities, the Church seeks to engage youth in real-time and enhance accessibility to faith-based content. Church leaders world wide, and particularly in Uganda, have recognized the potential of these platforms to appeal to young Catholics, who may feel distanced from traditional religious practices.

This engagement with new media reflects a broader shift in societal communication patterns. As media becomes integral to everyday life, including spiritual expression, scholars like Heidi Campbell emphasize that it serves as a significant platform for religious engagement.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan (1972) argues that effective evangelization necessitates an understanding of the cultural contexts in which the Christian message is communicated. He posits that integrating the Christian message into the local cultural fabric enhances its relevance and facilitates acceptance, particularly in the digital age where familiarity with cultural and linguistic nuances is critical for impactful outreach.<sup>46</sup>

In light of these insights, Church leaders recognize the imperative to develop communication strategies that resonate with the digital habits of youth. Dankasa (2014) emphasizes the necessity of utilizing new media as essential tools for evangelization, advocating for strategies that align with the online behaviors of young people to foster engagement and retention in the faith.<sup>47</sup> This perspective extends beyond Catholic outreach; it reflects a shared objective among various Christian denominations, indicating the broad applicability of digital strategies in addressing the spiritual needs of youth.

During the 2023 Synod of Bishops in Rome, Cardinal Michael Czerny emphasized that digital media signifies not only a tool for evangelization but a new “territory” for the Church’s mission. He indicated that the digital realm has emerged as a vital frontier for fostering community and faith in innovative ways. Czerny noted that this digital mission began organically, as laypeople, priests, and religious leaders recognized the

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Campbell, Heidi A, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, New York 2013, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Herder and Herder, New York 1972, p. 362.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Jacob Dankasa, *New Media as Tool for Evangelisation: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church*, ProQuest LLC (Published Master Thesis) 2014, p. 3. [https://www.academia.edu/9396198/NEW\\_MEDIA\\_AS\\_TOOLS\\_FOR\\_EVANGELIZATION\\_TOWARDS\\_DEVELOPING\\_EFFECTIVE\\_COMMUNICATION\\_STRATEGY\\_IN\\_THE\\_CATHOLIC\\_CHURCH?email\\_work\\_card=abstract-read-more](https://www.academia.edu/9396198/NEW_MEDIA_AS_TOOLS_FOR_EVANGELIZATION_TOWARDS_DEVELOPING_EFFECTIVE_COMMUNICATION_STRATEGY_IN_THE_CATHOLIC_CHURCH?email_work_card=abstract-read-more) (Accessed September 29, 2022).

potential of digital spaces to connect with those searching for spiritual guidance. He likened the digital mission to seeds scattered on the ground, germinating quietly yet significantly within various digital forums.<sup>48</sup>

In summary, the integration of new media into youth evangelization represents both an opportunity and a necessity. As young people increasingly inhabit digital spaces, the Church's proactive presence in these arenas offers a path for meaningful engagement. By leveraging digital media thoughtfully, the Church can connect with youth across diverse cultural and denominational backgrounds, meeting them at the intersection of faith and technology.

### **1.1.8 Challenges and Opportunities of New Media in Youth Evangelization**

The integration of new media into the Catholic Church's evangelization efforts presents both significant challenges and remarkable opportunities, particularly in reaching and engaging young people.

#### **Challenges**

The Church faces several hurdles in utilizing new media effectively. One primary challenge is the resource limitations, especially in regions where digital infrastructure remains underdeveloped. This disparity can hinder the Church's ability to implement comprehensive digital evangelization strategies. In addition, there is a significant gap in digital literacy among church members and clergy, which restricts their capacity to fully utilize digital tools for outreach and engagement.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, some traditional church members may resist the integration of new media, perceiving it as a distraction rather than a valuable evangelization resource.

Anne Zukowski (2012) raises critical concerns about the impact of digitalization on young people, arguing that the vast array of images, sounds, and information available online often captivates their attention more effectively than the Church's communication efforts. This disparity highlights the challenge of competing with the immediate gratification provided by digital media, as young people may find traditional church services less engaging compared to the interactive nature of online content. Zukowski

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Michael Czerny: Church's Digital Mission May Become an 'Ecclesial Ministry.' *Catholic World News*, July 2, 2024. <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/series.cfm?view=341> (Accessed October 3, 2024).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Dyikuk, J. J., Christianity and the Digital Age: Sustaining the Online Church, *International Journal, of Journalism and Mass Communication* 2017, 3(1): 043-049.

emphasizes that the Church must communicate in ways that are not alien to the preferences and behaviors of the digital generation, recognizing the necessity for a more engaging approach to retain youth interest.<sup>50</sup>

Bishop Gerard Musa (2023), articulates the dual nature of digital media, describing it as a “double-edged sword”. He notes that while digital platforms provide significant opportunities for evangelization, such as transcending geographical boundaries and enabling cost-effective communication, they also present challenges like misinformation and the risk of substituting online worship for physical participation in the Eucharist. Musa likens the digital space to “the old serpent,” suggesting that it can lead to temptations and distractions that detract from genuine faith engagement.<sup>51</sup>

### **Opportunities**

Despite these challenges, the integration of new media offers substantial opportunities for engaging youth in faith. Social media platforms allow the Church to minister large audiences quickly and at low costs. New media facilitates two-way communication, empowering youth to actively connect or engage with church content in real-time, thereby fostering a more dynamic and engaging religious community.

The proliferation of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has created a digital culture that offers the Church various avenues to propagate its faith.<sup>52</sup> This environment transcends denominational boundaries, appealing to Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal groups alike. This inclusive approach underscores the importance of digital communication strategies for engaging diverse theological frameworks.

Bishop Musa's insights also reflect the transformative potential of digital media for church outreach, as it allows dioceses and parishes to share their messages globally, making them accessible to a wider audience. This capability facilitates the Church's mission in ways that would be challenging through traditional methods.<sup>53</sup>

Jude Ilo (2024) emphasizes the importance of young people becoming digital influencers and missionaries within the digital space. He contends that digital media

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Zukowski, A., *Communicating Faith in a Digital Culture*, 2012, Vol. 43, No. 3. *Momentum*. – [questia.com/magazine/1P3-2789974981/communicating-faith-in-a-digital-culture](http://questia.com/magazine/1P3-2789974981/communicating-faith-in-a-digital-culture) (Accessed June 3, 2022).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Musa, Gerard., *Proceedings of the African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa (Synod on Synodality)*, in: *Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN)* 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Dyikuk, J. J., *Christianity and the Digital Age: Sustaining the Online Church*, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Musa, Gerard, 2014.

platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube, provide immense opportunities for youth not only to consume content but also to share their faith and engage with the gospel creatively. Ilo encourages young Africans to leverage these platforms for evangelization, thereby becoming “influencers for Christ” while addressing the challenges of accessing digital spaces in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Although some government restrictions and high data costs exist, Ilo urges youth to view the digital world as a critical tool for overcoming “Africa's Information Poverty” and advancing the Church's mission. His call to action encourages young people to be heralds of the message of Christ, emphasizing the need for innovative and authentic participation in the digital realm.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, while the integration of new media in youth evangelization presents challenges that the Church must navigate carefully, it simultaneously offers significant opportunities for engagement. By harnessing the potential of digital platforms, the Church can revitalize its outreach efforts, connecting with youth in meaningful and impactful ways.

### **1.1.9 Responding to the Signs of the Times**

The Church has an enduring duty to “scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel,” as articulated in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World from the Second Vatican Council. This document emphasizes that, through language accessible to each generation, the Church seeks to address humanity's deepest questions—questions concerning life, the afterlife, and the relationships between them. The Church must thus recognize and understand the contemporary world, including its expectations, longings, and the often-dramatic characteristics that define it (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4).

In our present age, technology has transformed global communication and social interaction, offering both challenges and opportunities for the Church’s mission. Rapid advancements in technology and social media have facilitated unprecedented access to knowledge and events, allowing ideas to circulate almost instantly and influencing global thought and sentiment. These developments have led to what *Gaudium et Spes*

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ilo, Jude, How Young People Can Use the Digital Space to Become Digital Influencers and Missionaries, in: Proceedings of the African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa (Synod on Synodality), Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) 2024.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

describes as a “chain reaction”, which expands the reach and speed of communication in ways previously unimaginable (*G S*, 5).

The Church, recognizing the transformative power of these tools, is called to thoughtfully engage with these media to ensure that the Gospel message reaches and resonates with people in ways that are meaningful within the context of modern life. This corresponds to the Church’s goal to bring the light of the Gospel to contemporary issues, enabling a dialogue that is both relevant and reflective of humanity’s current conditions.

#### **1.1.10 The Missionary Field of Social Media**

Social media has emerged as a modern “missionary field” where ideas, beliefs, and values are shared and contested on a global scale. It allows the Church to interact with young people in their digital environments, promoting messages of faith in an accessible and relatable way. Engaging with social media requires the Church to create meaningful, relevant content that resonates with the youth, allowing them to experience spirituality in their day-to-day online lives. In this sense, social media acts as a vital platform where the Church can build connections, counter secular narratives, and provide young people with a sense of purpose and community.<sup>56</sup>

#### **Social Media Statistics**

According to the most recent social media usage statistics from Statista, as of April 2024, approximately 4.9 billion people are using social media worldwide. This widespread adoption manifests the potential of social media in contemporary communication and interaction. Among these platforms, Facebook remains the leading social network, boasting 3.065 billion monthly active users (MAUs). Following Facebook, YouTube ranks second with 2.504 billion MAUs. Other prominent platforms include Instagram and WhatsApp, each with 2 billion MAUs, and TikTok, which has approximately 1.582 billion MAUs.<sup>57</sup> These statistics highlight the substantial user engagement across various platforms, indicating not only the popularity of these networks but also their potential for influence. The convergence of large user bases on

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Heidi Campbell, Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology: How Churches are Being Informed by Digital Media and Cultures, in: *Ecclesial Practices* 7, no. 1 (April 2020): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144417-bja10001> (Accessed July 2, 2023).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Statista, Global Social Networks Ranked by Number of Users, April, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (Accessed October 30, 2024).

these platforms presents a significant opportunity for outreach and engagement, particularly for organizations and communities seeking to connect with diverse populations.

The implications of these statistics extend beyond mere user engagement; they reveal the critical role social media plays in shaping public discourse, fostering community connections, and facilitating the dissemination of information. It is of utmost importance to effectively leverage social media as a tool for outreach, advocacy, and community building in an increasingly interconnected world.

In her article, “Social Networks Make the World’s Largest Nations Seem Small,” Jane C. Hu (2018) examines the significant implications of the extensive user bases of social media platforms, which rival the populations of the largest countries globally. Hu asserts that if Facebook were conceptualized as a nation, it would be bigger than all other countries in terms of population.<sup>58</sup> This extraordinary scale is not limited to Facebook; many other platforms, similarly possess user counts that reflect the formation of digital communities larger than those found within many sovereign states. This phenomenon points to the crucial role of social media in shaping contemporary notions of community and interaction, as these platforms foster connections that transcend geographic boundaries.

For the Church, these statistics reveal a significant missionary opportunity within the realm of social networking platforms. With approximately 4.9 billion people using social media worldwide, the potential for outreach and engagement is immense. This digital landscape serves as a fertile ground for evangelism, discipleship, and community building. The Church must recognize that social media is not merely a modern communication tool but a vital mission field where spiritual conversations and transformation may occur.

In light of this, the Church should adopt an offensive strategy in engaging with social media rather than a defensive one. Remaining defensive may lead to isolation and irrelevance, as it suggests a reticence toward utilizing the cultural tools and platforms that dominate contemporary communication. The Church cannot afford to adopt an “ostrich stance,” burying its head in the sand and pretending that social media does not concern its mission. Instead, it must actively participate in these digital spaces,

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hu, Jane C., Social Networks Make the World’s Largest Nations Seem Small, in: *Quartz*, September 12, 2018. <https://qz.com/1386649/social-networks-make-the-worlds-largest-nations-seem-small> (Accessed October 27, 2024).

recognizing that they are key to creating connections with the next generation and reaching those who may feel distant from traditional church settings.

The integration of technology into spiritual care practices is essential for effectively reaching and supporting congregants in an increasingly digital world. By embracing social media, the Church can cultivate relationships, share the Gospel, and promote spiritual growth within its community.<sup>59</sup> The Church, as a nurturing entity, must not pride itself on its traditions and practices without actively engaging with those it serves—especially the younger generation who are increasingly shaping their lives within digital contexts.

Without its children—those who are connected through social media and digital platforms—the Church risks losing its relevance and vitality. It must act as a mother, fostering relationships and creating spaces where individuals can explore faith and community. Engaging proactively with social media allows the Church to be a guiding presence in the digital world, facilitating conversations about faith, ethics, and purpose of life.

#### **1.1.11 The Great Commission**

Jesus gave the Church a mission for all people: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:19-20) According to Shell (2019), the Church should follow the Great Commission without hesitation. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” be it Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Blogs, YouTube, or others.<sup>60</sup> Digital media has created opportunities for teaching the Faith and evangelizing that did not exist before. It is crucial for the Church to adapt to these changes and work to establish its role within this new landscape.<sup>61</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the integration of media in evangelization efforts is not only inevitable but also essential. The Church must embrace digital communication to remain relevant

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Hogue, David., Pastoral and Spiritual Care in a Digital Age: The Future Is Now, in: Kirk A. Bingaman, *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 30, no. 2 (2020): 150–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2020.1712870> (Accessed May 23, 2023).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Caroline F. Shell, *Ministry in the Digital Age: The Use of the New Media to Promote Fruitful Youth Ministry in the 21st Century* (Bachelor's thesis, Walsh University, 2019). [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb\\_etd/ws/send\\_file/send?accession=walshhonors1555608547689393&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=walshhonors1555608547689393&disposition=inline) (Accessed November 30, 2023).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

and effectively minister to the digital generation. By doing so, it can transform the new agora into a vibrant space for spiritual growth and engagement. However, the successful integration of these technologies into the Church's evangelization strategies comes with its own set of challenges. Overcoming these challenges requires innovative approaches that resonate with the lived experiences and preferences of young people, ensuring their active participation and investment in the Church's mission.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In the tech-driven era, new media technologies have transformed modes of communication, social engagement, and information dissemination, particularly among young people. Recognizing this shift, the Catholic Church globally, including in Uganda, has made efforts to incorporate digital platforms into its evangelization strategies to remain relevant to a younger, tech-savvy demographic. Notwithstanding these efforts, a significant gap remains in empirical research on the integration of new media in the Church's youth evangelization efforts within the Ugandan context. Little is known about the effectiveness of these initiatives, the successes and limitations they encounter, and the broader implications for religious engagement among youth in a digital landscape.

While the Catholic Church in Uganda has initiated various digital outreach efforts, the actual impact of these initiatives on youth engagement remains underexplored. Questions about the effectiveness of these efforts, the challenges and barriers to their successful implementation, and the potential benefits and opportunities that digital media may offer have not been thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, without a clear understanding of how these digital tools can be best integrated, the Church risks failing to meet the spiritual and community needs of young people, thereby diminishing its influence and relevance in an increasingly digital society.

This gap in knowledge highlights several critical areas that require investigation: How successful have the Church's new media initiatives been in engaging Ugandan youth? What obstacles, both internal and external, hinder the effective integration of new media? What opportunities remain unexploited, and how can these be leveraged to strengthen youth evangelization? Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies that not only fulfill the spiritual needs of young people but also ensure the Church's continued relevance and resonance with the youth.

This study seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic Church in Uganda's use of new media for youth evangelization. It will evaluate the successes and limitations of existing efforts, identify specific challenges and barriers, and explore untapped opportunities for enhancement. By offering practical recommendations, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital media's role in religious practice and community building, providing insights that can inform more effective and sustainable integration of new media into youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 Main Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda by assessing its implementation, identifying successes and failures, exploring opportunities, examining challenges, and providing recommendations for effective use.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

- A. To assess the integration of new media by the Catholic Church in Uganda for youth evangelization, identifying successes and failures.
- B. To identify potential opportunities and benefits of using new media for youth evangelization.
- C. To explore the challenges and obstacles to effective integration of new media for youth evangelization.
- D. To provide recommendations for the effective integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The central question driving this research is: "How can the Church in Uganda integrate the new media and digital technology appropriately to reach out to young people in the modern digital age?"

The research questions for this study are:

- A. What are the successes and failures in the Catholic Church's use of new media for youth evangelization in Uganda?

- B. What are the opportunities and advantages of using new media for evangelizing the youth within the Catholic Church in Uganda?
- C. What challenges and obstacles do the Catholic Church in Uganda encounter in integrating new media for youth evangelization?
- D. What recommendations can improve the integration of new media for youth evangelization in the Catholic Church in Uganda?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study on the “Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization in Uganda” holds significant potential to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications. This contribution is especially pertinent to the Catholic Church in Uganda and beyond, given the context of youth evangelization in the cybernetic era. Here are the key points of significance:

#### **A. Filling Research Gaps**

Despite the widespread use of new media, there is a notable lack of comprehensive research on its integration into religious practices, particularly within the context of youth evangelization in Uganda.

#### **B. Academic Contribution**

By conducting empirical research and generating new knowledge, this study contributes to the academic discourse on the intersection of religion, media, and youth culture. It enriches scholarly understanding and debate in these fields.

#### **C. Practical Insights for the Catholic Church**

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights to decision-makers within the Catholic Church in Uganda. These insights can inform long-term planning for youth evangelization efforts in the digital age.

#### **D. Benefits for Policymakers and Practitioners**

Policymakers and practitioners in the fields of religion, communication, and youth development can benefit from the study's findings. The study can inform their initiatives and strategies for leveraging new media to engage and empower young people in Uganda and beyond.

#### **E. Relevance in the Digital Age**

In an era dominated by digital communication and media consumption, understanding how the Catholic Church in Uganda integrates new media for youth evangelization is

crucial. This understanding ensures the Church's relevance and effectiveness in reaching younger generations.

#### **F. Enhancing Youth Engagement**

Effective use of new media can facilitate greater engagement and participation among young people in religious activities. It nurtures a feeling of togetherness and belonging within the Catholic Church in Uganda.

#### **G. Equipping Youth Leaders**

By understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with new media integration, youth leaders within the Church can be better equipped. They can design and implement effective evangelization initiatives tailored to the needs and preferences of young Catholics.

In conclusion, this study is positioned to make a substantial contribution to both the academic community and practical fieldwork. It offers critical insights into how new media can be effectively integrated into youth evangelization efforts, enhancing the Catholic Church's mission and outreach in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study encompasses an investigation into the integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda.

The study is limited to the Catholic Church in Uganda, considering both urban and rural dioceses to capture diverse perspectives and practices in digital evangelization. This geographical focus allows for an in-depth exploration of contextual factors unique to Uganda, such as internet accessibility, digital literacy, and socio-cultural attitudes toward new media in religious context.

Thematically, the study investigates several core areas:

#### **A. Successes and Failures:**

The study assesses or examines how the Catholic Church in Uganda has adopted and utilized digital platforms for evangelizing young people, assessing both the successes and shortcomings of these efforts.

#### **B. Opportunities and Benefits:**

It explores the potential advantages and future opportunities that new media could offer the Church in enhancing youth evangelization.

#### **C. Challenges and Barriers:**

The study examines the challenges encountered in integrating new media, including technological, financial, and cultural barriers.

#### **D. Recommendations:**

Based on findings, the study provides recommendations for optimizing the use of digital media for youth evangelization.

The study primarily targeted key stakeholders involved in youth ministry, pastoral care, and new media users within the Catholic Church in Uganda, including clergy, youth leaders, Catholic youth and members of relevant church committees or organizations.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

#### **Diffusion of Innovations Theory**

Everett. M. Rogers, a communication theorist at the University of New Mexico, in 1962 developed the diffusion of innovations theory. The theory outlines how a new idea or innovation is adopted progressively by different individuals, moving through various stages as people begin to embrace or use the new concept.<sup>62</sup> Here's how this theoretical framework could be applied to each of the research questions:

#### **A. How has the Catholic Church in Uganda integrated new media for youth evangelization?**

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory provides insights into how and why certain new media technologies or practices have been adopted by the Catholic Church in Uganda for youth evangelization. It analyzes the characteristics of adopters (e.g., church leaders, youth ministers, Catholic youth) and the communication channels through which innovations are disseminated.

#### **B. What challenges and barriers exist in integrating new media for youth evangelization?**

This theory helps to identify the factors that influence the adoption or resistance to new media integration within the Catholic Church in Uganda. It explores variables such as perceived complexity of the innovation, compatibility with existing practices, and organizational support, which may affect the successful implementation of new media initiatives.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Halton Clay, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Definitions and Examples, December 13, 2023. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/diffusion-of-innovations-theory.asp#What%20Is%20The%20Diffusion%20of%20Innovations> (Accessed June 12, 2024).

**C. What potential opportunities are there for enhancing youth evangelization through the strategic use of new media in the Catholic Church in Uganda?**

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory highlights opportunities for leveraging new media technologies to enhance youth evangelization efforts within the Catholic Church in Uganda. It identifies strategies for targeting early adopters, fostering positive word-of-mouth communication, and facilitating innovation diffusion through social networks.

**D. What recommendations could be proposed for the successful integration of new media in youth evangelization, tailored to the context of the Catholic Church in Uganda?**

Leveraging the observations made through the application of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, recommendations can be developed to overcome barriers and capitalize on opportunities for integrating new media in youth evangelization within the specific context of the Catholic Church in Uganda. These recommendations may include strategies for increasing awareness, providing training and support, etc.

Applying the Diffusion of Innovations Theory helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying the integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda, and develop practical recommendations for effective implementation.

## **1.8 Definition of terms**

### **1.8.1 New media**

New media refers to any platform that relies on digital technology to communicate with an audience and can also be referred to as digital media or multimedia. New media technologies encompass a wide range of digital tools and platforms such as social media, blogs, videos, websites and Internet.<sup>63</sup> This is in contrast to “old media”, which refers to traditional forms of media such as print media (e.g. newspapers and magazines), television and radio. In this research, new media, social media, digital media, internet, new technologies, new agora will be used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. What is New Media? Definition, Examples, and Careers, University of Phoenix. <https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/what-is-new-media.html> (Accessed November 10, 2023).

### **1.8.2 Evangelization**

The term “evangelization” stems from the Greek word “*euangelion*” and means “good news” or “good tidings”. Evangelization involves sharing the good news or the gospel, also known as *kerygma*. “*Kerygma*” is a Greek word meaning “announcement.” In this research, the terms evangelization, evangelism, communicating the gospel, reaching out, pastoral ministry will be used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

### **1.8.3 Young people or Youth**

Pope Francis (2019) asserted; “In reality, there is no ‘youth’ – there are only young people, each with the reality of their own lives”.<sup>64</sup> The XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2017) tried to clarify the meaning of the term “young people” or “youth”. This document defined the word youth as young people aged roughly 16 to 29 years, taking into account that the term needs to be adapted to local circumstances.<sup>65</sup> “In any case, it is good to remember that the term youth, in addition to referring to persons, is a stage of life that each generation understands in an unequal, original manner”.<sup>66</sup> This clarification applies to this study. In this research, the terms young people, youth, younger generations, Tiktok generation, young adults are used interchangeably to mean young people.

### **1.8.4 Youth Evangelization**

The process of sharing the gospel message with young people, typically aimed at individuals between the ages of adolescence and young adulthood, with the goal of nurturing spiritual growth, fostering a sense of community, and encouraging active participation in religious practices and beliefs.

### **1.8.5 Integration**

The word “integration” comes from the verb “to integrate” which means to make into a whole or part of the whole. Integration refers to the process of combining or coordinating different components or systems into a unified whole. In various contexts, it can involve merging diverse elements, ideas, or entities to work together seamlessly.

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<sup>64</sup> Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, no.71.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2018.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

In this research, integration refers to the process of incorporating new media technologies and strategies into existing youth evangelization efforts within the Catholic Church in Uganda, with the aim of enhancing outreach, engagement, and communication with young Catholics.

#### **1.8.6 Challenges and Barriers**

Challenges and barriers in this study refer to obstacles and difficulties encountered in the integration of new media into youth evangelization efforts, including technological limitations, cultural barriers, resource constraints, and organizational resistance.

#### **1.8.7 Opportunities**

Here opportunities refer to potential avenues for enhancing youth evangelization through the strategic use of new media technologies and platforms, including innovative approaches, faith formation, and targeted outreach initiatives.

#### **1.8.8 Recommendations**

By recommendations means actionable suggestions and strategies for improving the integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda, based on the findings and analysis of this study. These recommendations may encompass technological upgrades, capacity-building initiatives, and strategic planning frameworks tailored to the specific context and needs of the Church.

### **1.9 Organization or Overview of the Thesis**

This study is structured into multiple chapters, each addressing on different aspects of youth evangelization and new media within the Catholic Church. Chapter One presents the introduction background of this dissertation. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework guiding the study, Chapter Three presents the methodology used, Chapter Four presents the Results or findings, followed by a discussion of the implications in Chapter Five and Chapter Six presents Conclusions, recommendations for future practice and research in the field of youth evangelization in a digital era.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Media and Evangelization: State of Research

#### Introduction or Overview

The relationship between media and religion has attracted significant academic interest in recent years, driven by the rapid evolution of digital technology and its global reach. As McLuhan (1989) famously noted, the world has become a “global village”<sup>67</sup> due to the rise of mass media, enabling unprecedented levels of interaction across distances. In the 21st century, religious institutions have increasingly harnessed the power of media to engage with followers, a shift which has profoundly influenced how religious practices and beliefs are communicated and experienced. Hoover (2012) asserts that religious institutions now navigate a digital landscape where much of their influence and authority are mediated through media platforms.<sup>68</sup> This transformation aligns with theories of the mediatization of religion, as described by scholars like Hjarvard (2008), who views media as a significant force in religious change, often reshaping how spiritual practices are performed and understood.<sup>69</sup>

Against this backdrop, this chapter examines the integration of new media into youth evangelization efforts, with a specific focus on Uganda and the Catholic Church. With Uganda’s youth comprising a large percentage of the population, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram etc have become critical tools in fostering engagement and spiritual growth among younger generations. As religious practices increasingly adapt to digital environments, the Catholic Church in Uganda is utilizing these platforms to sustain its mission and reach new audiences, particularly youth.

This review will explore key themes in the intersection of media and religion, emphasizing the role of new media in the Catholic Church's evangelization efforts in Uganda. First, the chapter provides an overview of Uganda's broader social, economic, religious, and political landscape, offering context for understanding the challenges and

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<sup>67</sup> McLuhan, M., *The Global Village: Transformations in world life and media in the 21st century*, Oxford University, Oxford 1989.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Hoover, Stewart M., *Forward: Practice, Autonomy and Authority in the Digitally Religious and Digitally Spiritual*, in: Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fisher-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, and Charles Ess, (eds.), *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Rituals*, Peter Lang, New York 2012, 6-12.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Hjarvard, Stig, *The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change*, in: *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (2008): 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1386/NL.6.1.9/1> (Accessed August 24, 2022).

opportunities of integrating media into youth-focused religious outreach. This is followed by a discussion of how digital technologies have transformed the global Church's evangelization strategies, drawing on both local and international perspectives. As Campbell and Tsuria (2021) argue, the digital revolution has compelled religious organizations to rethink their outreach strategies, recognizing the potential of new media to engage with more diverse and dynamic audiences.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Cheong (2017) emphasizes that new media facilitates more interactive religious practices, enabling religious leaders to communicate more effectively with youth and respond to their unique needs.<sup>71</sup> This chapter will critically assess the opportunities and obstacles presented by new media, particularly as they relate to youth evangelization in Uganda's rapidly changing digital environment.

By integrating existing research, this literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how new media can be effectively integrated into youth evangelization efforts in Uganda. It will also point out the gaps in the existing literature, highlighting areas for further study to ensure that the Catholic Church's outreach strategies remain relevant and effective in an increasingly digital world.

## **2.1 Uganda's General Social, Economic, Religious and Political Situation**

Uganda is a land locked country in East Africa astride the Equator located between 1° 30 S and 4° N. It has a surface area of 236,040 km<sup>2</sup> of which 36,330 km<sup>2</sup> is water and 199,710 are land.<sup>72</sup> Uganda's motto, "For God and My Country," serves as a guiding principle for good conduct among its citizens. For leaders, upholding this motto signifies embracing their responsibilities with dedication and integrity. However, since gaining independence in 1962, Uganda has continued to grapple with political challenges.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Heidi Campbell, and Ruth Tsuria, eds., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, London 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683> (Accessed December 11, 2023).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Cheong, Pauline Hope, *The Vitality of New Media and Religion: Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organization*, in: *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017): 25-33.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda*, (Entebbe: Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation, 1995), Second Schedule article 5, p. 174-189; cf. B. Balletto, *Spectrum Guide to Uganda*, Camerapix publishers International, Nairobi 1998, p. 21

<sup>73</sup> Cf. V. Ssekabira, *The Church's involvement in politics in Africa and in Uganda in particular*, in: B. Ssettuuma Jr. (ed.), *The Waliggo Journal of holistic theological reflection*, Angel Agencies, Kampala 2009), p. 125.

### 2.1.1 Political Land scape

Uganda has a complex socio-economic, political, and religious history shaped by both colonial and post-colonial dynamics. The country was colonized by the British in the late 19th century and achieved independence in 1962. Uganda's post-independence political landscape has been marked by periods of instability, military rule, and authoritarian governance, notably under leaders such as Idi Amin (1971–1979) and Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since 1986. Museveni's regime, initially celebrated for stabilizing the country after years of civil unrest, has faced growing criticism for its democratic backsliding, with elections marred by violence, restrictions on opposition, and manipulation of the constitution to extend his rule.<sup>74</sup>

The political landscape of Uganda is marked by a fragile democracy with substantial limitations on political freedoms and civil liberties. While elections occur regularly, they are often marred by allegations of electoral manipulation, intimidation, and violence, undermining the democratic process. The ruling party maintains a dominant position, limiting the effectiveness of opposition parties and contributing to a perception of partisanship as divisive.<sup>75</sup>

Judicial independence is frequently undermined, with the judiciary facing pressures from the executive branch, which hampers its ability to act as a check on governmental power. As a result, citizens often express concerns about the fairness of judicial processes and the safeguarding of their rights.<sup>76</sup>

Media freedom is also restricted, with government control over key media outlets and the harassment of independent journalists. This stifles critical discourse and limits the public's access to unbiased information. Overall, Uganda's political environment reflects a struggle for democratic consolidation amidst enduring authoritarian tendencies, where political freedoms are circumscribed and institutional checks are weak.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Eloïse Bertrand and Michael Mutyaba, *Opposition Party Institutionalisation in Authoritarian Settings: The Case of Uganda*, in: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 62, no. 2 (2024): 77–99. doi:10.1080/14662043.2024.2349345 (Accessed October 2, 2024).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Sarah Biecker, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime*, in: *African Affairs*, Volume 111, Issue 442, January 2012, Pages 160–162. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr067> (Accessed June 6, 2024).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Eloïse, Bertrand, & Michael, Mutyaba, *Opposition Party Institutionalisation in Authoritarian Settings: The Case of Uganda*, in: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 62, no. 2 (2024): 77–99. DOI:10.1080/ 14662043.2024.2349345 (Accessed October 2, 2024).

### **2.1.2 Economic Situation**

Economically, Uganda is largely an agrarian society, with over 70% of its population relying on agriculture, though poverty remains widespread. According to a report by the World Bank, Uganda has one of the fastest-growing populations globally, but its economic growth has been insufficient to significantly reduce poverty.<sup>78</sup> In spite of its rich natural resources, including fertile land and mineral deposits, Uganda struggles with low levels of industrialization, high unemployment, and income inequality.<sup>79</sup>

### **2.1.3 Uganda's Population**

Uganda is a country with a great variety of peoples and cultures.<sup>80</sup> Uganda is a multi-ethnic country with a diverse array of ethnic groups, including the Baganda, Basoga, Banyankole, Bakiga, Bagisu, Langi, Acholi, Batooro, Iteso, and Banyoro, among others. Uganda is home to a total of 56 ethnic groups, each with its own indigenous language or dialect.<sup>81</sup>

Uganda's official languages are English and Swahili. English is used in government, education, and business, while Swahili has been promoted as an additional national language to strengthen unity across East African countries. However, both English and Swahili are not universally spoken in Uganda, as many people primarily communicate in their respective ethnic languages.

As of 2024, Uganda's total population is approximately 45.94 million, with a male population of about 22.50 million, representing 49% of the total population, and a female population of approximately 23.44 million, which constitutes 51%. This demographic distribution indicates a slight female majority within the population.<sup>82</sup>

### **2.1.4 Media Landscape in Uganda**

Uganda's media landscape is complex, shaped by a mix of diversity, economic challenges, political pressures, and rapid digital transformation. It is characterized by a variety of media platforms, including traditional media such as radio and print, as well as digital media. Major players such as Vision Group, Nation Media Group, and Next Media Services dominate the market, controlling key areas such as newspapers, radio,

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. World Bank, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org> (Accessed November 4, 2024).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. B. Linda, Uganda Economy, in *Regional Surveys of the World: Africa South of the Sahara 1998*, in: Europa Publications, London 1997, pp. 1084-1085.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. J.M. Mittelman, *Ideology and Politics in Uganda*, Cornell University Press, London 1975, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Third Schedule 1995 (article 10a), p. 189-191.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2024. *Census Report*, Kampala 2024.

television, and advertising. Despite the control these companies exert, there is also a rise in startup content creators, who increasingly collaborate with traditional media houses to generate multimedia content, particularly in the digital space.<sup>83</sup>

One of the defining characteristics of Uganda's media landscape is its linguistic diversity. Many radio and television stations broadcast in local languages, reflecting the country's cultural mosaic.<sup>84</sup> This diversity allows media outlets to cater to specific ethnic and linguistic groups, particularly in rural areas where vernacular programming plays a crucial role. However, this also fragments the audience, making it challenging for media outlets to reach a broad, mass audience, especially given the proliferation of digital and social media platforms.<sup>85</sup>

The ongoing shift to digital technology is one of the most profound changes occurring today in Uganda's media industry. Online social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tiktok and YouTube have gained prominence, providing alternative sources of information and reshaping how content is produced and consumed. This shift, however, presents challenges for traditional media outlets, which are grappling with declining advertising revenues and rising operational costs. Financial sustainability is a pressing issue, with many media houses struggling to find alternative revenue streams as they face competition from online media channels that provide free content.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to economic challenges, Ugandan media faces threats from both state and non-state actors. Journalists, particularly those covering politically sensitive topics or engaging in investigative journalism, often experience physical harassment, arrests, and detentions. This has led to widespread self-censorship, as reporters avoid topics that could endanger their safety. The situation worsens during election periods, as seen in the 2021 elections, when journalists covering opposition candidates were subject to heightened harassment and assaults.<sup>87</sup>

Journalists in Uganda also face financial difficulties, with low wages being a common issue across the sector. Most journalists earn meager salaries, often lacking formal contracts and benefits. Surveys show that only a small percentage of journalists earn

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. African Centre for Media Excellence, Report on the State of Uganda's Media Landscape, 2023. <https://acme-ug.org/2024/08/12/report-on-the-state-of-ugandas-media-landscape-2023/> (Accessed October 15, 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Cf. UNESCO, Assessment of Media Development in Uganda, Paris 2019. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/assessment-media-development-uganda> (Accessed October 15, 2024).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. UNESCO (2019); Cf. African Centre for Media Excellence, 2024.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

more than \$260 per month, which contributes to the precariousness of their profession and further discourages investigative work.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these challenges, the Ugandan media sector holds potential for growth, particularly in areas like digital journalism, data journalism, and investigative reporting. The rapid digitalization of the industry provides opportunities for innovation and new ways of engaging audiences. As more people gain access to the internet and mobile phones, the scope for digital content and multimedia storytelling continues to expand, offering a pathway for the media to evolve in a rapidly changing environment.<sup>89</sup>

### **2.1.5 Internet Users in Uganda**

As of January 2024, Uganda's digital landscape remains underdeveloped, characterized by a significant number of 13.30 million internet users, which equates to an internet penetration rate of 27.0% of the total population. According to DataReportal (2024), this figure reflects an increase of 1.2 million users, or +10.3%, compared to the previous year, indicating steady growth in internet access across the country. Nevertheless, in spite of this rise, a considerable share of the general public about 73.0% remained offline without internet access.<sup>90</sup>

These figures highlight the digital divide that continues to challenge Uganda's digital ecosystem. Although internet adoption is increasing, the data indicates that a large proportion of the population remains disconnected, potentially due to infrastructural limitations, cost barriers, and disparities in digital literacy. It is important to note, however, that the complexities in collecting and analyzing internet user data mean that these figures may under-represent actual internet adoption. As DataReportal (2024) explains, delays in data collection and publication may result in under-reported user numbers, suggesting that actual internet growth could be higher than current estimates suggest.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Digital 2024: Uganda, DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-uganda> (Accessed October 15, 2024).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

### 2.1.6 Social Media Use in Uganda

Social media has emerged as a crucial platform for communication in Uganda, enabling the sharing of opinions, experiences, and perspectives in a highly interactive manner.<sup>92</sup> Unlike traditional media, social media fosters greater public engagement, making it an essential tool for government-citizen interaction. Given the significant rise in the adoption of social media in Uganda, it has become increasingly important to integrate these platforms into the development of modern communication strategies, especially within government operations.<sup>93</sup> However, leveraging social media effectively requires careful planning, risk and benefit assessment, adequate resources, and a strong commitment to ensure its potential is fully realized while managing its challenges.<sup>94</sup>

Social media usage in Uganda is experiencing significant growth, with 2.60 million active users, representing 5.3% of the total population as of January 2024. This marks a year-on-year increase of 750,000 users, or 40.5%, indicating a substantial rise in social media engagement throughout the country.<sup>95</sup>

Demographically, 19.5% of Uganda's total internet users engage with at least one social media platform, revealing insights into the broader adoption of digital technologies across various age groups. Notably, the gender distribution among social media users shows a significant imbalance: 62.2% of users are male, while only 37.8% are female.<sup>96</sup> This disparity raises important questions regarding access to technology and digital literacy, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

Further analysis reveals that approximately 2.55 million users aged 18 and above are active on social media, which constitutes 10.7% of the adult population in Uganda.<sup>97</sup> This data underscores not only the rapid adoption of social media platforms among adults but also highlights the need for equitable approaches to address the gender gap in digital access. Addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering a more equitable digital environment and ensuring that all segments of society can benefit from the opportunities presented by social media.

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. National Information Technology Authority-Uganda (NITA-U), Government of Uganda Social Media Guide, 2013. <https://ict.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Government-of-Uganda-Social-Media-Guide.pdf> (Accessed May 15, 2023).

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Cf. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-uganda> (Accessed October 15, 2024).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

### 2.1.7 Mobile Connections in Uganda

At the beginning of 2024, Uganda recorded approximately 33.34 million cellular mobile connections, according to data from GSMA Intelligence. This figure illustrates a 6.9% increase of 2.2 million connections from the previous year, reflecting a growing reliance on mobile connectivity within the country. This growth in mobile connections translates to an impressive 67.7% of the total population being linked via cellular networks.<sup>98</sup> Such high levels of connectivity underscore the critical role mobile technology plays in bridging communication gaps across Uganda. However, the substantial number of connections relative to the population also highlights issues such as device accessibility and the digital divide that may persist within the region.

The expansion of mobile connectivity in Uganda is essential for facilitating access to various services, including information, education, and economic opportunities. As mobile technology continues to develop, it remains crucial to ensure that all segments of the population can benefit from these advancements.

Thomas Tayebwa, the Deputy Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, served as the Guest of Honour during the liturgical service celebrating the 57th World Social Communications Day in Uganda on May 14, 2023, organized by the Kampala Archdiocese. In his address, Tayebwa emphasized the dual potential of social communication tools, highlighting their capacity to either unify and uplift societies or to contribute to division and harm. He urged communicators to deliberately channel their influence towards fostering societal good, emphasizing the importance of using communication to combat poverty, build cohesive families, and empower communities.<sup>99</sup>

Tayebwa further argued that the power of communication lies in its ability to shape perceptions, influence opinions, and drive behavioral change. This, according to him, places a significant ethical responsibility on communicators to prioritize messages anchored in trust, empathy, and mutual respect. He underscored that the choice of how communication tools are used ultimately rests with individuals, who must balance their influence with moral accountability.<sup>100</sup>

According to Aker and IMbiti (2010), the swift growth of mobile telephony in sub-Saharan Africa has transformed communication and access to information across social

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Thomas, Tayebwa, Message on the 57<sup>th</sup> World Social Communication in Uganda, May 14, 2023. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202305150166.html> (Accessed May 15, 2023).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

and economic divides. Across both urban and rural landscapes, mobile phones are a vital tool, connecting people to information, markets, and services in ways previously unimaginable. This has been particularly revolutionary in rural areas, where mobile telephony often represents the first significant telecommunications infrastructure. By drastically reducing communication costs, mobile phones have enabled individuals and businesses to efficiently share and access information related to economic, social, and political matters. Research indicates that these reduced costs have had substantial economic impacts, improved the efficiency of agricultural and labor markets while enhancing both producer and consumer welfare in various contexts throughout the continent.<sup>101</sup>

A recent study by Kituyi et al. (2024) examined the challenges and potential solutions for improving access to communication services in rural communities in Uganda. The key constraints identified include poor infrastructure, limited access to electricity, high costs of digital devices and internet connectivity, high illiteracy rates, regulatory barriers, language obstacles, and gender disparities. In response, the Ugandan government has implemented interventions such as expanding network coverage, promoting digital literacy programs, reducing taxes on communication devices, and supporting investment in underserved regions. To further bridge the digital divide, the study proposes expanding broadband infrastructure, encouraging Public–Private Partnerships, advancing digital literacy, promoting local content, and enhancing mobile connectivity solutions and financial inclusion. Addressing these issues could significantly improve access to communication services for Uganda’s marginalized populations.<sup>102</sup>

### **2.1.8 Religious Land Scape in Uganda**

Religiously, Uganda is a highly pluralistic society. Christianity is the dominant faith, with about 84% of the population identifying as Christian (divided primarily between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. In Uganda, religion influences people’s social and

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<sup>101</sup> Aker, Jenny C., and Isaac M. Mbiti, Mobile Phones and Economic Development in Africa, in: *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24, no. 3 (2010): 207–32. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.24.3.207> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Kituyi, G. M., Abaho, E., Aguma, D. *et al.*, Improving access to communication services by the unserved and underserved communities in Uganda through information and communication technologies, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-024-01153-8> (Accessed September 26, 2024).

political perspectives of every life.<sup>103</sup> Religion plays a stabilizing role in Ugandan society, with religious institutions often mediating in political and social crises. As Gifford (1998) notes, “The churches have remained influential in Ugandan politics, often providing moral guidance or criticism in moments of national crisis.” Religion also intersects with social life, shaping issues like education, health care, and even political campaigns.<sup>104</sup>

Although Uganda is constitutionally a secular state, its population is deeply religious, with various faith traditions coexisting across the country.<sup>105</sup> This interplay of secular governance and widespread religiosity reflects Uganda's cultural and social fabric, where religious beliefs significantly influence daily life, moral values, and community structures. The nation's growing population is shared among multiple religious groups, highlighting the diversity and plurality of faith expressions within the country.<sup>106</sup> This dynamic often shapes public discourse, policy priorities, and communal relationships, showcasing the unique role of religion in Ugandan society despite its secular constitutional framework.

### **Religious Composition of Uganda**

Though Uganda as a nation is a secular state, her people are a highly religious one and its surging population is shared by several religions.<sup>107</sup> Most of the population are Christians. The Roman Catholic Church has the highest share of the population and makes up 37.4% of the total population. Anglican, Pentecostal believers or Evangelicals, Muslims and Seventh Day Adventists represent 30%, 14.7%, 13.6% and 2.1% of the total population respectively. There rest religions are as follows Orthodox 0.1%, Traditional religion 0.1%, others 1.7%, Non religion 0.2%.<sup>108</sup>

### **Catholic Dioceses in Uganda**

The Catholic Church in Uganda operates under the leadership of the Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC), which oversees the activities of bishops across the nation.

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. UNICEF Final Report December 2015, A Formative Research to Guide the Implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Paul, Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021853799227478> (Accessed June 10, 2024).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. B. Ssetuuma Jr., *The State of religion and culture in Uganda 2008*, in: *The Waliggo Journal of Holistic Theological Reflection*, 2 (2009), no. 1, p. 156.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS 2024), Data extracted from 2024 National Population and Housing Census.

Administratively, Uganda is divided into four ecclesiastical provinces that include, Kampala, Gulu, Mbarara, and Tororo and it has a total of 19 dioceses led by bishops. The clergy, comprising priests, deacons, religious men and women, seminarians, and catechists, serve in various parishes, missions, and diocesan structures. Notably, the Church in Uganda has witnessed remarkable increases in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.<sup>109</sup>

### **2.1.9 Evangelization of Uganda**

Christianity arrived in Uganda relatively later than in many other parts of Africa. However, within just 25 years of its introduction, Uganda became one of the most fruitful mission fields on the continent.<sup>110</sup> This rapid spread highlights the profound impact of missionary efforts and the receptiveness of local communities to the Christian faith.

Ugandans embraced Christianity quickly. When Europeans arrived in Uganda, they encountered a population that was distinct from many other African peoples. Winston Churchill, who traveled through several African countries, famously referred to Uganda as the “Pearl of Africa.” His admiration for Uganda was not only due to its natural beauty but also because of the warmth and hospitality of its people. This kindness and openness made Ugandans particularly receptive to the Christian message, which they welcomed with great enthusiasm.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Arrival of the Missionaries to Uganda**

The first missionaries arrived in Uganda in 1877 at the palace of Kabaka (King) Muteesa, the reigning king at the time. They were Anglicans sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The two missionaries were Shergold-Smith and the Rev. C.T. Wilson. The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) quickly organized a group of eager missionaries in response to an invitation from Kabaka Muteesa, as conveyed in Henry Morton Stanley's well-known letter published in the *Daily Telegraph* in London on November 15, 1875. The letter described the King of Buganda

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC). <https://uecon.org/pages/about-uec> (Accessed October 15, 2023).

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Kevin Ward, A History of Christianity in Uganda. <https://dacb.org/histories/uganda-history-christianity/> (Accessed November 24, 2021).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Kampala Archdiocese, Who Are the Uganda Martyrs? <https://klarchdiocese.org.ug/who-are-the-uganda-martyrs/> (Accessed December 3, 2024).

Kabaka Muteesa, “a great enlightened despot eager to hear the Gospel and speedily to propagate it throughout his Kingdom”.<sup>112</sup>

The Catholic missionaries from France arrived on February 17, 1879, led by Fr. Simeon Lourdel and Brother Amans of the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the “White Fathers.” They were sent by their founder, Cardinal Lavigerie. The Missionaries of Africa, along with the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (the “White Sisters”), became a powerful and consistent missionary force in the interior of Africa, playing a crucial role in the spread of Christianity across the continent.<sup>113</sup>

#### **2.1.10 Uganda, Land of Martyrs**

Uganda is often referred to as the “Land of Martyrs” due to the significant number of individuals who gave their lives for their Christian faith shortly after the arrival of Christianity in the country. Within approximately a decade of evangelization, Uganda witnessed the emergence of martyrs.

Pope John Paul II, in his 1979 letter commemorating the first centenary of the Catholic mission in Uganda, reflected on Africa’s openness to the Gospel, placing particular emphasis on Uganda. He highlighted the nation’s eager acceptance of Christianity over the past century and the remarkable spiritual fruits it had borne. Specifically, he acknowledged the steadfast witness of many Ugandans who chose martyrdom rather than dishonor their faith. Through their sacrifice, they affirmed their commitment to divine law by shedding their blood as a testimony to the truth of Christianity.<sup>114</sup>

The Pope further noted that this martyrdom occurred only a few years after Catholicism had been introduced in Uganda. He suggested that the land was particularly receptive to Christianity, implying that it was already prepared to embrace the Gospel. Once the message of Christianity was introduced, it quickly led to a remarkable spiritual awakening. This commentary underscores the idea that Uganda's cultural and spiritual environment was primed for Christian teachings, which rapidly took root and bore fruit, resulting in a profound and lasting impact on the region.<sup>115</sup>

The Uganda Martyrs were executed at Namugongo in Kampala at the orders of King Mwanga between 1885 and 1887 and are always commemorated on 3<sup>rd</sup> June on Church

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Kevin Ward, A history of Christianity in Uganda.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Letter for the First Centenary of Evangelization of Uganda (January 17, 1979). <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#search/john+paul+II+Letter+/QgrcJHrtsHHfCDbQtHpXcKtdSHLzfvVSFzB> (Accessed November 12, 2023).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Calendar. The Uganda Martyrs were forty-five young men: twenty-two Roman Catholics and twenty-three Anglicans.<sup>116</sup>

After a short while, Jildo Irwa and Daudi Okello were recognized for their unwavering commitment to Christianity. On October 18, 1918, the two young catechists were killed in Paimol, near Kalongo, in northern Uganda. Despite the pressure to abandon their newfound faith, they too chose to remain steadfast and refused to renounce their Christian beliefs. These young men too were granted the grace to endure martyrdom rather than forsake their faith. Their ultimate sacrifice did not go unnoticed, and in 1964, Pope Paul VI canonized them as saints.<sup>117</sup>

The martyrdom in Uganda exemplified immense courage and dedication, reflecting the deep roots of Christianity within the country and the enduring strength of the faith among its people. The willingness of these individuals to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs underscores the profound commitment to Christianity that took hold in Uganda, inspiring future generations to uphold and spread the faith despite adversity.

#### **2.1.11 Evangelization of Young People in the New Agora in Uganda**

The Corona Virus Pandemic led the Church to utilize the new agora and other media to minister their flocks. In Uganda, it was a big challenge for the Churches to shift their activities online to enable congregations to be able to get access to spiritual nourishment. Churches in rural areas could not manage to effectively live stream Masses, and other spiritual activities to their flock given the less internet connectivity. Nevertheless, radios were used, and they were creative to use special loudspeakers or Community Audio Towers (CATs) as channels for the evangelization.<sup>118</sup> During the pandemic, the Catholic Church made efforts to make the gospel reach the people of God outside walls or gatherings. Digital means, such as livestreams, virtual meetings, and online platforms, allowed everyone to share the Gospel.

The global presence of young millennials on social media is undeniable, even in regions characterized by extreme poverty. Contrary to common assumptions, social media usage is widespread in poorer nations due to its affordability and accessibility. Many individuals in these regions rely on inexpensive cell phones that are compatible with

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Kampala Archdiocese, Who Are the Uganda Martyrs?

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Cf. John, Semakula, In Rural Uganda, Churches Provide Speakers to Safely Unite Communities During COVID-19.2, in: Religion Unplugged, July 8, 2020. <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2020/7/8/in-rural-uganda-churches-provide-speakers-to-safely-unite-communities-during-covid-19> (Accessed June 27, 2023).

modern social networking platforms. As a result, social media has become a significant medium for connecting a large portion of the global population, transcending economic barriers.<sup>119</sup>

## **2.2 Evangelization in the Catholic Church**

Several theologians and Church documents have offered definitions of evangelization, but one of the most influential comes from Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). He defines evangelization as a multifaceted process, stating: “Evangelization means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (E N 18). This definition emphasizes that evangelization is not limited to verbal proclamation but encompasses the transformation of individuals and societies through the power of the Gospel. It involves proclamation, witness, teaching, and social transformation, engaging both personal and communal dimensions of faith. This holistic approach has become a cornerstone of Catholic theology on evangelization.

### **2.2.1 Primary Documents on Evangelization since Vatican II**

The Catholic Church has produced various documents on evangelization missions over the years. These documents provide guidance and instructions on how the Church should approach and carry out its mission to spread the Gospel. Some of the key documents related to evangelization include:

#### ***Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church)-1965**

*Ad Gentes* (1965), one of the landmark documents of the Second Vatican Council, presents a comprehensive framework for understanding evangelization within the Catholic Church. This decree is particularly focused on the missionary activity of the Church, emphasizing that evangelization is not just the task of clergy but a duty entrusted to every member of the Church. It affirms that being missionary is a central element of the Church's identity. The Church embraces this mission in order to fulfill the command given by the Lord to “go and make disciples of all nations,” (cf. AG 2).

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Miriam Westen, *Social Media in the New Evangelization*, Conference Paper Presented and Published with the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Canada, 2013. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344788691\\_Social\\_Media\\_in\\_the\\_New\\_Evangelization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344788691_Social_Media_in_the_New_Evangelization) (Accessed November 25, 2021).

This underscores the universal call to mission that extends to every baptized individual, highlighting the intrinsic link between the Church's identity and her missionary mandate. Furthermore, *Ad Gentes* calls for a "double dynamism" of proclamation and witness, indicating that evangelization should involve both the explicit preaching of the Gospel and the lived example of faith by the Church's members. This dual approach is considered vital for the effective communication of the Good News, as it not only involves teaching the content of the faith but also living in a way that authentically embodies those teachings.

The document also underlines the importance of cultural adaptation in evangelization, recognizing the need to engage with different cultures and contexts in a respectful and meaningful way. It advocates for inculturation, where the message of Gospel is proclaimed in such a way that it resonates with the cultural context in which it is being preached. *Ad Gentes* states, "Missionary activity must be accomplished with the cooperation of the local communities themselves, who are its first agents" (A G, 23). This reflects fostering a deeper understanding and acceptance of the Gospel message. By engaging with local cultures, the Church can communicate the faith in a manner that is understandable and relevant to those who hear it, thereby facilitating a genuine encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. This document therefore provides foundational principles that guide the Church's approach to evangelization in a way that respects the integrity and values of different societies.

### ***Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)**

Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) offers a profound reflection on the nature and scope of evangelization within the modern world. He emphasizes that evangelization is not merely about spreading doctrines but involves a deeper transformation of individuals and society. He writes, "Evangelization is in fact the Church's deepest identity, the most basic and fundamental mission entrusted to her by Christ" (EN, 14). This highlights that evangelization is not an optional activity but is intrinsic to the Church's mission. Pope Paul VI stresses that the Church must not only preach the Gospel but also to demonstrate it through its actions, particularly in promoting justice, peace, and human dignity, thus integrating faith with social life.

The document also discusses the challenges presented by modern secularism and calls for a new evangelizing effort that engages the contemporary world with authenticity and relevance. According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "The new evangelization must be

characterized by a renewed sense of commitment and urgency, a deeper faith and a more profound sense of solidarity with those who are suffering” (E N, 80). Pope Paul VI urges the Church to renew its approach to evangelization, particularly by emphasizing the centrality of Christ’s love and mercy, which can touch hearts even in secularized and pluralistic contexts. The document therefore positions evangelization not only as the transmission of religious knowledge but as a dynamic, life-changing encounter with the Gospel in the world today.

### ***Redemptoris Missio* (1990)**

In *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), Pope John Paul II reaffirms the Church's enduring commitment to evangelization, particularly in the context of increasing secularization and the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world. The encyclical underscores that the missionary mandate given by Christ is a permanent obligation of the Church. Pope John Paul II asserts that “the Church is missionary by her very nature” (R M, 32), reiterating that evangelization is at the heart of the Church’s identity and mission. He calls on the Church to respond to contemporary challenges by renewing its focus on missionary activity, ensuring that the Gospel reaches all people, especially those who have not yet heard it.

The encyclical also introduces the concept of the “New Evangelization,” particularly aimed at rekindling faith in regions that were once predominantly Christian but have experienced a decline in religious commitment. John Paul II writes, “The new evangelization is the spreading of the Gospel in nations and regions where Christianity was once widespread, but where it has lost strength, and where today it is necessary to rekindle the flame of faith”.<sup>120</sup> This “New Evangelization” is presented as a response to the secularizing forces within these regions, seeking not just to restore Christian practices but to deepen and renew the personal encounter with Christ in the lives of the faithful.

### ***Verbum Domini* (2010)**

In *Verbum Domini* (2010), Pope Benedict XVI places a strong emphasis on the central role of Scripture in the evangelizing mission of the Church. He underscores that the Word of God is not only a source of spiritual nourishment but also an essential instrument for spreading the Gospel. Benedict XVI states, “The Church draws her

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. R M, 33

nourishment from the Word of God, which she unceasingly proclaims, and the faithful are called to be ever more deeply rooted in the Scriptures” (VD 73). This call highlights the necessity for an active engagement with the Bible in the life of the Church, as it is through the Scriptures that the faithful encounter the living Word of God.

The apostolic exhortation also emphasizes that Scripture is foundational not only for personal faith but for effective evangelization. Benedict XVI emphasizes, “The Word of God is the first and greatest instrument of evangelization” (V D, 95). He stresses that a deeper understanding of Scripture is essential for those engaged in evangelization, as it equips them to present the Gospel with clarity and conviction. The document thus advocates for a renewed commitment to the study of the Bible, urging the faithful to make the Scriptures a living part of their everyday lives in order to more effectively bear witness to Christ.

### ***Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)**

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis emphasizes the essential role of joy in evangelization, encouraging the Church to embrace a joyful and optimistic approach to spreading the Gospel. He further emphasizes the importance of a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, urging all Christians, everywhere, to engage in this transformative experience, underscoring that the joy of evangelizing is rooted in a deep personal relationship with Christ.<sup>121</sup> The apostolic exhortation calls on the Church to communicate this joy through actions and words, fostering an evangelical spirit that attracts others to the faith. Pope Francis also challenges the Church to be more inclusive, prioritizing outreach to the marginalized, those on the margins of society, and those who feel excluded from the Church's traditional structures.<sup>122</sup>

The document further emphasizes the need for social justice as integral to evangelization. Pope Francis writes, “The Church's mission is to offer to every person the joy of the Gospel, which carries a message of freedom or liberation, justice, and peace”.<sup>123</sup> He calls on the Church to engage with societal issues, advocating for a preferential option for the poor and oppressed. Evangelization is thus not only about spiritual proclamation but also about transforming the world by providing both material and spiritual healing to the brokenness of society.

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. EG 3.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Cf. E G, 176.

### ***Misericordiae Vultus* (2015)**

In *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015), Pope Francis highlights mercy as the central theme of the Church's mission, particularly in the context of evangelization. The bull of indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy stresses that the Church's evangelizing work must be marked by the compassionate love of God, who reaches out to all people, regardless of their situation. Pope Francis emphasizes that mercy is the fundamental foundation of the Church's life, and that all of its pastoral efforts should be characterized by mercy.<sup>124</sup> This understanding of mercy as a central aspect of the Church's mission calls the faithful to extend forgiveness, reconciliation, and care for those on the margins of society as essential elements of the proclamation of the Gospel.

The document also emphasizes that evangelization through mercy is not only about individual acts of charity but about creating a culture of mercy within the Church itself. Pope Francis urges, "The Church is called to be a sign of mercy".<sup>125</sup> This vision of a merciful Church challenges Christians to embody the mercy of God in their everyday lives, particularly by embracing the vulnerable and offering compassion to those in need. The "Jubilee of Mercy" was a call for the Church to open her doors wide to all, offering a message of hope and reconciliation that reflects God's boundless love.

### ***Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018)**

In *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), Pope Francis urges the faithful to recognize the call to holiness in everyday life as a vital aspect of evangelization. He emphasizes that holiness is not meant for an exclusive group, but is the calling of every Christian. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven",<sup>126</sup> quoting Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, Francis highlights that holiness is attainable through the lived experience of daily encounters with God in ordinary life. The document challenges the faithful to witness to the Gospel through their actions, embodying Christ's love and presence in the world, thereby evangelizing through their very way of living.

Pope Francis further emphasizes that holiness is expressed through both personal transformation and social engagement. He writes, "We are called to be saints by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2015, no.12.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and be Glad), Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018, 3.

ourselves”.<sup>127</sup> This call to holiness is not confined to traditional religious roles but permeates all aspects of life. Evangelization, in this context, becomes an invitation to live in accordance with the Gospel, bearing witness to God’s love in all relationships and actions, thus inspiring others to encounter Christ through the everyday holiness of the Christian life.

### **2.2.2 Evangelization of Youth**

The General Directory of Catechesis, No. 80 says “Sharing the good news is about connecting young people’s lives to the power of the gospel by connecting their life stories to the stories of faith, relationships and challenges of the gospel. Ultimately, this sharing is about bringing young people “into communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ”.<sup>128</sup>

Evangelization encompasses a multifaceted approach to sharing the faith, integrating several key elements and principles. It begins with proclamation, a clear and intentional communication of the message of Christ, and is reinforced through witness, where individuals live out their faith in tangible ways. This outreach extends into deliberate efforts to engage others, providing opportunities for an invitation to explore the faith. At the core of evangelization is conversion, understood as *metanoia*—a transformative change of heart that fosters a hunger for spiritual growth, discipleship, and a personal encounter with Christ, culminating in a responsive commitment.<sup>129</sup>

This process is intricately woven into all aspects of youth ministry, including advocacy for the needs and rights of young people, leadership development, catechesis, pastoral care, community-building activities, prayer, worship, justice-oriented service, and evangelization itself. Each component serves as a channel for fostering a deeper connection with God and the faith community.<sup>130</sup>

An evangelizing community is characterized by several hallmarks. It actively celebrates and tells its story, emphasizing the Christian narrative and its relevance to all ages, particularly youth. Such a community values young people, recognizing their role in the life of the Church, and invites their responsible participation in its mission. It embodies the story of Christ through its actions, encourages adult involvement, and promotes

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Evangelizing Youth: Witness, Outreach, and Sharing*. [https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/e24ab6fa5c3b7905fe6c55b8d8a69e59/Evangelizing\\_Youth.pdf](https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/e24ab6fa5c3b7905fe6c55b8d8a69e59/Evangelizing_Youth.pdf) (Accessed November 12, 2023).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *Evangelizing Youth: Witness, Outreach, and Sharing*.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

inclusivity and hospitality, ensuring that all feel welcome and included in the faith journey.<sup>131</sup>

Finally, evangelization is not confined to a single group but is a collaborative effort. It is carried out by families, young people themselves, parishes, ministry leaders, and Catholic schools, all of whom play integral roles in nurturing faith and spreading the Gospel. This comprehensive approach ensures that the message of Christ reaches individuals in diverse contexts and stages of life, fostering a holistic and inclusive evangelizing mission.<sup>132</sup>

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) emphasizes that the foundation of evangelization in youth ministry lies in acknowledging God's presence within the lives of young people, their families, their experiences, and their cultural contexts. This perspective is rooted in the Christian belief in the incarnation, which affirms that God is intimately present within all aspects of creation and humanity.<sup>133</sup>

Evangelization, in this framework, is not about introducing God as if He were absent, but rather about helping young people recognize and articulate their encounters with a God who is already active in their lives. By facilitating this awareness, evangelization opens their hearts and minds to receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ in a transformative way. This approach highlights the importance of engaging with young people's lived realities as a means of connecting them to their faith, underscoring a theology that values the sacredness of their experiences as a starting point for spiritual growth and deeper discipleship.<sup>134</sup>

### **2.2.3 Church Documents Pertaining Youth Ministry**

The Catholic Church has consistently emphasized the importance of youth ministry, providing guidance through various documents that address the spiritual, pastoral, and developmental needs of young people. These documents are foundational for leaders, educators, and ministers striving to engage young people in their faith journey.

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Cf. National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization: Called to Be Witnesses and Storytellers*, Washington, DC: NFCYM, 1993, pp. 7-8 cf. [https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/e24ab6fa5c3b7905fe6c55b8d8a69e59/Evangelizing\\_Youth.pdf](https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/e24ab6fa5c3b7905fe6c55b8d8a69e59/Evangelizing_Youth.pdf) (Accessed November 12, 2023).

<sup>134</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

### ***Dilecti Amici* (1985): A Foundational Document for Youth Engagement**

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Dilecti Amici* was written in 1985 during the United Nations' International Year of Youth. It holds historical and theological significance as it set a foundation for the establishment of World Youth Day. The document highlights the critical importance of youth as a stage of self-discovery and the realization of one's unique potential within the context of faith and community. Pope John Paul II emphasizes, "Your youth is not just your own property... it is a possession of humanity itself".<sup>135</sup>

The Pope portrays youth as a time for discovering one's purpose and encourages young people to embrace their distinctive gifts while contemplating their contribution to the Church's mission. He underscores that the Church's future lies in the hands of its young members, reflecting her vitality and hope in their energy and aspirations. "The Church," he writes, "sees herself reflected in the vitality and hope of young people, placing its future in their hands".<sup>136</sup>

Through this document, John Paul II not only acknowledges the transformative power of youth but also underscores their vital role in influencing the Church and society. His message serves as a call to action for young people to actively participate in the life and mission of the Church, affirming their value as key contributors to its present and future.

### ***Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001)**

In his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II reflects on the deep longing within young people for genuine values, which he asserts find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He describes Christ as "the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart," emphasizing His role as both a supreme friend and a teacher of authentic friendship.<sup>137</sup>

The Pope encourages presenting Christ to young people as He truly is—a figure who offers compelling answers to their deepest questions. This approach resonates even when the message is challenging and marked by the Cross. He observes that when

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Dilecti Amici* to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year 1985, no.1.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 9: *AAS* 93 (2001), 271-272.

young people encounter Christ in this authentic way, they find His message convincing and are inspired to embrace its demands.<sup>138</sup>

This passage underscores John Paul II's vision of youth ministry as a call to guide young people toward an encounter with Christ that is rooted in authenticity and truth, empowering them to live meaningful and spiritually enriched lives.

### ***Verbum Domini* (2010): Young People and the Word of God**

In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the integral role of young people in the Church as both active participants and its future. He recognizes their openness to the Word of God and their sincere desire to encounter Jesus. Pope Benedict highlights the unique character of youth as a period of profound questioning about life's meaning and direction, asserting that only God can provide true answers to these existential inquiries.<sup>139</sup>

The Pope calls for courage and clarity in proclaiming the Gospel to young people. He stresses the need to foster their confidence and familiarity with sacred Scripture, which he describes as a "compass" that guides them in discerning their life's path and making decisions rooted in faith. The exhortation underscores the Church's responsibility to provide young people with the tools to navigate life's complexities while staying anchored in the Word of God.<sup>140</sup>

This message reflects Benedict XVI's deep concern for youth formation, acknowledging their potential to contribute to the Church's vitality while affirming the transformative power of Scripture in shaping their spiritual journey.

### ***Africae Munus* (2011): A Vision for Youth in Africa**

Pope Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Africae Munus*, acknowledges the critical role of young people in the growth of society and the Church, particularly in Africa, where youth form a significant portion of the population. Benedict XVI describes the youth as "a big treasure for the whole Church," emphasizing their vitality and potential to drive positive transformation within the Church and society.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Cf. VD no. 104.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus: On the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011 no. 60.

The document highlights the Church's responsibility to support young people's aspirations and address their struggles, providing guidance to help them navigate modern challenges such as materialism and ideological influences. Benedict XVI stresses the importance of presenting Christ as the source of true freedom and fulfillment, urging the Church to lead young people toward a deeper relationship with Him.<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, the exhortation affirms the centrality of Scripture in youth formation, describing it as a "compass" that helps young people discern their life's direction and address the existential questions of their time. This scriptural foundation, Benedict XVI argues, is vital for enabling young people to anchor their lives in faith and make significant contributions to the Church and the world.<sup>143</sup>

### ***Christus Vivit* (2019): A Landmark in Youth Ministry**

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, serves as a significant pastoral guide for youth ministry, encapsulating the reflections from the 2018 Synod of Bishops on "Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment." Referred to as a "Magna Carta of youth ministry and vocations," the document underscores the vitality of youth in the Church and calls them to embrace vibrant, holy lives.<sup>144</sup> The Pope emphasizes that Christ is alive and remains central to the lives of young people and the Church, urging them to live with hope and purpose.<sup>145</sup>

*Christus Vivit* emphasizes a paradigm shift in youth ministry to address the evolving needs of contemporary young people. Traditional pastoral approaches, often structured around fixed programs and rigid formats, frequently fail to resonate with the dynamic and fluid realities of youth culture. Pope Francis highlights that the proliferation of diverse youth movements, which often arise spontaneously, signifies the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in creating new avenues for engagement.<sup>146</sup> However, these movements require thoughtful integration into the Church's broader pastoral efforts, fostering communion and coordination while respecting their unique contributions. Central to this vision is the recognition that effective youth ministry must involve the entire Church

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *Africae Munus*, no. 104.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Edward, Pentin, Pope Francis' New Document 'a Magna Carta of Youth Ministry and Vocations'. <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-new-document-a-magna-carta-of-youth-ministry-and-vocations> (Accessed November 12, 2023).

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit: To Young People and to the Entire People of God*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019, nos. 202-210.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

community in evangelization efforts, with young people themselves playing an active and leading role in reaching their peers.<sup>147</sup> This approach underscores the importance of flexibility, relational engagement, and a readiness to meet young people where they are, using their language and culture to communicate the Gospel authentically.

The document calls for a synodal approach to youth ministry, advocating for a “journeying together” that appreciates the diverse charisms within the Church. This collaborative model fosters co-responsibility among clergy, laypeople, and youth, reflecting the Church's unity through diversity.<sup>148</sup> Rather than imposing rigid frameworks, *Christus Vivit* encourages young people to employ their creativity and audacity in devising fresh pastoral strategies. This includes leveraging social media, organizing dynamic events, and crafting authentic, love-driven encounters that convey the joy of the Gospel. The text warns against relying solely on doctrinal instruction post-conversion, as this can stifle the transformative energy of an initial encounter with Christ. Instead, Pope Francis advocates for deepening foundational experiences of faith and community life, prioritizing growth in fraternal love and service.<sup>149</sup> By embracing a vibrant and inclusive model of evangelization, youth ministry can inspire and sustain a lifelong commitment to the faith.

### **World Youth Day Resources: Foundations and Papal Messages**

World Youth Day (WYD) is an international gathering that brings together young Catholics to celebrate their faith and mission within the Church. The Vatican has issued a collection of foundational documents that outline the principles and purpose of WYD, providing a framework for its establishment and continued success. The Pope traditionally issues messages to young people during WYD events, offering reflections on the event's theme and guidance on how they can deepen their faith and engage in evangelization. For instance, in his homily on April 25, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged young people not to fear Christ, affirming, “He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life”.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, April 25, 2005. cf. [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ho](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ho) (Accessed December 13, 2023).

Similarly, in his message for the 25th World Youth Day in 2010, Benedict XVI offers a cautionary exhortation to young people, urging them to remain vigilant against influences that threaten to derail their development and future. He identifies a range of temptations, including ideologies, sects, materialism, substance abuse, promiscuity, and violence, as destructive forces that can compromise their personal and spiritual growth.<sup>151</sup>

Benedict XVI's message acknowledges the allure of these enticements, particularly in a world that often glorifies instant gratification and superficial success. However, he challenges young people to resist discouragement amidst difficulties and to steadfastly pursue their ideals and commitments. By emphasizing the importance of human, intellectual, and spiritual formation, the Pope highlights a holistic approach to personal growth, where faith and reason are harmonized. His call underscores the need for resilience, moral clarity, and perseverance in navigating the complexities of modern life while striving toward authentic self-realization. This message remains relevant as it encourages young people to critically evaluate the values and choices shaping their lives and to prioritize their long-term flourishing over transient pleasures.<sup>152</sup>

Through these messages, the Popes highlight WYD as not merely an event but a vital spiritual journey that equips young Catholics to face contemporary challenges with faith, courage, and a commitment to living out the Gospel in their daily lives.

## **Conclusion**

The above documents provide insights into the Church's perspective on youth evangelization, emphasizing the importance of empowering young people to live out their faith meaningfully. The Church's guidance reflects a balance of encouragement, vigilance, and openness to modern realities, making youth ministry a cornerstone of its evangelizing mission.

### **2.2.4 Understanding Catholic Youth Ministry**

Catholic youth ministry is a vital aspect of the Church's mission, aiming to connect young people to their faith, community, and purpose. Grounded in key documents such as *Sons and Daughters of the Light* (1996) and *Renewing the Vision* (1997), the United

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the XXV World Youth Day (22 February 2010), 7: *AAS* 102 (2010), 253-254.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provides a comprehensive framework for effective ministry tailored to the diverse needs and realities of young people.

### **Definition and Scope of Youth and Young Adult Ministry**

The 1996 document, *Sons and Daughters of the Light*, defines young adulthood as a life stage encompassing individuals in their late teens, twenties, and thirties. This group includes single, married, divorced, or widowed individuals, with or without children, and spans a wide range of social, cultural, and professional realities. The USCCB emphasizes the diversity of this demographic, particularly noting the significant presence of young adults among immigrant populations, whose average age often falls in their early to mid-twenties. Young adults live in various contexts, including rural areas, and urban environments, and their ministry requires an approach that addresses this diversity.<sup>153</sup>

In the 1997 document *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (RTV), the bishops define youth ministry as “the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of the youth with the larger community.” This framework builds upon the principles of *A Vision of Youth Ministry* (1976) and outlines three primary goals for youth ministry: empowering young people to live as disciples of Christ, integrating them into the life and mission of the Church, and fostering their holistic personal and spiritual growth.<sup>154</sup>

### **Goals of Youth Ministry and Principles for Effective Young Adult Ministry**

The USCCB, in *Sons and Daughters of the Light* (1996), identifies four key goals for effective ministry with young adults:

- 1. Connecting Young People with Jesus Christ:** Facilitating a personal and transformative relationship with Christ as the foundation of their faith.
- 2. Connecting Young People with the Church:** Encouraging active participation in the Church community to nurture their spiritual growth and sense of belonging.

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* November 12, 1996 cf. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/young-adults/upload/Sons-and-Daughters-of-Light.pdf> (Accessed November 14, 2023).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, 1997, p. 1 (quoting *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, 1976).

3. **Connecting Young People with the Mission of the Church in the World:** Inspiring young adults to embody the Church's mission through evangelization, service, and leadership.
4. **Connecting Young People with a Peer Community:** Creating opportunities for supportive relationships with peers who share and strengthen their faith journey.

### **Principles for Effective Young Adult Ministry**

The USCCB in *Sons and Daughters of the Light* (1996) also outlines twelve principles to guide ministry efforts with young adults in parishes, dioceses, and campus settings:

1. **Supportive Community:** Young adults develop their beliefs and values through active engagement with a supportive and nurturing community, which plays a critical role in shaping their moral and spiritual foundations.
2. **Relational and Inclusive Opportunities:** They seek relationships with peers while valuing intergenerational and multicultural experiences.
3. **Relevance and Accessibility:** Faith and Church traditions resonate when communicated through relatable and engaging symbols, words, and activities.
4. **Invitation and Participation:** Young adults respond positively when actively invited to participate in planning and community spiritual activities.
5. **Meeting Young Adults Where They Are:** Effective ministry engages young adults in their diverse environments, including workplaces, homes, campuses, and civic communities.
6. **Collaborative Engagement:** Ministry involves young adults in identifying and shaping initiatives specific to their community.
7. **Spiritual Development:** Ministry supports the holistic spiritual growth of young adults, fostering a healthy understanding of life and a deepening relationship with God.
8. **Openness to Questions:** Ministry provides safe spaces for young adults to explore faith-related questions and engage with the Church traditions and practices.
9. **Peer and Family Ministry:** Effective programs incorporate peer ministry and involve families in faith formation.
10. **Celebration of Diversity:** Ministry acknowledges and celebrates cultural diversity, fostering inclusivity and respect.
11. **Commitment to Justice and Compassion:** Young adults are encouraged to engage in social justice, peacebuilding, and acts of compassion.

**12. Investment in Resources:** Successful ministry requires a commitment to resources for catechesis, and pastoral care of young people.

### **Goals of Youth Ministry according RTV**

#### **Empowerment**

The primary objective of youth ministry is to equip young adult to embrace and live out their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. Youth ministry helps young people learn what it means to follow Jesus Christ and live as His disciples today, equipping them to serve others and bear the vision and values of God's reign.<sup>155</sup> Pope John Paul II (1993) urged a very baptized member of the Church to follow in the footsteps of Christ and make a difference in today's world. He emphasized the potential of young people to effect meaningful change in the world. He encouraged them to channel their energy and talents toward fostering a society rooted in Christian love. He further urged youth to actively engage in promoting justice, solidarity, and peace, highlighting their critical role in shaping a more compassionate and equitable world.<sup>156</sup>

The core of the Church's mission lies in the call to discipleship, which involves following Jesus. Every ministry with youth must be focused on sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with young people and inviting and challenging them to become His disciples.<sup>157</sup>

#### **Participation**

Another key goal of youth ministry according to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in its 1997 document "Renewing Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Work," is involving young people in responsible participation in the Catholic Church. Young people need to be drawn to responsible participation in the life and mission of the church community.<sup>158</sup>

Young people long to socialize, be in relationships and belong. Family, peers, school, youth organizations and church are the most important connections for young people. The Church achieves this second goal of youth ministry through, among other things... Being a "youth-friendly" community that welcomes young people, values their

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<sup>155</sup> RTV n.9.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Homily of His Holiness John Paul II on World Youth Day, Denver 1993.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. *Renewing the Vision: Part 2*. <https://www.usccb.org/renewing-vision-part-2> (Accessed November 20, 2023).

<sup>158</sup> Cf. RTV n. 11.

participation and nurtures their talents. Integration of young people into the liturgical, pastoral and pastoral life of the parish. Creating opportunities for young people to develop healthy, trusting and respectful relationships with peers and adults. Promote Catholic identity and religious education through youth catechesis programs.<sup>159</sup>

### **Personal and spiritual growth**

The third goal of youth ministry is promoting young people's personal and spiritual growth. Adolescence is a vital time for mental, spiritual, social and physical growth. Youth experiences and relationships have a major influence on their healthy and positive development.<sup>160</sup>

### **Fundamental components youth pastoral ministry according to RTV**

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, 1997" states the detailed comprehensive approach to youth ministry. It outlined eight fundamental components that is advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, and prayer and worship. These components guide efforts to proclaim the Good News, connect young people with the faith community, and call youth to the challenge of discipleship. The components describe specific areas of the church's mission that work together to provide ministry to younger generations. These elements offer the Catholic community a structure for addressing the needs of young people while encouraging them to contribute their distinctive gifts to the broader community.<sup>161</sup>

### **2.2.5 Youth Ministry for African Youth**

In her presentation at the *African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa* (Synod on Synodality, 2023), Thandeka Matse outlined several key strategies to address the spiritual and practical needs of African youth in their faith journey. The first strategy focused on spiritual and pastoral camps. Matse argued that the faith and spirituality of young people can be significantly deepened through robust formation programs, such as

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<sup>159</sup> Cf. <https://nfcym.org/resources/topics/catholic-youth-ministry/> (Accessed November 20, 2023).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> RTV, p. 26 cf. <https://nfcym.org/resources/topics/catholic-youth-ministry/> (Accessed November 20, 2023).

paid youth retreats and workshops. These initiatives would help the youth focus on prayer, reflection, and community service, fostering a more intentional spiritual life.<sup>162</sup> . The second strategy emphasized the importance of forming youth ministries, such as “Youth for Christ,” which would aid in discipleship and evangelization among young people. Matse also highlighted Bible study groups as an effective tool for nurturing faith and understanding Scripture.<sup>163</sup>

Matse's third point addressed the significance of youth-centered liturgies, proposing the incorporation of modern music tunes into Christian worship. She suggested the use of projectors and social media to engage youth beyond the Church's physical walls, expanding the reach of evangelization to a broader audience.<sup>164</sup>

The fourth strategy involved the promotion of Catechism as a means to help youth understand and appreciate Catholic liturgy, thus deepening their faith and connection to the Church.<sup>165</sup>

The fifth strategy tackled education and employment, proposing support for young people through vocational training, educational programs, and scholarship opportunities for underprivileged youth. Matse emphasized that such initiatives would engage young people in meaningful, life-changing activities, including job creation and entrepreneurship.<sup>166</sup> She also underscored the need for inclusivity and dialogue within the Church, advocating for synodal sessions in dioceses where young people can voice their concerns and ideas.<sup>167</sup>

Finally, the sixth strategy centered on social media, stressing its potential as a tool for faith sharing, learning, and community building among youth. Matse concluded by quoting Popes Francis and John Paul II, noting, “The Church needs the enthusiasm and intuition of young people.” She encouraged young people to freely practice their spirituality, voice their concerns, and grow in their spiritual lives within the Church.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Matse, Thandeka, *Strategies that Will Help to Meet the Hunger of African Youth for God and for a Better Future*, in: *Proceedings of the African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa (Synod on Synodality)*, Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network, 2024.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

### 2.2.6 Means of Evangelization

Spreading the message through verbal communication is a traditional method. From the apostolic time to today, the methodology of evangelization has changed, allowing the introduction of new techniques for proclaiming the Word of God. This shift in perspective is driven by the evolving dynamics of global systems shaped by modern technology. In 1962, McLuhan in his book “*Gutenberg Galaxy*” predicted the age of internet or global village. He predicted an electronic era defined by a technologically connected community of individuals. The Church recognizes this phenomenal step and has remained faithful to its vision despite the enormous challenges posed by new technology.<sup>169</sup> In the modern age, the use of media has become increasingly important. This includes radio, television, podcasts, and online platforms. Sermons, discussions, and educational content can be shared with a global audience through these channels. Leveraging social media and various online platforms helps to engage a wider audience. This allows for the dissemination of information, discussions, and engagement with people who may not be physically present.

## 2.3 Media and Digital Technology

### Media: Definition and Scope

The term *media* refers to the various channels or tools used to communicate information and ideas to a broad audience.<sup>170</sup> It includes various channels and platforms for disseminating information, news, entertainment, and other content. Media can be broadly categorized into types such as print media, broadcast media, digital media (e.g., websites, social media, blogs, podcasts, and online videos), and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok.<sup>171</sup> Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, influencing culture, and facilitating the exchange of ideas.<sup>172</sup> The advent of digital technology has significantly transformed the media landscape, fostering interactivity, instant communication, and inclusivity of diverse voices.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Godfrey, Danaan, Naanlang, Mass Media and Christian Evangelisation in the Digital Age: Towards Sustaining ‘Mission’ in the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos, in: Journal of Arts and Humanities 5, no. 7 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v5i7.954>. (Accessed June 26, 2023).

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Give the Meaning of the Term 'Media' and Describe Why It Is Important for Global Citizens to Be Media, in: Brainly. <https://brainly.com/question/51080363> (Accessed December 3, 2024).

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Li, B., Emerging Media: Opening a New Era in Future Communication, in: Emerging Media, 2023, 1(1), 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543231205343> (Accessed July 28, 2024).

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Fay, Gordon, Researching the Media Representations of Children and Young People, in: Children, Young People and the Press in a Transitioning Society, Palgrave Socio-Legal Studies, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2018. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-60682-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-60682-2_1) (Accessed March 29, 2023).

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

### 2.3.1 Evolution of the Media

The evolution of media reflects humanity's efforts to communicate and disseminate information. As Somo in “The Evolution of Media” highlights, the roots of modern media can be traced to “Egyptian hieroglyphics”<sup>174</sup>, a medium that combined word and image to convey meaning. These ancient scripts were regarded as “holy writing” and were believed to be divinely inspired.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, ancient Greek theater, encompassing drama, satire, and debates, is recognized for its role in shaping modern media structures.<sup>176</sup>

The invention of the movable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century marked a pivotal moment in media history, revolutionizing the dissemination of information. Later, the Industrial Age introduced innovations such as the electric telegraph, while the Electronic Age (1930s–1980s) saw advancements like community antenna television systems and early cable networks. The 21st century heralded the era of new media, driven by the internet's invention and the proliferation of social networking platforms.<sup>177</sup>

### 2.3.2 Social Media Versus Old Media

Social media fundamentally differs from traditional or “old” media by fostering a more interactive and participatory environment. In contrast to traditional media, where audiences typically act as passive recipients, social media enables users to become content producers. Social platforms allow individuals to share personal experiences, knowledge, and opinions, breaking down the boundaries between public and private spheres. However, the blurred distinction between authentic relationships and superficial connections remains a challenge.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> The Egyptian hieroglyphic script was one of the writing systems used by ancient Egyptians to represent their language. Because of their pictorial elegance, Herodotus and other important Greeks believed that Egyptian hieroglyphs were something sacred, so they referred to them as ‘holy writing’. In the ancient Egyptian language, hieroglyphs were called *medu netjer*, ‘the gods’ words’ as it was believed that writing was an invention of the gods.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Gennasel, Somo, The Evolution of Media. <https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/the-evolution-of-media-6fbad2d3-dde1-4476-a722-c68116382100> (Accessed November 4, 2023).

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Gabrielle, Frazier, How Ancient Greek Theater Influenced Modern Media. [https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.issuu.com/mirage\\_magazine/docs/issue\\_11-min/s/21902359](https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.issuu.com/mirage_magazine/docs/issue_11-min/s/21902359) (Accessed November 5, 2023).

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Gennasel, Somo, The Evolution of Media.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Norberto, González Gaitano, Essentials of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church on Communications and Social Media, 14 November 2016. <https://www.familyandmedia.eu/en/media-education/essentials-of-social-doctrine-of-the-catholic-church-on-communications-and-social-media/> (Accessed November 6, 2023).

The media theorist Marshall McLuhan's assertion that “the medium is the message” underscores the transformative role of media in shaping communication. McLuhan (1964) argued that the medium itself fundamentally influences how content is perceived and understood.<sup>179</sup> Quoting Pope Pius XII, he emphasized the importance of maintaining equilibrium between the power of communication techniques and the individual's capacity to process them.<sup>180</sup>

### **2.3.3 New Media and Digital Media**

New media represents the convergence of digital, computerized, and networked technologies. According to Flew (2008), it encompasses content accessible on demand through the internet and digital devices.<sup>181</sup> The advent of email, social media platforms, blogs, and video-sharing sites has reshaped communication, providing both opportunities and challenges. If utilized effectively, new media serves as a tool for innovation and connectivity. Conversely, misuse can lead to social discord and ethical dilemmas.<sup>182</sup>

Social media, a subset of new media, fosters collective intelligence by connecting users who share common interests and goals. It is characterized as “a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”.<sup>183</sup> Social media tools continue to expand in number and functionality, influencing nearly every aspect of daily life.<sup>184</sup> Angela S. Zanella (2015) highlights that these tools offer avenues for sharing knowledge, experiences, and creativity, but they also contribute to information overload and diminished appreciation for physical interactions.<sup>185</sup>

As noted in the Vatican's reflections on media, the pervasive presence of online communication, social media, and smartphones significantly shapes individual consciousness and societal norms. While these tools enhance connectivity, they also

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1964.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Pius XII, quoted in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 1964, 2003), 38.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Flew, Terry, *New Media: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Patrick Ryan, *Handbook of Civic Education*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2015, p. 104.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Kietzmann, Jan H., Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, and Bruno S. Silvestre, *Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media*, in: *Business Horizons* 54, no. 3 (April 2011): 241–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005> (Accessed February 20, 2023).

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Kiran, Bala, *Social Media and Changing Communication Patterns*, in: *Global Media Journal-India* 15, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Angela, S. Zanella, *We are what we Share*, In: Antonio Spadaro, *Web 2.0 Relationships in the Internet Age*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2014, p. 73.

present challenges such as reduced face-to-face interaction and an overwhelming influx of information.<sup>186</sup>

#### **2.3.4 Types of Social Media**

A central part of young people's lives is social media. Social media can be categorized into several types and they are distinguished from one another by the type of content. They serve various needs and social purposes.

##### **Social Networking Sites**

These social platforms are primarily designed to connect with friends and family. They focus more on personal conversations. In addition to personal conversations, these platforms promote the exchange of knowledge. These platforms accommodate various content formats, including text, photos, videos, and other creative media. Examples of social networking sites that offer these features include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok.<sup>187</sup>

##### **Discussion Forums**

Discussion forums are very important because they allow users to ask questions and get answers from different people. These platforms are designed to encourage conversations based on shared interests or curiosity. These platforms include Quora, Reddit, Digg among others.<sup>188</sup>

##### **Image Sharing Sites**

These are image-based sites or social media sites that allow people to share photos and related content. They provide a platform to initiate conversations and inspire creativity. They have recently become more important. Content like info-graphics, illustrations, and images capture users' attention more. Social media apps like Pinterest, Instagram,

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. Andrew Kaufa, AMECEA, UGANDA: SECAM Bishops Reflect on Pastoral Issues, in: Vatican News, July 22, 2019. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2019-07/uganda-secam-bishops-reflect-on-pastoral-issues.html> (Accessed May 12, 2024).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Durga Kudumula, What Are The Types of Social Media?, Digimind Blog, 2022. <https://blog.digimind.com/en/insight-driven-marketing/what-are-the-types-of-social-media> (Accessed November 25, 2023).

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Snapchat, Flickr are designed to increase image sharing. It is said a picture is worth a thousand words, and using this picture can have many positive effects.<sup>189</sup>

### **Video Sharing/Streaming Platforms**

Video content is one of the most engaging and appealing forms of content. Video content has many benefits for marketers, businesses, churches, etc. This form of content makes it easier to absorb and understand and is therefore widely preferred by users. One major platform that has changed the way people interact with video content is YouTube. With over a billion monthly active users, the platform sometimes serves as a search engine for most users.<sup>190</sup> Other video hosting platforms include TikTok, Instagram, Vimeo, Snapchat etc.

### **Blogs and Community Platforms**

Blogging and community platforms are a great way to publish one's views or thoughts about a job, current events etc. They have helped businesses and marketers to reach their target audience and provide them with credible information. Platforms like Tumblr, Facebook, Medium and WordPress allow users to build a community where people with similar interests can follow them.<sup>191</sup>

### **Bookmarking Networks**

Bookmarking networks are platforms whose purpose is to discover new content and discuss trends based on shared interests. Bookmarking networks include Feedly, Flipboard, Pinterest, StumbleUpon, and Pocket.<sup>192</sup>

## **2.3.5 Major Social Media Platforms**

Social media platforms have significantly transformed communication, interaction, and information sharing. Below is an overview of some major social media platforms:

### **Facebook**

According to Statista (2024), Facebook is a leading social media platform that has significantly influenced impacted worldwide communication and social dynamics.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Career Development, What are the Different Types of Social Media, 2023. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/types-of-social-media> (Accessed November 25, 2023).

Facebook users can easily connect with friends and family, share multimedia content such as photos and updates, and engage with others through features like likes, comments, and private messaging. Founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Andrew McCollum, Eduardo Saverin, Chris Hughes, and Dustin Moskovitz, Facebook initially targeted Harvard University students before expanding to other universities and eventually becoming accessible to the general public.<sup>194</sup>

The platform's early success was attributed to its simplicity, which made it easier for users to navigate and connect with others. Over time, Facebook evolved into a global phenomenon, reshaping how people share information and communicate. The platform allows users to create personal profiles, join or establish groups, and participate in a myriad of online communities. These features have made Facebook an integral part of modern social life, particularly in fostering connections across geographical and cultural boundaries.<sup>195</sup>

Beyond its role as a secular social network, Facebook has also been leveraged for religious and spiritual purposes. According to Spadaro (2014), many religious organizations and leaders use Facebook as a tool for evangelization and community building. They create pages, groups, and live sessions to share religious messages, teachings, and spiritual reflections, thus extending their outreach to a broader audience. This usage highlights Facebook's capacity to facilitate not just secular interaction but also faith-based engagement, emphasizing its multifaceted role in modern society.<sup>196</sup>

However, Facebook's global influence is not without criticism. Facebook contributes to violation of privacy and other issues such as misinformation, and the platform's role in shaping political discourse have sparked debates about its broader societal impacts.<sup>197</sup>

## **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp is a widely used social platform that has transformed communication for both personal and professional purposes. Launched as a mobile application, it offers features such as text messaging, voice and video calls, and the ability to share

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. Stacy, Jo Dixon, Most Used Social Networks 2024, by Number of Users, in: Statista, published July 10, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (Accessed October 10, 2024).

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Ray, M., Social network, Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/social-network> (Accessed October 1, 2024).

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Antonio Spadaro, WEB 2.0 Relationships in the Internet Age, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2014, P.56.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Lauer, D., Facebook's ethical failures are not accidental; they are part of the business model, in: AI Ethics 1, 395–403 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-021-00068-x> (Accessed May 3, 2023).

multimedia files, including images, documents, and videos. These functions are seamlessly accessible across smartphones and computers, making WhatsApp a versatile tool for users.<sup>198</sup>

A standout feature of WhatsApp is its strong focus on security and user privacy. It uses end-to-end encryption, guaranteeing that messages and media can only be accessed by the sender and the intended recipient. This approach to data protection has earned WhatsApp a reputation as one of the safest messaging platforms, particularly appealing to users concerned about privacy in an era of increasing digital surveillance.<sup>199</sup>

The app's intuitive design and broad accessibility have contributed to its widespread adoption. It is favored for professional collaboration, with businesses leveraging its features for customer support, marketing, and team communication. It is used for casual communication among friends and family. Its integration with desktop interfaces enhances productivity, further solidifying its role as a multifaceted communication tool.<sup>200</sup>

However, the platform is also criticized for misinformation and the rapid spread of fake news via WhatsApp's group messaging feature. Additionally, its encrypted nature, while a boon for privacy, has led to debates over potential misuse for illicit activities. These challenges underscore the dual-edged nature of technological innovation in the communication space.

Despite these concerns, WhatsApp's prominence remains undisputed. It exemplifies how technology can foster connectivity and efficiency while sparking important discussions about striking a balance between accessibility and accountability.<sup>201</sup> As Hollington (2023) notes, the app's impact on modern communication is profound, reshaping the ways people interact and collaborate globally.<sup>202</sup>

## **Snapchat**

Snapchat, a multimedia messaging application, has significantly reshaped how users interact and communicate in the digital era. Released in 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown, the app introduced a novel feature of ephemeral content:

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. Hollington, Jesse, What Is WhatsApp? How to Use the App, Tips, Tricks, and More, in: Digital Trends May 6, 2023. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/what-is-whatsapp/> (Accessed May 12, 2024).

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Tom Clayton, 25 Pros and Cons of WhatsApp, in: Rigorous Themes, April 25, 2023. <https://rigorousthemes.com/blog/pros-and-cons-of-whatsapp/> (Accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Hollington, Jesse, What Is WhatsApp? How to Use the App, Tips, Tricks, and More, in: Digital Trends. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/what-is-whatsapp/> (Accessed May 6, 2023).

photos and videos that disappear after being viewed. This innovation catered to a growing demand for privacy and spontaneity in digital exchanges, setting Snapchat apart from traditional social media platforms.<sup>203</sup>

The app further distinguishes itself with its array of creative tools, including filters, lenses, and augmented reality features. These elements have not only made Snapchat a hub for casual interactions but have also transformed it into a medium of self-expression and creativity. The introduction of “Stories,” a feature that lets users to post content viewable for 24 hours, expanded its functionality, encouraging narrative-style sharing akin to visual journaling.<sup>204</sup>

While Snapchat's unique approach to temporary messaging has gained widespread appeal, particularly among younger audiences, it has also attracted critical discourse. Critics have highlighted concerns about the potential for misuse, such as the facilitation of inappropriate content due to the app's fleeting nature. Moreover, the platform's design prioritizes visual communication, which some argue may inadvertently contribute to the oversimplification of interactions in an increasingly image-driven digital culture.<sup>205</sup>

Despite these challenges, Snapchat remains a significant player in the social media landscape. Its ability to blend entertainment, creativity, and communication has earned it a distinct niche. Scholars and industry observers recognize its influence on the evolution of digital communication, particularly in fostering a culture of immediacy and engagement through visual content.<sup>206</sup> Snapchat’s success is indicative of the changing priorities in how users value privacy and expression in the modern digital age.

## **Instagram**

Instagram is a social network famous for its focus on sharing visual content, particularly photos and videos, making it a cornerstone of digital expression in modern society. Invented by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, the platform was launched in October 2010, quickly gaining popularity for its simplicity and focus on aesthetic content. By

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. Philip Bates, What is Snap chat and How Does it Work? 2021. <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/what-is-snapchat/> (Accessed December 10, 2023).

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Adam, S. Kahn and Todd, M. Martinez, Text and You Might Miss It? Snap and You Might Remember? Exploring ‘Google Effects on Memory’ and Cognitive Self-Esteem in the Context of Snapchat and Text Messaging, in: *Computers in Human Behavior* 105 (2019): 106166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.106166> (Accessed October 6, 2023).

<sup>206</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

2012, Instagram was acquired by Facebook, solidifying its position within the portfolio of leading social media services and expanding its features and reach significantly.<sup>207</sup>

Instagram offers a versatile set of tools that enable users to connect, create, and engage. Features such as direct messaging, live-streaming, and browsing by hashtags allow for diverse interactions. Instagram Stories, introduced in 2016, stand out as one of its distinctive features, empowering users to share ephemeral content that disappears after 24 hours. This feature fosters spontaneous sharing and real-time engagement, enhancing its appeal across demographics. Similarly, the addition of Instagram TV (IGTV) allows creators to share long-form video content, catering to professional influencers and content-driven industries.<sup>208</sup>

The platform's tools for businesses, including analytics and advertising options, have transformed it into a powerhouse for marketing and brand promotion. Companies leverage Instagram's visually engaging environment to connect with target audiences, using paid ads and influencer collaborations to boost their visibility. Furthermore, the platform's algorithm-driven discovery features, such as the Explore tab, help users and businesses reach a wider audience, making it integral to modern marketing strategies.<sup>209</sup>

Despite its widespread adoption, Instagram is not without criticism. The platform's emphasis on curated and idealized visual content is often linked to issues such as self-esteem challenges and the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards. Furthermore, the growing integration of advertisements has raised debates about authenticity and consumer manipulation.<sup>210</sup>

Nevertheless, Instagram continues to innovate and adapt to the shifting dynamics of digital interaction. Its ability to balance personal use with business applications and its appeal to a global audience underscore its enduring relevance in the social media landscape.

### **Twitter: A Global Communication Platform**

Launched in 2006, Twitter has grown into one of the most influential social media platforms, enabling users to share and discover brief messages known as "tweets." The

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. Alison, Eldridge, A., Instagram, Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/money/Instagram> (Accessed November 7, 2024).

<sup>208</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Redaction Team, 16 Advantages and Disadvantages of Instagram, Barraza Carlos, January 20, 2024. <https://barrazacarlos.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-instagram/> (Accessed October 24, 2024).

<sup>210</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

platform encourages concise, real-time communication by limiting tweets to 280 characters, a feature that encourages users to express thoughts quickly and clearly.<sup>211</sup> The name “Twitter”. reflects the brevity and quick nature of communication, as well as the chirping of birds, which the bird logo symbolizes. Since its inception, Twitter has become an essential tool for individuals, organizations, businesses, and public figures to reach a global audience and share their ideas, perspectives, and content<sup>212</sup>.

The primary functions of Twitter include following other users, engaging with tweets by liking, retweeting, and replying, and utilizing hashtags to organize and categorize content. Hashtags allow users to easily find discussions on topics of interest and participate in global conversations. Through these features, Twitter provides a versatile platform that facilitates communication and the rapid dissemination of information. Its ability to connect people from around the world has made it a critical platform in various contexts, from news dissemination to social movements, politics, and entertainment.<sup>213</sup>

However, Twitter's role is not limited to secular communication. It also plays a significant role in the field of evangelization and religious communication. Religious groups and individuals use Twitter to share their spiritual messages, teachings, and perspectives, using the platform's broad reach to engage with a global audience. Through tweets, links to religious content, hashtags, and even live streaming, faith-based communities form virtual congregations and extend their evangelistic efforts beyond physical boundaries. As noted by Spadaro (2014), Twitter's dynamic, real-time format can facilitate spiritual conversations, enabling users to engage in online faith discussions, share religious teachings, and create virtual communities that focus on shared religious beliefs and values.<sup>214</sup>

Yet, Twitter’s potential in evangelization is not without challenges. The platform’s brevity, while promoting succinct communication, also limits the depth of discussions, which could make complex religious ideas harder to convey. Additionally, Twitter’s content guidelines and the platform’s propensity for viral discussions may occasionally conflict with religious messaging. Despite these challenges, creative and thoughtful use

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. Daniel, Zeevi, *Social Media Today*, 101 *What Twitter Really About*, 2013. <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/twitter-101-what-twitter-really-about> (Accessed December 10, 2023).

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Antonio Spadaro, *WEB 2.0 Relationships in the Internet Age*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2014, P.66.

of the platform allows religious groups to reach new audiences, engage in digital ministry, and foster spiritual communities.<sup>215</sup>

In conclusion, Twitter remains a multifaceted platform that serves a wide variety of communication purposes, including evangelization. While its influence in the religious domain continues to grow, its effectiveness depends on how well religious messages are tailored to the platform's character and the interests of its diverse audience.

## **TikTok**

TikTok, invented by the Chinese tech company ByteDance and launched in 2016, has become one of the most influential social media platforms worldwide, particularly among younger demographics. It allows users to create and share short-form videos, often accompanied by music, sound effects, and various creative filters. This interactive format has contributed to TikTok's swift ascent in popularity, attracting millions of users globally engaging with its unique blend of entertainment and creativity.<sup>216</sup>

One of TikTok's key features is its ability to encourage creativity among users. The platform's wide array of filters, stickers, and voice-overs allows individuals to personalize their videos, while the inclusion of sound effects and background music creates opportunities for diverse expression.<sup>217</sup> Additionally, TikTok's recommendation algorithm plays a significant role in its success, suggesting content based on a user's interactions and preferences, making it highly personalized. This algorithm not only promotes content that users are likely to enjoy but also enables videos to go viral quickly, amplifying trends and challenges that often transcend the app itself and spread across other platforms.<sup>218</sup>

Although TikTok is known for its entertainment value—particularly dance routines and lip-sync videos—its influence extends far beyond these areas. As Jeffrey P. Carpenter et al. (2024) discuss, educational content has flourished on the platform, covering a variety of subjects including personal development, history, science, and life skills. TikTok has become a space where users engage with learning materials in new, interactive formats,

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Werner Geyser, What is TikTok? - Everything You Need to Know About it in 2024, Influencer Marketing Hub, October 25, 2023. <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-tiktok/#Why%20Is%20TikTok%20So%20Po> (Accessed December 11, 2023).

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Min Zhang and Yiqun Liu, A Commentary of TikTok Recommendation Algorithms, *MIT Technology Review*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fmre.2021.11.015> (Accessed September 7, 2023).

reflecting the platform's versatility. This blend of entertainment and education has further solidified TikTok as a major player in the global digital landscape.<sup>219</sup>

Despite its playful and often lighthearted content, TikTok's swift expansion and worldwide presence have established it a significant platform for various forms of digital expression, including activism, marketing, and even religious engagement. Creators can use TikTok to address social issues, share knowledge, and reach global audiences in a manner that was previously unimaginable with traditional media.<sup>220</sup> However, the platform also faces criticism regarding privacy concerns and its impact on mental health, issues that remain subjects of ongoing discussion as the app continues to evolve.<sup>221</sup>

In conclusion, TikTok has redefined digital content creation and consumption, enabling individuals to express themselves creatively and engage with others in an interactive, global environment. While its initial focus on entertainment has broadened to include educational and activist content, the platform's role in shaping cultural trends and promoting global engagement cannot be understated.

## **YouTube**

YouTube, launched in 2005, is one of the most widely used video-sharing platforms globally, allowing users to upload, share, and view videos across a broad spectrum of topics. From its early days, YouTube has been instrumental in reshaping the way we consume media, democratizing video production and making it accessible to anyone with an internet connection. As Hosch (2024) highlights, YouTube has become a critical platform for entertainment, social interaction, education, and business.<sup>222</sup>

Many creators produce content aimed at entertainment, such as comedy sketches, short films, and music videos. Music artists, in particular, have turned to YouTube as a primary platform for sharing official music videos, live performances, and even fan-generated cover songs, reaching a global audience without the need for traditional distribution channels.<sup>223</sup> Additionally, YouTube serves as a platform for live

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. Jeffrey P. Carpenter et al., *How and Why Educators Use TikTok: Come for the Fun, Stay for the Learning?* In: *Teaching and Teacher Education* 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104530> (Accessed October 23, 2024).

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Demelash, Lemmi, *The Impact of TikTok on Students: A Literature Review*, in: *Qeios*, October 2023. <https://doi.org/10.32388/EPFGO6.2> (Accessed June 10, 2024).

<sup>222</sup> Cf. William, Hosch, L., *YouTube*, in: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 7, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/YouTube> (Accessed November 7, 2024).

<sup>223</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

performances, behind-the-scenes content, and fan interactions, further solidifying its role in the global entertainment ecosystem.<sup>224</sup>

YouTube has also emerged as a major source of educational content. Many users create content to educate and inform others, with step-by-step guides and how-to videos that cater to specific interests or needs. Educational YouTube channels, including those dedicated to coding, languages, and academic subjects, have helped shape the platform into a valuable resource for learning. This aspect of YouTube has been particularly important in offering free access to educational material, democratizing knowledge in ways that traditional educational institutions often cannot.<sup>225</sup>

The gaming community has also flourished on YouTube, where creators upload gameplay videos, walkthroughs, reviews, and related content. These gaming videos are particularly popular, with channels dedicated to everything from competitive gaming to “let’s play” videos, providing entertainment and useful content to millions of fans. Gaming live streams have further enhanced the platform’s appeal, with users broadcasting their gameplay in real time and interacting with viewers.<sup>226</sup>

Beyond entertainment and education, YouTube has become a platform for news dissemination. Many media houses use the platform to share reports, interviews, and in-depth analyses of current events. This shift in how news is shared reflects the broader trend of digital media replacing traditional broadcast and print journalism, with YouTube playing a key role in real-time reporting and audience engagement.<sup>227</sup>

Moreover, YouTube has introduced features like live streaming, where users can broadcast events, Q&A sessions, and even personal interactions. This interactive element has made YouTube a highly engaging platform, fostering community building among creators and viewers alike. Whether it is for streaming special events, conducting interviews, or engaging in discussions, YouTube’s live streaming feature has become an important tool for creators who wish to directly interact with their audience.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Jean, K. Chalaby, *The Streaming Industry and the Platform Economy: An Analysis*, in: *Media, Culture & Society* 46, no. 3 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437231210439> (Accessed May 10, 2024).

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Sarah Kohler and Tabea Dietrich, *Potentials and Limitations of Educational Videos on YouTube for Science Communication* (July 2020). <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/w4d9c> (Accessed October 2, 2023).

<sup>226</sup> Cf. William Hosch, L., *YouTube*, in: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 7, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/YouTube> (Accessed November 7, 2023).

<sup>227</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

In conclusion, YouTube has evolved into a multifaceted platform that serves not only as a hub for entertainment but also as a critical resource for education, news, and social interaction. Its ability to host and distribute diverse content has made it an integral part of the digital landscape, influencing everything from popular culture to academic learning.

## **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn, launched in 2003, has emerged as a top platform for professional networking, enabling users to create profiles that highlight their work experience, skills, accomplishments, and educational backgrounds. This platform acts as an essential resource for individuals looking seeking employment opportunities, expanding their professional networks, and advancing their careers. Unlike other social media platforms that focus on social interaction, LinkedIn is specifically designed for professionals to connect, collaborate, and engage in career-oriented activities.<sup>229</sup>

LinkedIn's primary appeal lies in its capacity to facilitate business networking. Professionals can connect with colleagues, peers, mentors, and potential employers, building relationships that are key to career growth. The platform also allows users to endorse each other's skills and provide recommendations, further strengthening professional connections. Moreover, LinkedIn provides users with the opportunity to follow companies, industry leaders, and groups, keeping them updated on industry trends, job opportunities, and professional growth prospects.<sup>230</sup>

For job seekers, LinkedIn provides a wide range of resources, such as job postings, company profiles, and the ability to directly apply to positions.<sup>231</sup> LinkedIn is an essential tool for anyone looking to advance their career. The platform's algorithm also customizes job recommendations based on users' profiles and activity, enhancing the chances of finding suitable positions.<sup>232</sup>

Additionally, LinkedIn is used for professional development. Many users take advantage of LinkedIn Learning, an integrated feature offering courses on a wide range of topics, including business, technology, and creative skills. This service offers

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<sup>229</sup> Cf. Vincent, Cho, and Wing, Lam, The Power of LinkedIn: How LinkedIn Enables Professionals to Leave Their Organizations for Professional Advancement, in: Internet Research, ahead-of-print (September 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-08-2019-0326>. (Accessed September 30, 2023).

<sup>230</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Cf. <https://cuteshort.com/unlocking-opportunities-using-linkedin-for-job-search-3/> (Accessed November 8, 2024).

<sup>232</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

individuals a chance to gain new knowledge, certifications, and skills that can enhance their professional qualifications and make them more competitive in the job market.<sup>233</sup>

In conclusion, LinkedIn is not only a platform for job searching but also an essential tool for networking and professional development. By connecting professionals worldwide, it fosters a global network where individuals can share expertise, build relationships, and advance their careers.

## **The Internet**

The Internet is a system of interconnected computers and devices that enables the sharing of information and resources across the globe.<sup>234</sup> Emerging in the 1970s, its foundational protocols allowed for the communication between networks of computers, a development that revolutionized global communication, media, and commerce. By the 1990s, the internet had become increasingly available to the public, transforming not only how individuals interact but also how businesses and governments operate. By 2020, more than 4.5 billion people—over half the world's population—had internet access, a figure that continues to grow as smart technologies and the “Internet of Things” (IoT) further integrate devices such as smartphones, home appliances, and vehicles.<sup>235</sup>

As Kahn and Aaron (2024) describe, the Internet’s versatility or adaptability makes it an indispensable resource in contemporary life. It facilitates a broad range of communication activities, including social media interaction, email, and real-time chat, fostering human connections across distances.<sup>236</sup> Beyond personal communication, it facilitates collaborative work. This shift toward digital collaboration is not confined to the workplace; educational institutions, healthcare providers, and various organizations also rely on the Internet to operate more efficiently and offer services to a global audience.<sup>237</sup>

In addition to communication and collaboration, the Internet provides access to vast amounts of digital information. The World Wide Web (WWW), a system of interlinked hypertext documents, allows users to access and explore an infinite variety of content—

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<sup>233</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> Cf. D. B. Garrie, L.M., Gordon, and B. Newman, *The Internet*, in: *Uncovering Digital Evidence*, Springer, Cham, 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68118-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68118-9_3) (Accessed October 3, 2024).

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Robert, Kahn, and Dennis, Michael, Aaron, *Internet*, in: *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Internet> (Accessed October 28, 2024).

<sup>236</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> Cf. C. Antoni, *Virtual Teams and Digital Collaboration*, in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, March 22, 2023. <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-881> (Accessed November 19, 2024).

from news and entertainment to academic research and technical documentation. The ease with which individuals can acquire knowledge and resources has fundamentally changed learning, access to healthcare, and even political participation.<sup>238</sup>

The Internet also plays an essential role in the global economy. It has given rise to a new wave of e-businesses that conduct transactions and operations entirely online. Traditional businesses have adapted by extending their operations to the digital sphere, offering products, services, and customer support through websites and mobile apps. The growth of e-commerce has reshaped industries, from retail to finance, as more consumers choose to shop, bank, and interact with businesses through digital platforms.<sup>239</sup>

In his message for the 36th World Communications Day, titled *The Internet*, Pope John Paul II highlighted the profound potential of the Internet as a tool for evangelization. He emphasized its capacity to project the face and voice of Christ amidst the multitude of images and sounds transmitted globally, asserting that only through the recognition of Christ's presence can the Internet become a space for proclaiming the "glad tidings of our redemption." Viewing the Internet as more than just a technological innovation, the Pope called upon the Church to boldly engage with this new frontier, encouraging it to "put out into the deep" of the digital world to foster meaningful intersections between the Gospel and contemporary culture. He underscored the necessity of making the Internet a genuinely human space by ensuring that it accommodates Christ, as without room for Christ, there is no room for humanity. Concluding his message with a blessing for those dedicated to this mission, the Pope proclaimed that when used to reveal God's glory through Christ, the Internet could serve as a transformative force, bringing redemption and hope to the world.<sup>240</sup>

### **2.3.6 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Church**

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines "Artificial intelligence" as "the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with

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<sup>238</sup> Cf. The Internet: Revolutionizing Communication, Information Access, and Connectivity, in: Science and Technology, July 20, 2023. <https://reinventers.com/the-internet-revolutionizing-communication-information-access-and-connectivity/> (Accessed June 20, 2024).

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Mohd, Javaid, Abid Haleem, Ravi Pratap Singh, and Anil Kumar Sinha, Digital Economy to Improve the Culture of Industry 4.0: A Study on Features, Implementation and Challenges, in: Global Journal of Engineering Science and Technology (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.grets.2024.100083> (Accessed September 27, 2024).

<sup>240</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 36th World Communications Day. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_20020122\\_world-communications-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20020122_world-communications-day.html) (Accessed November 19, 2023).

intelligent beings. The term is frequently applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experience.”<sup>241</sup>

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative technology with implications across various sectors, including religion. The integration of AI within the Church presents both opportunities and challenges in areas such as evangelization, administration, and pastoral care.

In his article, “The Catholic Faith and AI? The Church's Crucial Role in Shaping the Future of Technology”, Ryan (April 9, 2023) urges that the Church has the potential to enrich its mission and connect with people in innovative ways if she embraces AI responsibly and ethically.<sup>242</sup>

The integration of AI must be approached with careful attention to ethical concerns, privacy issues, and the impact on relationships<sup>243</sup>. By integrating technological advancements with the core principles of faith, the Church can leverage AI to better serve its mission and community.<sup>244</sup>

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has sparked significant debates about its impact on religion, the church, and theology. The growing integration of AI into society presents both opportunities and challenges for religious communities, institutions, and theological reflection. This discussion critically examines the societal, theological, and ecclesiastical dimensions of AI's influence.

### **Opportunities Presented by AI in Religion and Theology**

Artificial Intelligence offers transformative potential for religious communities and theological inquiry. Beth Singler in “An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence and Religion for the Religious Studies Scholar” (2019) argues that AI’s societal changes

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<sup>241</sup> Cf. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, What is artificial intelligence? In; Encyclopedia Britannica, November 18, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/question/What-is-artificial-intelligence> (Accessed April, 2024).

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Ryan, G., The Catholic Faith and AI? The Church's Crucial Role in Shaping the Future of Technology (April 9, 2023). <https://www.churchpop.com/the-catholic-faith-ai-the-churchs-crucial-role-in-shaping-the-future-of-technology/#:~:text=The%20Church's%20responsibility%20is%20to%20act%20as%20a%20decentralizing%20AI%20technology%20and%20promoting%20its%20ethical%20use> (Accessed June 7, 2024).

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Paul, Glenn, The Intersection of Phones and Artificial Intelligence: Transforming Communication and Beyond, in: *IBM Community*, August 28, 2024. <https://community.ibm.com/community/user/ibmcommunity/blogs/paul-glenn2/2024/08/28/the-intersection-of-phones-and-artificial-intellig> (Accessed December, 2024).

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Kevin, Crawley, The War Room Podcast: Strategies for Modern Pastors and Leaders. <https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/the-war-room-podcast-strategies-for-modern-pastors/id1765811523> (Accessed December 5, 2024).

will inevitably affect religion because “religion and society are intrinsically intertwined”.<sup>245</sup> As AI reshapes human life, it opens new avenues for spiritual expression and religious engagement. Singler suggests that AI could even “reinvigorate contemporary religion” by fostering new religious movements or inspiring fresh forms of spiritual expression, as has occurred historically with other technological advances.<sup>246</sup> The church has already begun to embrace AI for its practical benefits, such as AI-driven chatbots for spiritual guidance and AI-powered translation tools that enable more inclusive and diverse worship services.<sup>247</sup>

Additionally, AI offers new tools for theological study and reflection. George M. Coghill (2023) highlights how AI algorithms can analyze vast databases of theological texts, scripture, and historical documents to provide insights that may be inaccessible to individual scholars. This capacity for AI to assist in theological scholarship enhances the church's ability to engage deeply with its intellectual traditions and expand understanding in areas such as biblical interpretation and doctrine.<sup>248</sup> AI could also work as a channel for new forms of evangelism, providing personalized spiritual guidance through data analytics, further extending the church's mission into the digital age.

### **Challenges Posed by AI for Religious Institutions and Theology**

While AI offers significant opportunities, it also presents profound ethical and theological challenges. Vallor (2016) in *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting* introduces the concept of “technosocial opacity”, describing a societal condition where the rapid evolution of technology obscures the future and its implications, leaving individuals and communities uncertain about how to navigate the changes ahead.<sup>249</sup> The opacity of AI's long-term societal impact presents a major challenge for religious institutions, which are inherently slow to adapt to

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<sup>245</sup> Cf. Singler, Beth, An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence and Religion for the Religious Studies Scholar, in: *Journal of Implicit Religion*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.35901> (Accessed October 13, 2024).

<sup>246</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Slattery, John P., and Brian Patrick Green, Encountering Artificial Intelligence in the Catholic Tradition, in: *Journal of Moral Theology* (May 2024) 251-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2351638> (Accessed September 20, 2024).

<sup>248</sup> George, M. Coghill, Artificial Intelligence (and Christianity): Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? In: *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1177/095394682311694> (Accessed June 4, 2024).

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Vallor, Shannon, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190498511.001.0001> (Accessed January 13, 2024).

technological shifts. Theologians and religious leaders may struggle to address the complexities AI introduces into questions about personhood, agency, and morality. As Slattery and Green argue, AI's rapid development demands urgent and thoughtful theological reflection, which may be difficult given the slow, deliberative nature of theological traditions.<sup>250</sup>

One of the most pressing theological questions raised by AI is its ambiguous status as a "potential new intelligent being." Singler raises concerns about how AI challenges traditional religious frameworks for understanding personhood. The emergence of AI as an "intelligent entity" opens new areas for religious inquiry, particularly regarding the nature of the soul, consciousness, and moral agency.<sup>251</sup> If AI systems are capable of human-like decision-making and interaction, theological debates about personhood and what it means to be made in the image of God are called into question. Theologians must grapple with whether AI systems could possess any form of spiritual discernment or autonomy, issues that have traditionally been central to religious understandings of humanity.

Moreover, Slattery and Green caution against treating AI as a replacement for human beings in religious or pastoral roles. They argue that, while AI can produce human-like outputs, it lacks consciousness, personhood, and the capacity for genuine relationships. The church must resist the temptation to treat AI as an equal to human beings in relational or religious contexts, as doing so would undermine the distinctiveness of human personhood and spiritual experience.<sup>252</sup>

### **Ethical Concerns and AI's Role in Christian Social Teaching**

AI's ethical implications extend beyond theological speculation to tangible societal concerns, particularly within the framework of Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Francis and the Vatican have been actively engaged in discussions about the ethical use of AI, most notably through initiatives like the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*. Slattery and Green, drawing from Pope Francis' encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, argue that AI technologies must align with the church's teachings on human dignity, justice, and the

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<sup>250</sup> Cf. Slattery, John P., and Brian Patrick Green, Encountering Artificial Intelligence in the Catholic Tradition, in: Journal of Moral Theology (May 2024) 251-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2351638> (Accessed September 20, 2024).

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Singler, Beth, An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence and Religion for the Religious Studies Scholar.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Slattery, John P., and Brian Patrick Green, Encountering Artificial Intelligence in the Catholic Tradition.

common good.<sup>253</sup> The automation of labor, surveillance, and AI's potential to perpetuate social inequalities demand a critical theological response. Religious leaders are called to address how AI affects the dignity of workers, the ethics of data privacy, and the environmental consequences of technology development, aligning these discussions with the church's call for "integral ecology".<sup>254</sup>

Furthermore, AI's role in the broader societal structure may contribute to issues of social injustice, particularly as it relates to algorithmic bias, data privacy, and surveillance. Vallor (2016) warns of the potential for AI to entrench existing power dynamics, exacerbating social inequalities rather than fostering human flourishing.<sup>255</sup> For Christian theology, the challenge is to ensure that AI technologies serve the common good and uphold the values of justice and human dignity, rather than reinforcing economic or social hierarchies that contradict Christian ethics.

### **Conclusion: Navigating the Theological Frontier of AI**

In sum, AI presents both significant opportunities and challenges for religion, the church, and theology. The church has the potential to leverage AI to enhance its mission and deepen theological engagement.<sup>256</sup> However, these benefits must be weighed against the profound theological and ethical questions AI introduces. AI challenges traditional religious concepts of personhood, consciousness, and moral responsibility, while also posing risks to social justice and human dignity.<sup>257</sup> The church must navigate these tensions thoughtfully, ensuring that its engagement with AI reflects its core values of justice, compassion, and the common good. Through ongoing theological reflection and ethical discernment, religious communities can encounter AI not as a threat, but as a tool for fostering deeper spiritual growth and social justice in the contemporary world.

## **2.4 Youth and New Media Engagement**

Young people actively engage with new media in various ways, and their preferences and behaviors are continually evolving. Youth engage with new media through

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Shannon, Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190498511.001.0001> (Accessed June 29, 2023).

<sup>256</sup> Cf. George M. Coghill, *Artificial Intelligence (and Christianity): Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?* In: *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>257</sup> Cf. John P. Slattery and Brian Patrick Green, *Encountering Artificial Intelligence in the Catholic Tradition*, in: *Journal of Moral Theology* (May 2024) 251-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2351638> (Accessed September 30, 2024).

platforms like social media, streaming services, and online communities, using them for communication, content consumption, and self-expression. This often involves creating and sharing multimedia content, staying updated on trends, and participating in online discussions.

#### **2.4.1 Social Media: A Tool for Youth Engagement**

According to Youth Engagement Network<sup>258</sup> youth are often the most enthusiastic users of social media. If any organization or entity that has a mission to engage young people, social media and online interaction with young people should be part of the strategic plan. “While we recognize that social media has many disadvantages, it is possible and important to create a space where young people can express their opinions and have access to important information”.<sup>259</sup>

Social media is an important space for information exchange. Engaging young people in social networks can help young people feel informed, empowered and represented. Young people are not just socializing online; they are researching and reaching out. The youth are not only fans of social media, but they are also creating content<sup>260</sup>.

#### **2.4.2 The Multifaceted Role of Social Media in Adolescence**

Youth engagement with social media has become a critical area of study, given its pervasive presence in adolescents' daily lives and its multifaceted influence on their development. Researchers such as van der Wal et al. (2024) emphasize that social media plays an integral role in shaping social interactions and identity formation during adolescence.<sup>261</sup> Their findings highlight the “homogeneity in motives” behind social media use, with many adolescents utilizing these platforms primarily for social connection, entertainment, and information about their peer groups.<sup>262</sup> However, there is significant heterogeneity in how emotional states drive this engagement, with

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<sup>258</sup> The Youth Engagement Network (YEN) is a project that envisions that all young people, and particularly those who face systemic marginalization or discrimination, have the ability and opportunity to participate meaningfully and equally in the programs, policies and systems that shape their lives and impact their communities. Cf. <https://www.etr.org/yen/news/why-social-media-should-be-a-part-of-your-youth-engagement-plan/> (Accessed November 14, 2023).

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Why Social Media Should Be a Part of Your Youth Engagement Plan. <https://www.etr.org/yen/news/why-social-media-should-be-a-part-of-your-youth-engagement-plan/> (Accessed November 14, 2023).

<sup>260</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Amber van der Wal, Patti M. Valkenburg, and Irene I. van Driel, In Their Own Words: How Adolescents Use Social Media and How It Affects Them, in: *Social Media + Society* 10, no. 2 (2024): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/205630512412485> (Accessed October 6, 2024).

<sup>262</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

adolescents using social media both to escape negative feelings and enhance positive emotions.<sup>263</sup> This underscores the complex emotional dynamics involved in their interactions online.

### **2.4.3 The Duality of Social Media Impact on Mental Health**

The duality of experiences on social media is a prominent theme in studies of adolescent engagement. Galea and Buckley (2024) acknowledge the contrasting affective responses that adolescents experience—ranging from positive emotions such as inspiration to negative feelings like envy or anxiety.<sup>264</sup> Social media can facilitate social connections and provide emotional support, but it can also foster detrimental comparisons, cyberbullying, and mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.<sup>265</sup>

### **2.4.4 Balancing Opportunities and Risks**

These contrasting outcomes are shaped by a range of factors, including individual characteristics such as age, gender, and personality traits, as well as the type of content consumed on social media. Galea and Buckley (2024) further emphasize the importance of understanding these contextual influences in order to prevent the risks associated with social media use.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, Angwaomaodoko (2024) points out that while social media can serve as an educational tool and provide job search opportunities, it also has the potential to be addictive and reduces students focus on academic tasks. This balance between opportunity and risk is crucial to understanding the overall impact of social media on youth education and well-being.<sup>267</sup>

The potential for social media addiction, noted by Angwaomaodoko (2024), exacerbates these challenges, especially when linked to poor sleep patterns and reduced academic performance.<sup>268</sup> This aligns with broader concerns about the mental health implications of excessive social media use. Both van der Wal et al. (2024) and Angwaomaodoko (2024) call for greater awareness and intervention by educators, parents, and

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<sup>263</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Sandro Galea, Gillian J Buckley, Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health: A consensus report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, in: *PNAS Nexus*, Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2024, pgae037. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae037> (Accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>265</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Angwaomaodoko, Ejuchegahi Anthony, The Impact of Social Media on Youth Education and Well-being (April 30, 2024) in: *Path of Science*, volume 10, issue 4, 2024 [10.22178/pos.103-8], <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4848877> (Accessed October 10, 2024).

<sup>268</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

policymakers to promote healthier online behaviors and digital literacy. The consensus across these studies is that proactive strategies are needed to help youth navigate the complexities of social media and mitigate its risks.<sup>269</sup>

#### **2.4.5 Advancing Social Media Literacy**

The development of tools such as the Youth Social Media Literacy Inventory (YSMLI) by Drake et al. (2023) highlights the increasing focus on equipping young people with the skills necessary for responsible and informed social media use. This inventory, designed to assess competencies in areas such as cyberbullying, privacy, and media balance, represents a significant advancement in evaluating social media literacy among adolescents.<sup>270</sup> As noted by Drake and colleagues, measuring these skills is essential for both understanding how adolescents engage with social media and for developing effective interventions that enhance their positive interactions while reducing harmful behaviors.<sup>271</sup>

The Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria advocates for youth media literacy and remarks, “There is no doubt that the development of the media and media society requires basic knowledge and skills in dealing with them. However, “media literacy” is more than just “being able to use a computer.” Media competence enables people to use media independently, responsibly, critically and creatively. Media competence means: being able to use the individual (new and old) media in order to know their possible uses, a critical view, knowledge of and dealing with dangers. In addition, media literacy must always include a social and ethical component”.<sup>272</sup>

#### **2.4.6 Generational Shifts in Digital Engagement**

In her article “Millennials Stand Out for Their Technology Use, But Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life,” Elizabeth A. Vogels (2019) highlights the evolving engagement of various generational cohorts with social media and technology, revealing

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. Amber, van der Wal, Patti M. Valkenburg, and Irene I. van Driel (2024); Cf. Angwaomaodoko, Ejuchegahi Anthony (2024).

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Drake, A. P., Masur, P. K., Bazarova, N. N., Zou, W., & Whitlock, J., The youth social media literacy inventory: Development and validation using item response theory in the US, in: *Journal of Youth Studies*, 26(4) (2023), 467-487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2230493>. (Accessed January 29, 2024).

<sup>271</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> The Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria, Youth media literacy. <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/youth/youth-media-and-information/> (Accessed November 14, 2023).

a significant shift in how these platforms are utilized across age groups.<sup>273</sup> Vogels underscores that while Millennials remain the most active users of social media, engaging extensively for communication, information sharing, and entertainment, older generations are increasingly adopting digital technologies, including smartphones and social media, at unprecedented rates. This trend demonstrates that technology is no longer confined to a particular age group, as Baby Boomers and Gen Xers recognize the value of online connectivity and the convenience that digital tools offer. Furthermore, Vogels points out the challenges that older adults face in navigating new technologies, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy in mitigating potential divides.<sup>274</sup> Her insights contribute to a broader understanding of how media technology fosters engagement and connectivity among diverse populations, underscoring the need for inclusive approaches to enhance digital participation across all generations.

#### **2.4.7 Children's Rights in the Digital Age**

Sonia Livingstone and Amanda Third (2017) in “Children and Young People's Rights in the Digital Age: An Emerging Agenda,” discuss the rapid evolution of digital environments and the critical implications this shift has for children's well-being. They argue that children are often the earliest adopters of new technologies, yet the consequences of this engagement are frequently overlooked as governments and states prioritize economic opportunities associated with digital advancements.<sup>275</sup> Livingstone and Third highlight that, in this rush to capitalize on technological innovations, there is a concerning lack of principled frameworks to safeguard children's rights, including respect, fulfillment, and protection. The authors stress the importance of establishing robust policies and practices that recognize and uphold these rights in the digital context, advocating for a wise approach that considers the well-being of children amidst the relentless pace of digital change.<sup>276</sup> Their analysis serves as a call to action for stakeholders to prioritize children's rights in the discourse surrounding digital technologies, ensuring that the opportunities they present do not come at the expense of the younger generation's welfare.

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<sup>273</sup> Cf. Elizabeth, A. Vogels, Millennials Stand Out for Their Technology Use, But Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life, in: Pew Research Center, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/> (Accessed October, 2024).

<sup>274</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Livingstone, Sonia, and Amanda Third, Children and Young People's Rights in the Digital Age: An Emerging Agenda, in: *New Media & Society* 19, no. 5 (2017): 657-670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816686318> (Accessed June 16, 2023).

<sup>276</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

#### **2.4.8 Social Medias Contradictory Impact**

In “Digitally Un/Free: The Everyday Impact of Social Media on the Lives of Young People,” Bibizadeh et al. (2023) analyze the adverse effects of social media on youth engagement. The authors argue that social media serves as both a liberating and constraining force in the lives of young people. Social media provides opportunities for self-expression, peer connection, and social interaction, enabling young individuals to exercise digital agency and foster a sense of belonging. However, this engagement is accompanied by significant pressures, such as the need to manage online identities, exposure to cyberbullying, and the anxiety induced by social comparison.<sup>277</sup> Bibizadeh et al. highlight the duality of social media, which can simultaneously empower youth while also subjecting them to heightened surveillance and self-regulation, with potential negative impacts on mental health.<sup>278</sup> The study underscores the need for a nuanced approach to understanding social media’s influence on youth, acknowledging both its potential benefits and the challenges it poses for their well-being.

#### **2.5 The Panorama of Church Teaching on Media and Social Communications**

The Catholic Church recognizes the significant role of media in shaping human culture and advancing its mission to evangelize and foster community. Rooted in the directive of Christ to “teach all nations” (cf. Mt 28:19), the Church identifies social communication as a pivotal instrument for spreading the Gospel and engaging with contemporary society. The Second Vatican Council affirms the responsibility of bishops to prioritize the proclamation of the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium*, 25). Moreover, the Church’s canon law supports its right and duty to utilize media for the promotion of faith and moral guidance (cf. Can. 747). Canon Law further provides specific norms for the Church’s engagement with media (cf. Can. 822-832), underscoring the need for responsible and ethical use of communication channels.<sup>279</sup>

Over the years, the Church has produced a rich body of teaching on media and social communications, addressing its opportunities and challenges. These teachings emphasize the dual nature of media as a tool for both profound good and potential harm,

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. Bibizadeh, Roxanne Ellen, Rob Procter, Carina Girvan, Helena Webb, and Marina Jirotko, *Digitally Un/Free: The Everyday Impact of Social Media on the Lives of Young People*, in: *Learning, Media and Technology*, August, 2023, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2023.2237883> (Accessed April 4, 2024).

<sup>278</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Some Aspects of the Use of Instruments of Social Communication in Promoting the Doctrine of Faith*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2006, p.3.

depending on how it is employed. Below is a chronological overview of key Church documents on media and communication:

### **2.5.1 Vigilanti Cura (1936)**

Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* (1936) holds a pivotal place in the Church's teachings on social communication as it is the first papal document dedicated to this theme. Addressing the moral challenges of the burgeoning film industry, Pope Pius XI recognized cinema as one of the most powerful and influential forms of media. However, he also expressed concern about its potential to propagate immorality and undermine spiritual values. He cautioned that if left unchecked, the film industry could become a "playground of sin" and a significant threat to the salvation of souls.

To counter these risks, Pope Pius XI advocated for a clean and morally upright film industry that would serve to promote the Kingdom of God. He emphasized the necessity of ensuring that technological and artistic advancements in cinema contribute to God's glory and the salvation of souls. Highlighting the need for regulation, he endorsed censorship as a means to safeguard moral values. In his words, "It is urgently necessary that all progress made, by God's favor, in human learning and technology actually contribute to God's glory, the salvation of souls, and the spread of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ."<sup>280</sup> This perspective laid the groundwork for the Church's continued engagement with and guidance on media.

### **2.5.2 Miranda Prorsus (1957)**

Pope Pius XII's 1957 encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* marks a pivotal moment in the Church's engagement with modern communication technologies, addressing cinema, radio, television, and anticipating future innovations. Pius XII described human communication as a sacred gift, a means by which the "priceless treasures of God" are disseminated like "good seed" within the human community.<sup>281</sup> By recognizing media as a divine endowment, he underscored the potential of technological advancements to serve as vehicles for spreading faith, truth, and moral values, contributing to the betterment of humanity and the fulfillment of God's plan.

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<sup>280</sup> Cf. Pius XI, *Vigilanti cura*, June 29, 1936, in *Acta apostolicae sedis*, vol. XXVIII, 1936, 28.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Pius XII, *Miranda Prorsus*: Encyclical on Technical Innovation in Motion Pictures, Radio and Television, 1957.

However, the encyclical emphasizes that the use of these media requires careful moral discernment and the formation of what Pius XII termed a “media conscience.” He highlighted the importance of educating audiences to critically engage with media, cultivating the ability to discern whether content is uplifting or harmful. Without this formation, he warned, audiences risk being overwhelmed by the influence of media, rendering them unable to make mature and responsible judgments about its impact.<sup>282</sup> By advocating for this conscientious approach, *Miranda Prorsus* set a foundation for the Church’s call to integrate media literacy into faith education, ensuring that the faithful use media actively, responsibly, and in alignment with Christian values. This vision continues to resonate in the Church’s ongoing dialogue on media ethics and pastoral guidance.

### 2.5.3 Inter Mirifica (1963)

The Vatican II decree *Inter Mirifica* (*Decree on the Means of Social Communications*), promulgated on December 4, 1963, is a seminal document addressing the Church’s engagement with mass media and its role in modern society. Recognizing media as a remarkable human invention guided by divine providence, the document underscores its potential to advance the Kingdom of God and contribute to the salvation of souls when properly employed.<sup>283</sup> It highlights media such as television, radio, film, and the press as powerful tools for spreading truth and fostering a world where faith, morality, and human dignity are upheld. Furthermore, *Inter Mirifica* calls on Catholics to harness the media’s capacity to serve as instruments of light and salt, emphasizing its transformative role in reflecting Christian values in society.<sup>284</sup>

While the document celebrates the constructive potential of media, it also warns of the dangers posed by its misuse, noting that media employed against the Creator’s intent can lead to significant harm in the world. By underlining both the advantages and disadvantages of media, *Inter Mirifica* sets the foundation for the Church’s ongoing reflection on social communication and its moral implications. Its significance is evident in the establishment of initiatives like World Communications Day and subsequent documents such as *Communio et Progressio* (1971), which provided more comprehensive pastoral guidelines for media use.<sup>285</sup> *Inter Mirifica* thus remains a

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica*, n. 1.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

cornerstone in the Church's engagement with modern communication technologies, fostering a vision where media serves the greater good and aligns with divine will.

#### **2.5.4 *Communio et Progressio* (1971)**

The Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication (*Communio et Progressio*), published in 1971, builds upon the insights of Pope Pius XII's 1957 encyclical *Miranda Prorsus*. It recognizes modern media as “gifts of God”<sup>286</sup> intended to unite humanity in brotherhood and further God's salvific plan. This foundational text emphasizes that these media, when used in alignment with Christian principles, provide innovative avenues for sharing the Gospel. It asserts that the Church has a duty to engage with these new forms of communication to effectively evangelize in the modern world.<sup>287</sup>

The document calls for Catholic schools to take on the “urgent duty” of training both communicators and consumers of social communications in Christian values. Church leaders and pastoral agents are urged to integrate a deep understanding of media into their pastoral strategies. This includes creating practical policies and programs, and even seeking media education themselves, to enhance their effectiveness in spreading the Gospel. As noted in *Aetatis Novae*, the Church benefits greatly when its representatives are skilled in communication.<sup>288</sup>

Closing with a message of hope and enthusiasm, *Communio et Progressio* underscores the Church's forward-looking stance. It encourages the People of God to embrace the developments of the “space age” in communications, confident in their potential to advance human understanding and cooperation.<sup>289</sup> This text remains a cornerstone of the Church's engagement with social communications, urging thoughtful use of media as a tool for unity and evangelization.

#### **2.5.5 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)**

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Pope Paul VI underscores the critical role of mass media in the Church's mission of evangelization. He describes the

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<sup>286</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*, Pastoral Instruction for the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communications, Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1971.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> Cf. *Aetatis Novae*, nos. 23-33.

<sup>289</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*—Pastoral Instruction for the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communications, (Vatican City, Vatican Press, 1971). no. 107.

contemporary era as one marked by the proliferation of social communication tools, emphasizing that the spreading of the Gospel cannot be separated from these means. Pope Paul VI highlights the vast potential of media to extend the reach of the Good News, enabling the Word of God to resonate with millions worldwide. He likens the media to a modern pulpit, allowing the Church to proclaim its message “from the housetops” (cf. Mt 10:27; Lk 12:3). The Pope further asserts that the Church would be guilty before the Lord if it failed to employ these powerful tools, given their capacity to amplify the Gospel’s impact exponentially.<sup>290</sup>

However, Pope Paul VI also recognizes the challenges posed by using media for evangelization. While the media can reach vast audiences, the Pope stresses the need for the evangelical message to penetrate deeply into the conscience of each individual. The ultimate goal of media-driven evangelization, he asserts, is not merely to inform but to transform—to evoke a personal response and commitment to the Gospel.<sup>291</sup> Effective use of media, therefore, requires a balance between its broad outreach and its capacity to foster an intimate and individualized encounter with Christ. Pope Paul VI provides a framework for integrating modern communication tools into the Church's evangelizing efforts in a meaningful and transformative way.

#### **2.5.6 Redemptoris missio 1990**

In *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II identifies the sphere of communication as the “first Areopagus of modern times,” underscoring its transformative impact in uniting humanity into a “global village”.<sup>292</sup> The Pope highlights the media's profound influence, describing it as a primary source of information, education, and guidance, shaping personal, family, and social behaviors. This influence is particularly evident among younger generations, who are coming of age in an environment fundamentally shaped by mass media.<sup>293</sup> Pope John Paul II’s observation reflects the Church’s growing awareness of the media’s pervasive role in transmitting philosophies and values within a globalized context, where diverse perspectives and ideologies are exchanged freely.

The Church, recognizing the media as a powerful platform, seeks to engage actively in this arena to share its message and promote values that contribute to human development and spiritual fulfillment. Pope John Paul II emphasizes that the Church's

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<sup>290</sup> Cf. EN no.45.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 37, in *AAS*, LXXXIII (1991), 37 later referred to as RM.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. RM 37.

participation in the media is not only an opportunity but a necessity, as it allows the Gospel to be proclaimed in a way that is relevant to the contemporary world. By leveraging the media's vast reach, the Church aims to inspire a deeper sense of purpose and eternal well-being among individuals, fostering values that align with human dignity and the common good. Through this engagement, the Church asserts its commitment to being a vital presence in the global conversation facilitated by modern communication technologies.<sup>294</sup>

### **2.5.7 Aetatis Novae (1992)**

The pastoral directive *Aetatis Novae*, issued in 1992 by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, commemorated the 20th anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. It reaffirmed the critical role of media in the Church's mission, particularly in the context of re-evangelization and new evangelization efforts in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.<sup>295</sup> The document emphasized that evangelization and catechesis must utilize the media effectively to communicate the Gospel message in ways that resonate with contemporary audience. *Aetatis Novae* presented a nuanced analysis of the profound cultural, religious, and social influences exerted by modern communication technologies. It highlighted the media's capacity to shape moral attitudes, political systems, and educational structures, urging that these powerful tools be directed toward promoting human progress, solidarity, and ecclesial communication.<sup>296</sup> The document also advocated for an ecumenical approach, encouraging cooperative efforts in the use of media to foster dialogue and mutual understanding between people and cultures. By aligning media practices with the goals of development and ethical communication, *Aetatis Novae* reinforced the Church's commitment to using social communications as a bridge between faith and modern society.

### **2.5.8 Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ethics in Internet (2002)**

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications' document *Ethics in Internet* (2002) provides a critical reflection on the ethical dimensions of the Internet as a tool for

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<sup>294</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* on Social Communications on the twentieth anniversary of *Communio et progressio* no.11.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Jose Joseph, Media for Evangelisation, Changing Attitude of the Catholic Church, Dissertation, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, May 2015. <https://dannysteve.wordpress.com/2015/06/12/media-for-evangelization-changing-attitude-of-catholic-church/> (Accessed November 5, 2023).

communication and human development. It acknowledges the immense potential of the Internet to contribute to authentic human development, fostering connections, sharing knowledge, and promoting solidarity. However, the document warns against its misuse, cautioning that the same tools can be exploited for manipulation, dominance, exploitation, and corruption.

The document emphasizes the principle that communication should be “by persons to persons for the integral development of persons.” This ethical foundation calls for media practices that respect human dignity, truth, and the common good. *Ethics in Internet* highlights the Church’s responsibility to guide its faithful in discerning the appropriate use of digital media, ensuring it serves as a force for building a more just and humane society rather than perpetuating harm or inequality.

“Ethics in Internet” is one of the most recent documents from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. The document states that the Internet and other new media contribute in many ways to authentic human development. However, they can also be used “for exploitation, manipulation, dominance and corruption”.<sup>297</sup> Ethics in Internet says that media communication should be “by persons to persons for the integral development of persons.”<sup>298</sup>

### **2.5.9 Pontifical Council for Social Communications, The Church and Internet**

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications’ document *The Church and the Internet* emphasizes the Church’s proactive engagement with digital communication as a critical tool for evangelization and societal development. It calls on Catholics to embrace the Internet fearlessly, leveraging its capacity to spread the Good News “from the rooftops of the world.” The document highlights the creative and innovative use of the Internet at all levels of the Church to fulfill its mission, rejecting reticence or apprehension toward technology as incompatible with this responsibility.

Furthermore, the Church recognizes a dual aim regarding media: promoting their ethical development for human flourishing and fostering dialogue with media professionals to influence policy in light of the common good. This dialogue requires a deep understanding of the media’s functions, genres, and structures, as well as genuine support for those working within the industry. Such an approach allows the Church to

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<sup>297</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Internet*.

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*

advocate effectively for removing barriers to human progress and ensuring that media serves as a conduit for justice, peace, and solidarity.

#### **2.5.10 The Rapid Development, Apostolic Letter by John Paul II (2005)**

In his Apostolic Letter, *The Rapid Development* (2005), Pope John Paul II highlighted the transformative potential of contemporary media in advancing the mission of the Church. He affirmed that the “powerful media” of the modern age, when utilized by the faithful, can significantly enhance the communication of the Gospel, making it accessible to a wider audience. Additionally, these tools can strengthen the bonds of communion within and between ecclesial communities, fostering unity and shared purpose in their mission to evangelize.<sup>299</sup>

Pope John Paul II underscored the responsibility of those involved in media to recognize its capacity not only to inform but also to inspire and uplift. By aligning media use with the values of the Gospel, the Church can ensure that these platforms contribute positively to human development, spiritual growth, and the broader mission of spreading the message of Christ to a rapidly changing world.

#### **2.5.11 Benedict XVI, Message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 2010**

In his 2010 message for the 44th World Communications Day, titled *The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word*, Pope Benedict XVI urged the Church, particularly priests, to embrace new media as a vital tool for evangelization. He emphasized the importance of utilizing audiovisual resources and digital platforms to foster dialogue, enhance catechesis, and share the Gospel message effectively in a rapidly changing world.<sup>300</sup>

The Pope highlighted the transformative potential of new media, encouraging priests to integrate it into their pastoral ministry to reach a broader audience and make disciples of Christ. By creatively and responsibly employing these technologies, the Church could extend its mission, engage with contemporary culture, and bring the Word of God to the digital world in meaningful ways.

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<sup>299</sup> Cf. Apostolic Letter, *The Rapid Development* of the Holy Father John Paul II to those Responsible for Communications, January 24, 2005, n.6.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day*, May 16, 2010.

#### **2.5.12 Pope Francis, Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 2014**

In 2014, for World Communications Day, Pope Francis said, “Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts.”<sup>301</sup> He further underlined; “The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue that help us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but to receive. Media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God. This is not to say that certain problems do not exist, the desire for dignity connectivity can have the effect of isolating us from our neighbours, from those close to us”.<sup>302</sup>

#### **2.5.13 Pope Francis, Message for the 50<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 2016**

Pope Francis, in his 2016 message for World Communications Day, alluded to this: “Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology that determines whether communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal.”<sup>303</sup>

#### **2.5.14 Pope Francis Message for the 58<sup>th</sup>, World Communications Day, 2024**

On the 58th World Communications Day, Pope Francis addressed the profound impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on society, emphasizing both its potential benefits and risks. His message, titled “Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication,” stressed that while AI technologies can store and correlate vast amounts of data, only humans can make meaningful interpretations of this information. He warned against the illusion that AI can replicate human wisdom and

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<sup>301</sup> Francis, Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, January 24, 2014.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> Francis, Message for the 50<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, May 8, 2016.

emphasized the importance of maintaining human vulnerability and social bonds in the face of rapid technological advancements.<sup>304</sup>

He pointed out the dual nature of AI, which can either be an opportunity or a threat, depending on its use. AI can enhance communication and knowledge sharing, but it also poses risks such as cognitive pollution and the spread of disinformation through tools like deepfakes. The Pope urged for ethical regulations to prevent AI from exacerbating social injustices and called for an international treaty to govern AI development and use.<sup>305</sup>

He urged for a balanced approach to artificial intelligence, one that combines technological advancements with the wisdom of the human heart, ensuring that AI serves to enhance human communication and community rather than undermine it.<sup>306</sup>

In summary, the Catholic Church has increasingly recognized the importance of media and the digital environment in modern society. Through various documents and messages, the Church has acknowledged the transformative role of technology in communication, evangelization, and community formation. From early reflections in documents like *Miranda Prorsus* (1957) to more recent statements such as Pope Francis' 2024 message on artificial intelligence, the Church consistently emphasizes the need for ethical engagement with media and technology. It seeks to address both the challenges and opportunities the digital world presents, aiming to use these tools to further its mission while promoting human dignity, truth, and solidarity. The Church's focus on integrating faith and technology underscores its commitment to guiding the faithful in navigating the evolving digital landscape.

## **2.6 Biblical Perspective of Media and Social Communication**

The Bible, regarded as the sacred text in Christianity, can be seen as an early form of media, especially through its written word. In the context of theological discussions surrounding technology, Bryan Barrineau (2023) asserts that “God was the originator of specific technologies that led to a particular advancement of man.”<sup>307</sup> Theologically, this suggests that communication, as depicted in the Scriptures, is not merely a human endeavor but a divine act of creation. From the very beginning, the Bible portrays God

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<sup>304</sup> Cf. Francis Message for the 58<sup>th</sup>, World Communications Day, 2024.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>307</sup> Bryan Barrineau, Can Theology and Technology Co-exist?, Blog. <https://www.youthpastortheologian.com/blog/can-theology-and-technology-coexist> (Accessed December 13, 2023).

as a communicator whose words lead to the creation of the world, and this act of communication is extended to humanity as part of the divine plan.

In the Book of Genesis, the narrative opens with God speaking creation into existence: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). This passage exemplifies the concept that communication is intrinsically tied to creation and divine action. God’s speech leads to tangible outcomes, and throughout the Bible, communication is presented as a means of bringing about transformation.<sup>308</sup> This understanding of communication as an act of creation underpins the biblical narrative, where God continually uses various forms of media to engage with humanity.

One key example of this is found in Hebrews 1:1-2, where the author contrasts God’s communication with humanity in the past and the present: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”. This passage has been interpreted by some scholars as indicating that new forms of communication, including digital communication, can be tools for spreading God’s message in contemporary society.<sup>309</sup> Phillips, Lewis, and Bruce (2013) assert that, just as God once used different mediums such as papyrus and paper to communicate, today’s digital realm can be seen as a legitimate platform for evangelization and mission work.<sup>310</sup>

While the Bible does not specifically mention modern concepts such as digital media, it nevertheless speaks to the human condition of interaction, communication, and community. Social interactions in biblical times occurred in places like the marketplace, the synagogue, the temple, and the home—venues that allowed for the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and social practices.<sup>311</sup> The concept of community and social engagement, even in the absence of digital technologies, is deeply embedded in the biblical narrative, and it is through these communal settings that God’s message was spread. This foundational understanding can inform how we view the role of modern media in evangelistic work.

Throughout the Bible, God also uses a variety of symbolic and tangible forms of communication to relay important messages. For example, God communicated with

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<sup>308</sup> Cf. Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Basic Human Communication*, vol.1, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 1999, p.63.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. Phillips, P; Lewis, B. & Bruce, K., *Digital Communication, the Church and Mission*, in: Durham: Church Growth Resourcing Mission Bulletin, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. What Does the Bible Say about Social Media? The Preacher’s Pen. <https://preacherspen.org/what-does-the-bible-say-about-social-media/> (Accessed November 19, 2024).

Moses through a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-17), and he used stone tablets to deliver the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). These instances show that God's communication was not confined to spoken or written words alone; God also used physical signs and natural phenomena to convey meaning. A bird returning with an olive branch (Genesis 8:8-12) is one of the first instances of what we might today call "tweeting," signaling a message of peace after the flood. Additionally, the rainbow in Genesis 9:13-17 symbolizes God's covenant with humanity, serving as a visual promise. Similarly, the cross in the New Testament (John 19:17-30) became a sign of ultimate love and sacrifice. These examples show how various forms of media—both natural and technological—have historically been used to communicate divine messages.<sup>312</sup>

The Bible's influence goes beyond its immediate religious context, shaping not only spiritual practices but also cultural expressions such as literature, art, and music. The extensive translation of the Bible into various languages and the mass production of its texts via the printing press have made it one of the most disseminated books in human history. In contemporary times, the Bible has also adapted to the digital age, with e-books, audiobooks, mobile apps and online platforms, enabling it to be more accessible than ever before.<sup>313</sup>

As Barrineau (2023) highlights, while technology in the Bible is morally neutral in itself, it is the way humanity utilizes technology that determines its moral value. In the biblical narrative, technology is presented as a gift from God, whether it is Noah's ark (Genesis 6), the use of Roman roads by the Apostle Paul to spread the gospel (Romans 15:24), or the invention of brick-making for the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). These examples illustrate that technology can serve both righteous and selfish purposes, depending on its application. Therefore, in the digital age, social platforms which offer unprecedented opportunities for evangelization, are neither inherently good nor bad. Rather, it is the manner in which they are used to further the message of the gospel that determines their moral impact.<sup>314</sup>

In conclusion, while the Bible does not directly address the age of the internet or social media, its teachings about communication, technology, and community offer a valuable

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<sup>312</sup> Cf. John, Oakes, In What Ways Has God Communicated with Mankind? In: Evidence for Christianity, May 8, 2005. <https://evidenceforchristianity.org/in-what-ways-has-god-communicated-with-mankind/> (Accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Carlos, Jódar, The Bible, Literature and Communication: A Theologian's View, in: Journal of Communication and Religion 370–390 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2022.2098788> (Accessed July 30, 2023).

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Bryan Barrineau, Can Theology and Technology Co-exist?, Blog. <https://www.youthpastortheologian.com/blog/can-theology-and-technology-coexist> (Accessed December 13, 2023).

framework for understanding how modern tools can be used for evangelistic purposes. Whether through written texts, oral traditions, or digital platforms, the key is to ensure that the message of love, peace, and salvation remains at the heart of all media endeavors.

## **2.7 Terms Used to Explain the Relationship Between Religion and Media/Digital Technology**

The relationship between religion and media/digital technology involves various terms. The terms reflect the evolving dynamics between religion and the digital realm, highlighting the ways in which technology shapes and is shaped by religious practices and beliefs.

### **2.7.1 Digital Religion**

Heidi Campbell, in 2012, defined digital religion as the intersection of religion and digital technology, exploring how religious practices and beliefs are expressed, mediated, and transformed in online environments.<sup>315</sup> It could refer to the use of digital platforms for religious activities, such as online worship services, virtual pilgrimages, or digital prayer groups. It could also involve the ways in which religious communities and organizations establish and maintain a presence in digital spaces, such as through websites, social media, or online forums. “Cyber-religion” was a term that arose to describe the interface between religion and virtual reality technologies.

### **2.7.2 Mediatization of Religion:**

The concept of mediatization generally refers to the processes through which various aspects of social life, including religion, become shaped by and integrated into media logic. It involves the ways in which media influence and transform social institutions, practices, and individual experiences. Stig Hjarvard, a Danish media scholar known for his work on the mediatization of society, including the relationship between media and religion holds that mediatization of religion is a description of how media technologies influence the way religion is practiced, represented, and understood in contemporary society.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Cf. Campbell, Heidi A. (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, New York 2012.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Hjarvard, 2016, p. 8.

### **2.7.3 Theology of Media and Technology**

Theology of media and technology refers to the exploration and understanding of the relationship between religious or theological perspectives and the advancements and impact of media and technology. It involves examining how technology and media shape and are shaped by religious beliefs, values, and practices. This field of study delves into the ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of technology and media in the context of various religious traditions. Theology can actually inform technology.<sup>317</sup>

“Technology needs theological guidance; it cannot serve very well as its own god. And theology has its own internal imperative to address technology; theology is reflection on the ultimate sacred, center of life and meaning and value, and it cannot rest in silence or error with respect to technology, the dominating force in contemporary life”.<sup>318</sup>

Ugboh (2023) makes an argument that emphasizes the need to go beyond the mere presence of digital facilities in churches, such as websites and social media platforms, and urges an evaluation of their efficiency. Questions arise regarding how churches utilize these tools for ministries, respond to societal demands for enhanced service delivery, and effectively engage tech-savvy individuals. The argument underscores the necessity for the church to adapt its ministry structures, leadership, and strategies in response to technological disruptions, emphasizing the importance of integrating technological concepts into theological frameworks for sustainable development.<sup>319</sup>

## **2.8 Impact of New Media to the Church**

The impact of new media on the church is a multifaceted subject that encompasses changes in communication, community building, evangelism, and internal dynamics. The advent of new media, particularly digital and social media, has had both positive and negative effects on various aspects of church life and operation.

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<sup>317</sup> Cf. Susan, Ella George, the Theology of Technology, In: Religion and Technology in the 21st Century (179-199), 2006. DOI:10.4018/978-1-59140-714-0.ch009 (Accessed July 24, 2023).

<sup>318</sup> David, W. Gill, Prolegomena to a Theology of Technology, In: Bridges: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Theology, Philosophy, History, and Science Vol. 5 Nos. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1998) pp. 155-173. <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/04/GillD.ProlegomenatoATheologyofTech.pdf> (Accessed December 18, 2023).

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Godspower, Ugboh, The Church and Techno-Theology: A Paradigm Shift of Theology and Theological Practice to Overcome Technological Disruptions, in: Journal of Ethics in Education and Technology, June 27, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jeet-02-2023-0004> (Accessed March 25, 2024).

## **2.8.1 Positive Impact of New Media to the Church**

### **Enhanced Communication and Outreach**

New media have significantly enhanced the communication capabilities of churches. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow churches to reach broader audiences with ease. This enhanced communication is pivotal in engaging with both current congregants and potential new members. According to Cheong (2017), New media provide novel opportunities for religious expression and community formation, offering religious institutions new channels for outreach and communication.<sup>320</sup>

### **Digital Evangelism**

The concept of digital evangelism has gained prominence with the rise of new media. Churches can now livestream services, post sermons online, and engage with global audiences. This shift has been particularly important in expanding the reach of the church beyond geographical limitations. Campbell and Tsuria (2022) note that Digital media have facilitated a shift in how religious messages are disseminated, allowing for broader and more inclusive access to religious content.<sup>321</sup>

John Grosso (2013), director of digital media at the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut argues that although social media especially Catholic social media can be a difficult, hostile place, the faithful Catholics need to take the message of love of and trust in Jesus Christ to social media. He reasoned that social media allows the church to communicate with hundreds of thousands of people with one click — so what better place to spread this message of hope and love than Facebook (or Twitter or Instagram)?”<sup>322</sup> He further argued that using social media to witness to Christ, or to evangelize in his name, starts by treating social media as an end in itself, not just a means to an end. To him social media outlets could be used to invite people to Mass, adoration, confession and Catholic events, but it cannot only use our social media in this way. Rather, he acknowledged that Facebook friends, or the accounts following parish’s Twitter account, are communities themselves that need to be ministered to or fed by

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<sup>320</sup> Cf. Cheong, Pauline Hope, *The Vitality of New Media and Religion: Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organization*, in: *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017): 25-33.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. Heidi, A. Campbell & Ruth Tsuria (Eds.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (2nd edition), Routledge, 2022.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. John, Grosso, *What role can social media play in evangelization?* 2018. <https://catholiccourier.com/articles/what-role-can-social-media-play-in-evangelization/> (Accessed October 31, 2023).

offering them content that will help them encounter Jesus in some way. Whether it is an inspiring or comforting quote from Scripture, live streaming Masses or events, or catechetical videos that share the richness of the Catholic tradition, Christians need to offer something of substance to thier friends and followers. If they share meaningful content, they can use social media to bring people into an encounter with Christ every single day.<sup>323</sup>

### **Community Building**

New media have also redefined community building within churches. Online forums, social media groups, and church apps enable congregants to stay connected, share prayer requests, and support each other virtually. This virtual community can complement physical gatherings, providing continuous support and engagement. According to Horsfield, the internet offers new ways of forming and maintaining community, allowing for both a broadening and deepening of relational connections within religious groups.<sup>324</sup>

### **Digital Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care has adapted to include digital interactions, allowing clergy to provide support through video calls, social media, and messaging apps. This can be especially beneficial for reaching congregants who may be unable to attend church in person. As noted by Campbell (2012), digital tools have expanded the scope of pastoral care, enabling clergy to maintain a presence in the lives of congregants through various online platforms.<sup>325</sup>

### **Social Media also Contributes to the Opening and Humanization of the Church**

The distance and anonymity that arises between people when they communicate online can help break down inhibitions that are often blamed for abusive behavior. But it can also encourage people to ask questions about faith, especially through private messages.

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. *ibid*,

<sup>324</sup> Horsfield, P., *From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. [https://www.academia.edu/12788104/From\\_Jesus\\_to\\_the\\_Internet\\_A\\_History\\_of\\_Christianity\\_and\\_Media\\_2015](https://www.academia.edu/12788104/From_Jesus_to_the_Internet_A_History_of_Christianity_and_Media_2015) (Accessed July 26, 2024).

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Campbell, Heidi, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, New York 2012.

“The humorous nature of many social media posts can also serve as a starting point for more serious discussions about religion”.<sup>326</sup>

### **Influence on Sermon Delivery**

The presence of new media has influenced the way sermons are delivered and consumed. Preachers often need to consider the online audience and adapt their delivery to be engaging both in-person and digitally. As Roof (2000) states that the rise of digital media has prompted preachers to refine their delivery techniques to effectively engage both in-person and online audiences.<sup>327</sup>

### **Online Learning and Spiritual Growth**

Online courses, webinars, and virtual Bible studies have become important tools for spiritual education and growth. These resources allow congregants to deepen their understanding of faith without leaving their homes. Mary Quinn, Laura Foote, and Michele Williams (2012) argue that the rise in online learning and the increasing number of adult students present significant opportunities for Christian colleges and universities to expand their reach.<sup>328</sup> Online learning platforms provide flexible and diverse opportunities for spiritual growth, making religious education more accessible.

### **Crisis Communication**

During crises, such as natural disasters or Pandemic times, new media platforms have proven invaluable for timely and effective communication. Churches can quickly disseminate crucial information and provide updates to their members. As Heidi A. Campbell (2020) points out, new media enable rapid response and efficient communication during crises, ensuring that congregants stay informed and connected. During Covid19 Pandemic, new media provided essential tools for crisis management, enabling churches to respond swiftly and maintain continuity in their ministry.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Cf. How social media is changing the church. <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-is-changing-the-church-57405> (Accessed August 23, 2023).

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Roof, Wade Clark, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. Mary Quinn, Laura Foote, and Michele Williams, *Integrating a Biblical Worldview and Developing Online Courses for the Adult Learner*, 2012. <https://christianscholars.com/integrating-a-biblical-worldview-and-developing-online-courses-for-the-adult-learner/> (Accessed July 5, 2024).

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Heidi, A. Campbell, *Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World 2020*. <https://doi.org/10.21423/RELIGIONINQUARANTINE> (Accessed May 24, 2024).

## **Formation of Virtual Communities**

Virtual communities have emerged as a significant aspect of church life, with online forums, social media groups, and virtual Bible studies fostering a sense of belonging and shared faith. Online communities provide a platform for members to connect, share, and grow in their faith, often transcending geographic barriers.

In “The Role of Technology in Church Growth and Outreach: Enhancing Community Engagement,” Adam Phillips (2024) emphasizes how technology has become a pivotal tool for churches aiming to expand their reach and deepen community involvement. Phillips highlights those digital platforms, such as social media and live-streaming services, have allowed churches to transcend physical boundaries. This digital presence not only broadens the church's reach but also creates opportunities for continuous engagement through online communities and content.<sup>330</sup>

## **Social Media is a Catalyst for Youth Advocacy**

Social media serves as a valuable platform for young individuals to amplify their voices and influence public opinion. By sharing narratives of faith, acts of kindness, and initiatives aimed at fostering positive societal change, young people can inspire others to engage in similar actions and authentically express their beliefs.<sup>331</sup> This indicates that social media not only facilitates communication but also plays a critical role in motivating and empowering youth to actively contribute to shaping a better world.

Through these platforms, young individuals can create communities of support and solidarity, encouraging one another to pursue their values and beliefs actively. The ability to share personal stories and experiences can lead to increased empathy and understanding among diverse audiences, further promoting a culture of compassion and collective responsibility.<sup>332</sup> Consequently, social media emerges not merely as a tool for self-expression but as a catalyst for social change, enabling young people to mobilize their peers, challenge societal norms, and advocate for justice and equality in their communities.

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<sup>330</sup> Cf. Adam, Phillips, The Role of Technology in Church Growth and Outreach: Enhancing Community Engagement, 2024. <https://thewitness.org/the-role-of-technology-in-church-growth-and-outreach/> (Accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN), Proceedings of the African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa (Synod on Synodality), 2024.

<sup>332</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

## **2.8.2 Negative impact of new media to the Church**

### **Digital Media and Reduction of Physical Engagement**

One of the primary negative impacts of integrating new media in the Church is the potential reduction in physical engagement. Digital interactions, while convenient, can never fully replace the depth and richness of face-to-face relationships and community worship. In “Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other” Turkle (2011), a specialist in technology and society notes that the shift towards digital communication can lead to a sense of isolation and weaken interpersonal connections. Turkle argues that technology, once a tool for convenience, has become an architect of our intimacies, blurring the lines between genuine human connection and the illusions provided by digital interactions. We are drawn to the promise of companionship without the effort, leading to shallow connections that leave us feeling overwhelmed and lonely, even as we are more connected than ever.<sup>333</sup>

For the Church, this reduction in physical engagement can undermine the communal and sacramental aspects of faith practice, which are essential for spiritual growth and community building. Sacraments, which are central to Catholic worship, cannot be administered online. This limitation underscores the irreplaceable nature of physical gatherings and in-person participation in the sacraments.

### **Social Media Contribution to Immoral Acts**

New media or social media can be a hub for cyberbullying and other forms of digital or online harassment. The Pontifical Council on Social Communications highlights challenges posed by modern media, particularly its indifference or hostility toward Christian faith and morality, rooted in postmodern skepticism about absolute truths. The internet amplifies these issues, featuring hate sites that attack religious and ethnic groups, including the Catholic Church, and content like pornography and violence, which reflect humanity’s sinful tendencies. While mass media has the potential to unify and foster understanding, it often promotes distorted views on life, family, and religion, undermining the dignity and purpose of the human person.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup>Cf. Turkle, Sherry, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Basic Books, New York 2011. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2011-02278-000> (Accessed May 20, 2024).

<sup>334</sup>Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002, n.11. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html) (Accessed April 12, 2023).

Pope Francis, in Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (2019) (ChV.88) says “The digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, up to the extreme case of the “dark web”. Digital media can expose people to the risk of dependency, isolation and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships. New forms of violence are being spread through social media, for example cyber-bullying; the internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and exploitation of persons for sexual ends or through gambling”.<sup>335</sup>

While the internet has the potential to enrich lives and foster the ability to positively influence others, it also exposes youth to harmful influences, such as consumerism, violent and pornographic content, and the dangers of isolation.<sup>336</sup>

### **The Media are Not Neutral Communication Vehicles**

Digital technologies can be misused to spread of misinformation. According to Joseph Borge and Sultana Carl-Mario (2015), faith communication is deeply influenced by the epistemologies embedded in media technologies and the operational cultures of media organizations. They argue that while the Church must use media to disseminate its message, this engagement inevitably shapes both the message’s content and delivery. The “mediatization” occurs during the transmission by the communicator and in the interpretation by the audience, each shaped by media-specific dynamics. This dual influence poses theological and pastoral challenges for faith-based communication strategies.<sup>337</sup>

The authors further argue that the introduction of new communication technologies often begins as technical innovation but evolves into significant cultural, psychological, and economic transformation.<sup>338</sup> John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) noted that media revolutionize culture by altering communication methods more profoundly than content itself, creating new cultural languages and techniques. This shift parallels early Christian challenges in transitioning Jesus’ oral teachings to written texts. Today, the

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<sup>335</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2019, no. 23. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20181027\\_doc-final-instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20181027_doc-final-instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani_en.html) (Accessed June 12, 2024).

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002, n.11.

<sup>337</sup> Cf. Joseph, Borge and Sultana Carl-Mario, *Communicating Faith Through the Legacy Media: Theological Reflections and Pastoral Implications*, in: *KMT* 20, no. 1 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.21697/KMT.20.1> (Accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>338</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Church faces a dilemma: adapting faith language to decentralized media platforms controlled by varied creators while maintaining its doctrinal integrity amidst contrasting hierarchical and media structures.<sup>339</sup>

### **Polarisation and Division**

Polarization, the growing division of attitudes and beliefs among groups or individuals, poses a significant challenge in the realm of Church's mission through new media. New media can facilitate the creation of echo chambers where individuals are mainly exposed to information and opinions that reinforce their existing views. Selective exposure in media consumption strengthens pre-existing beliefs by limiting exposure to differing viewpoints, resulting in individuals becoming more entrenched in their perspectives and less receptive to alternative ideas.<sup>340</sup>

### **Manipulation and Exploitation**

Pope Francis in Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (2019) (ChV89) further says “, there are huge economic interests operating in the digital world, capable of exercising forms of control as subtle as they are invasive, creating mechanisms of manipulation of consciences and of the democratic process. The way many platforms work often ends up favouring encounter between persons who think alike, shielding them from debate. These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The proliferation of fake news is the expression of a culture that has lost its sense of truth and bends the facts to suit particular interests. The reputation of individuals is put in jeopardy through summary trials conducted online. The Church and her pastors are not exempt from this phenomenon”.<sup>341</sup>

Pope Francis in his message of World Communications Day 2019 underscores that Internet and social networks “lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights.” According to the Compendium of the Catholic Church, the new media can be used to injure the good persons. “In the world of the media the intrinsic ideology, the desire for profit and political control, rivalry and conflicts between groups

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<sup>339</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> Cf. Dhiman B, Key Issues and New Challenges in New Media Technology in 2023: A Critical Review, in: Journal of Media & Management, Volume 5(1): 1-4, 2023 SRC/JMM-184. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4387353](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4387353) (Accessed July 7, 2024).

<sup>341</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (= ChV.89) Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2019, no. 89.

and other social evils.”<sup>342</sup> Pope Francis further emphasized that the Internet has been “proven to be one of the areas most exposed to disinformation and to the conscious and targeted distortion of facts and interpersonal relationships, which are often used to discredit.”<sup>343</sup>

### **Exclusion of Non-Digital Users**

Access to digital media is not equally available to all members of the church. This leads to a digital divide that can exclude those without internet access or digital literacy. This can disproportionately affect older adults, rural populations, and economically disadvantaged groups. According to Van Dijk (2019), the digital divide remains a major concern, with substantial segments of the population lacking adequate access to digital resources.<sup>344</sup>

### **Distraction from Core Activities**

The constant flow of information and notifications on social media can distract church members from core religious activities such as prayer, meditation, and study. The emphasis on immediate gratification and constant connectivity can detract from the contemplative aspects of faith. As highlighted by Carr (2010), the pervasive presence of digital media can alter attention spans and cognitive processes, impacting individuals' ability to engage deeply with their faith.<sup>345</sup>

### **Focus on Image Over Substance**

The visual nature of social media platforms can emphasize appearances and superficial aspects of religious practices, such as impressive church events or elaborate ceremonies. This focus on image over substance may detract from the authentic spiritual growth and internal transformation that are central to religious teachings. Carr (2010) argues that

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<sup>342</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2005, no. 416.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Lydia O’Kane, Pope highlights pros and cons of internet and social media use, 2019. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-01/pope-highlights-pros-and-cons-of-internet-and-social-media-use.html> (Accessed November 6, 2023).

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Van Dijk, José, You Have One Identity': Performing the Self on Facebook and LinkedIn, in: Media, Culture & Society 35, no. 2 (2013): 199–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712468605> (Accessed August 19, 2022).

<sup>345</sup> Cf. Carr, Nicholas, The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2010.

digital media's emphasis on instant gratification can undermine the patience and perseverance required for deep spiritual development.<sup>346</sup>

### **Overuse of Social Media**

The engaging and sometimes addictive characteristic of social media can result in excessive use, where individuals spend excessive time online at the expense of other important activities. This can affect their personal, professional, and spiritual lives. Young (2004) discusses the concept of Internet addiction, noting its impact on mental health and social functioning.<sup>347</sup>

### **Young people at Risk of Becoming “Social Hermits”**

In his *Message for the 53rd World Communications Day* (2019), Pope Francis addresses the dual nature of the internet, acknowledging its potential to foster human connection while cautioning against its risks. He points out that young people are particularly vulnerable to the illusion that digital interactions can fully satisfy their relational needs, leading to a form of social isolation. “There is the dangerous phenomenon of young people becoming “social hermits” who risk alienating themselves completely from society. This dramatic situation reveals a serious rupture in the relational fabric of society, one we cannot ignore.”<sup>348</sup>

### **Digital technology often values speed, choice, and individualism**

Digital technology emphasizes values such as speed, vast choice, and individualism, creating highly customized user experiences.<sup>349</sup> While these attributes can enhance efficiency and personalization, they also carry significant risks if unchecked. Speed can foster impatience, abundant choices may lead to superficial engagement, and hyper-individualism risks isolating individuals from community connections.<sup>350</sup> These unintended consequences highlight the ethical and relational challenges posed by

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<sup>346</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Young, K. S., Internet Addiction: A New Clinical Phenomenon and Its Consequences, in: *American Behavioral Scientist* 48, no. 4 (2004): 402-415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764204270278> (Accessed June 19, 2024).

<sup>348</sup> Cf. Francis, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 53<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day, 2019.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. Jay, Kim, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the South Baptist Convention (ERLC), Technology Can't Replace In-person Community - ERLC. <https://erlc.com/resource-library/spotlight-articles/technology-cant-replace-in-person-community/> (Accessed October 19, 2023).

<sup>350</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

overreliance on digital tools, emphasizing the need to balance technological advancements with intentional practices that prioritize meaningful human interaction.

## **2.9 Mission in a Digital Environment**

### **2.9.1 The Vatican's Digital Evolution: Engaging the Faithful Through Technology**

The Vatican began its digital outreach by launching its first YouTube channel in 2008. This move marked the start of a broader engagement with technology, which saw Pope Benedict XVI actively utilizing Twitter since December 3, 2012, and Instagram since 2016. His first tweet, sent on December 12, addressed questions from the faithful, reflecting the interactive nature of this platform. Monsignor Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Holy See's social communication council, noted that Twitter facilitates a new type of evangelism, enabling the Pope to reach a diverse demographic and engage in meaningful dialogue. In his Tweet, the Pope expressed gratitude for the online interactions, stating, “I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart.”<sup>351</sup>

Pope Francis also published his first tweet a few days after his election. His Tweet on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2013 read; “Dear friends, I thank you from my heart and I ask you to continue to pray for me”. “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you ...” (1 Peter 3:15—16).

Concurrently, the Pope's online presence evolved as a vital aspect of his pastoral involvement, ranging from early video messages to contemporary engagements like the 2017 virtual encounter with International Space Station astronauts. Noteworthy instances include the Pope's 2017 video message to the Super Bowl and his thought-provoking TED Talks in both 2017 and 2020, exemplifying his impactful digital pastoral presence.<sup>352</sup>

The Church effectively utilized social media, as demonstrated during a pivotal moment on March 27, 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Through televised and live-streamed transmission, Pope Francis delivered a powerful prayer and message from an empty Saint Peter's Square, creating a transformative global experience. Despite physical isolation, people worldwide felt united and in communion with each other

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<sup>351</sup> Cf. Mons. Celli: presto su Twitter gli Angelus del Papa, Il Messaggio di Quaresima diviso in 40 tweet. [http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2012/02/23/mons.\\_celli:\\_presto\\_su\\_twitter\\_gli\\_angelus\\_del\\_papa/it1-565577](http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2012/02/23/mons._celli:_presto_su_twitter_gli_angelus_del_papa/it1-565577) (Accessed August 20, 2023).

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Decastery of Communication, Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media, May 29, 2023. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/05/29/230529g.html> (Accessed December 20, 2023).

through digital media, extending an embrace to millions and fostering a moment of unity.<sup>353</sup>

“Technological change rapidly is making the media of communication even more pervasive and powerful.”<sup>354</sup> “The advent of the information society is a real cultural revolution.”<sup>355</sup> According to Steven Estes, a photographer and digital marketing strategist, social media “has the potential to be the greatest tool to advance the gospel since the printing press.” In essence, it provides a pulpit (or platform) for the common Joe (or Jolene) to proclaim the gospel like never before, and it enables churches a continuous means of communication with their members outside of Sunday morning services. Whether or not we use it as such is up to us”.<sup>356</sup>

By leveraging new media in these ways, religious organizations can effectively connect with and evangelize to the youth, meeting them where they are in the digital landscape.

### **2.9.2 Insights from the Synod of Bishops on Young People 2018**

The Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment (2018) highlights the profound opportunities and challenges presented by the digital environment for the Church’s mission. Recognizing the pervasive influence of digital culture, the Synod emphasizes the need for the Church to engage actively and thoughtfully in this space, fostering a Gospel-centered presence that addresses both ethical and anthropological concerns.<sup>357</sup>

### **The Digital Environment as a Pastoral Challenge**

The Synod acknowledges the multifaceted challenges posed by the digital environment to the Church's mission. These challenges extend beyond the technical or communicative aspects, encompassing deeper issues related to human identity, relationships, and ethical considerations. The document emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics and possibilities of digital culture from both

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<sup>353</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *Ethics in Communication*. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20000](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000) (Accessed March 20, 2023).

<sup>355</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *Toward a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 9.

<sup>356</sup> Brent, Bamer, *The Dilemma of Social Media and the Church*, in: *Christian Standard*, 1 March, 2021. <https://christianstandard.com/2021/03/the-dilemma-of-social-media-and-the-church/> (Accessed December 26, 2023).

<sup>357</sup> Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly on young people, faith and vocational discernment 2018, no. 145.

anthropological and ethical perspectives, enabling the Church to respond meaningfully to the needs of the faithful in a rapidly evolving context.<sup>358</sup>

### **Promoting the Gospel in Digital Spaces**

The document calls for a proactive engagement with the digital world, urging the Church to not only utilize its communicative potential but to actively shape its culture and dynamics with a “Gospel flavour.” This involves integrating Christian values into the digital milieu, fostering a dialogue that aligns with the Church’s mission of evangelization and moral guidance. According to the Synod, this mission entails promoting creative and faithful Christian proclamation that resonates with the lives of individuals immersed in digital culture.<sup>359</sup>

Additionally, the document highlights the importance of encouraging and sharing existing initiatives that align with this vision. Such initiatives are seen as foundational steps toward creating a robust and sustained presence of the Church in the digital sphere.<sup>360</sup>

### **Challenges of Image-Centric Communication**

The Synod raises concerns about the increasing prioritization of visual imagery as the dominant mode of communication in digital spaces. While acknowledging its effectiveness, this shift challenges traditional modes of faith transmission, which historically emphasize hearing God’s Word and engaging with the Sacred Scriptures. The Church is thus called to reflect on how it can adapt its methods of proclamation while remaining faithful to its core theological and scriptural foundations.<sup>361</sup>

### **The Role of Young Christians as Digital Missionaries**

Young people, described as digital natives, are identified as key actors in the Church’s mission in the digital age. The Synod highlights the authentic missionary potential of young Christians who are already engaged in navigating and transforming the digital environment. Their ability to integrate faith with digital culture positions them uniquely to evangelize their peers effectively and authentically.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

However, the document also recognizes that young people require guidance and accompaniment as they discern how to live mature, faith-filled lives within an increasingly digitalized context. The Church is called to assist them in seizing the opportunities for evangelization and personal growth that the digital world offers, while helping them navigate its inherent risks, such as ethical ambiguities, superficial connections, and misinformation.<sup>363</sup>

In summary, the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops (2018) articulates a comprehensive vision for the Church's engagement with the digital environment, emphasizing the importance of theological depth, cultural relevance, and ethical discernment. By empowering young Christians to become digital missionaries and fostering initiatives that integrate Gospel values into digital culture, the Church can effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. This mission requires collaboration, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to preserving the integrity of the faith in an ever-changing world.

### **2.9.3 World Youth Day (WYD) 2023**

In an address during the 2023 World Youth Day (WYD) in Lisbon, Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, emphasized the pivotal role of Catholic digital influencers in modern evangelization. Speaking at a Mass held at the Portuguese Catholic University, he remarked, "The Church needs you, dear digital influencers, to be the leaven of hope in these new spaces of social construction that are social networks and digital networks." He stressed that the question is no longer whether to interact with digital culture, as this is now "an irreversible fact," but rather how to engage with it effectively. Cardinal de Mendonça urged influencers to "culturally translate the message of Jesus" in these new spaces, aligning the Church's mission with contemporary digital realities.<sup>364</sup>

This call for Catholic digital engagement reflects the growing acknowledgment within the Church of the importance of social networks as spaces for spreading hope and fostering faith.

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<sup>363</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> Bussolo, Alessandro, and Francesca Merlo, 'Catholic Influencers at WYD Are Called 'to Announce Christ Jesus in Digital Spaces'', in: *Catholic Outlook*, September 3, 2023. <https://catholicoutlook.org>. (Accessed October 5, 2024).

## **2.10 Integrating New Media into Evangelization in Africa: Case Studies of PACTPAN and ASDYFI**

The integration of new media into evangelization efforts represents a vital shift in the approach of the Catholic Church in Africa, particularly through initiatives such as the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) and the African Synod Digital Youth Faith Influencers (ASDYFI). These programs exemplify how the Church leverages digital tools to engage with contemporary issues while fostering faith, leadership, and community in the digital age.

### **The Role of PACTPAN in Contemporary African Evangelization**

The Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) provides a collaborative platform for African theologians, clergy, and lay leaders to address the unique challenges facing the Church in Africa. Its mission focuses on fostering theological reflection and pastoral action to promote social justice, environmental stewardship, governance, and peace in Africa's diverse cultural landscape.<sup>365</sup> Central to its work is ensuring that theological discourse resonates with the lived experiences of African communities, creating a contextualized and impactful faith tradition.<sup>366</sup>

### **PACTPAN's Digital Faith Influencers Initiative**

As the Church navigates the complexities of the digital era, PACTPAN has responded by training African youth to utilize online platforms for evangelization and pastoral care. The African Synod Digital Youth Faith Influencers (ASDYFI) program, launched in 2024, is an innovative 8-month online training program that draws participants from 52 African countries. This initiative equips young Catholics with skills to communicate their faith effectively in digital spaces, addressing the dual needs of spiritual formation and digital engagement.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Cf. Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) Constitution. <https://pactpan.org/constitution/> (Accessed October 17, 2024).

<sup>366</sup> Cf. Nnaemeka, Ali, O.M.I., Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network: Believing that a Better Church and Society is Possible in Africa, 2024. <https://pactpan.org/press-releases/pan-african-catholic-theology-and-pastoral-network-believing-that-a-better-church-and-society-is-possible-in-africa/> (Accessed October 16, 2024).

<sup>367</sup> Cf. 100 Young Africans Train to Be Faith Influencers, in: Vatican News, 2 Feb. 2024. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2024-02/100-young-africans-train-to-be-faith-influencers.html> (Accessed October 16, 2024).

## **Key Features of the Program**

**Theological Formation:** Digital faith influencers receive solid theological training to ensure they are well-versed in Catholic doctrine and social teachings. This formation helps them provide sound and faithful teachings to a wider online audience.<sup>368</sup>

**Digital Literacy and Skills:** Influencers are taught how to effectively utilise various online tools and social platforms, such as social media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.), blogs, and podcasts. This includes content creation, video editing, and mastering communication strategies that resonate with modern audiences.

**Ethical Engagement:** Training focuses on how to interact with audiences online in an ethical and responsible manner. This includes addressing complex moral issues, fostering constructive dialogue, and combating misinformation or misrepresentation of the faith.<sup>369</sup>

**Cultural Relevance:** Since the network is focused on African theology and pastoral care, the training ensures that influencers are able to address issues pertinent to African societies—such as poverty, corruption, tribalism, and youth challenges—while being sensitive to cultural nuances.<sup>370</sup>

**Building Online Communities:** Influencers are encouraged to not only spread the faith but also build supportive online communities that foster deeper relationships among believers, provide spiritual support, and promote the practice of faith in daily life.<sup>371</sup>

## **Strategic Impacts of ASDYFI**

This initiative aligns with Pope Francis's call for youth to embrace their role as “digital disciples,” recognizing the transformative potential of the digital realm as a missionary field. The ASDYFI program empowers young Catholics to address both spiritual and social challenges in Africa, where youth demographics and internet connectivity are rapidly expanding.<sup>372</sup>

By equipping participants with technical and pastoral tools, the program facilitates youth-led evangelization. It also highlights how the Church can remain relevant to younger generations by meeting them where they are—in digital spaces. Graduates of

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<sup>368</sup> Cf. PACTPAN Africa, Empowering African Catholic Youth: Digital Discipleship and Faith Formation, September 10, 2024. <https://pactpan.org/press-releases/empowering-african-catholic-youth-digital-discipleship-and-faith-formation/> (Accessed October 16, 2024).

<sup>369</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>371</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> Cf. 100 Young Africans Train to Be Faith Influencers, in: Vatican News, February 2, 2024.

the program, numbering 56 in its inaugural cohort, are tasked with leading local initiatives and presenting their outcomes at the 3rd Pan-African Catholic Congress in Abidjan.<sup>373</sup>

### **Bishop Onah's Vision for Digital Evangelization**

At the graduation of the ASDYFI program, Bishop Godfrey Onah of the Diocese of Nsukka emphasized the urgent need for the Church to recognize the digital world as a central frontier for evangelization. He challenged the youth to view digital platforms not just as tools for communication but as transformative spaces for sharing the Gospel.<sup>374</sup>

Bishop Onah stressed the dual role of these influencers as communicators and missionaries, tasked with navigating the challenges of the digital age while embodying Catholic values. He acknowledged that engaging with digital peripheries may bring difficulties but affirmed that these spaces cannot remain peripheral to the Church's mission.<sup>375</sup>

### **The Future of Digital Evangelization in Africa**

The ASDYFI program demonstrates how new media can effectively bridge the gap between the Church and the younger, digitally connected population of Africa. By fostering a new generation of digital faith leaders, the program exemplifies the Church's potential to transform lives through culturally relevant and technologically advanced methods.

This innovative approach not only strengthens the Church's presence in digital spaces but also ensures its teachings resonate with contemporary audiences. As Bishop Onah remarked, the future of evangelization lies in the creativity, faith, and courage of young African Catholics who are willing to embrace and transform the digital frontier.<sup>376</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The efforts of PACTPAN and the ASDYFI program underscore the Catholic Church's commitment to adapting its evangelization strategies to the digital age. By integrating

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<sup>373</sup> Cf. Ali, Nnaemeka, Bishop Godfrey Onah Calls African Catholic Youth to Embrace Digital Evangelization, Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network, September 14, 2024. <https://pactpan.org/press-releases/bishop-godfrey-onah-calls-african-catholic-youth-to-embrace-digital-evangelization/> (Accessed October 13, 2024).

<sup>374</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

new media into its mission, the Church is fostering a vibrant and inclusive environment where faith and technology intersect, addressing both spiritual and societal challenges in Africa. These initiatives act as a model for how faith communities worldwide can leverage digital tools to remain relevant and impactful in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **2.11 Gaps in the Literature**

### **Lack of Longitudinal Studies on Media Impact**

While several studies have examined the intersection of new media and religion or church evangelization, significant gaps remain in the current body of research. One of the most notable gaps is the lack of focus on the long-term impact of digital evangelization on youth retention in the Church. Most existing literature focuses on short-term engagement metrics, such as social media interaction or online participation in religious events. However, there is limited empirical data on whether these digital engagements translate into sustained spiritual growth and long-term commitment to the Church. Understanding the effects of continuous digital interaction on youth faith formation and church attendance over time remains an area that requires further investigation.

### **Exploration of Peer-to-Peer Evangelization through New Media**

The existing literature largely addresses top-down evangelization efforts, where Church leaders or organizations create content for youth. However, there is a gap in research that explores peer-to-peer evangelization, where youth themselves use new media to share and express their faith with peers. This form of evangelization may resonate more authentically with young people, but has not been sufficiently examined.

**Cross-Cultural and Demographic Variations:** Many studies concentrate on specific geographical regions or demographic groups, often overlooking how cultural contexts influence the effectiveness of new media in evangelization. This lack of comparative analysis limits the generalizability of findings and may fail to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented in diverse cultural settings. Future research should explore how different cultural backgrounds shape the reception and impact of new media initiatives in various ecclesiastical contexts.

### **Digital Literacy and its Role in Evangelization**

The existing research does not fully address the issue of digital literacy among youth and its impact on evangelization efforts. As digital media requires a certain level of technological proficiency, there is a gap in understanding how differences in digital literacy among Catholic youth influence their ability to access and interpret religious content online.

### **Absence of Research on Privacy and Data Security Concerns**

There is little research examining the privacy and data security concerns in line with the use of new media for evangelization. As youth increasingly interact with religious content through social media, apps, and websites, there is a gap in understanding how data collection practices and privacy issues might affect their willingness to engage with online religious content, especially in an era of heightened digital surveillance.

### **Mental Health and Spirituality in Digital Evangelization**

There is a gap in research connecting mental health and spirituality in the context of new media evangelization for youth. While youth increasingly turn to digital spaces for both spiritual guidance and mental health support, little is known about how digital evangelization efforts address or neglect the mental health challenges facing Catholic youth today. Studies exploring this intersection could be valuable for understanding holistic approaches to youth evangelization.

### **Use of Analytics and Data in Evangelization Strategies**

There is a significant gap in research investigating how data analytics and user insights from new media platforms are used to shape evangelization strategies. While businesses and marketers use sophisticated data tools to target audiences, there is little research on whether the Catholic Church is leveraging similar data-driven strategies to optimize evangelization efforts toward youth, and how such approaches align with ethical considerations in ministry.

These gaps highlight further areas of research that could contribute to more effective and comprehensive integration of new media in youth evangelization for the Catholic Church, especially in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

### **Youth Perception of Church Authority in Digital Spaces**

There is limited research on how Catholic youth perceive Church authority in digital spaces. While new media democratizes communication and allows for decentralized conversations, it is unclear how this affects youth's perception of traditional Church structures, authority figures, and teachings presented online, particularly in contrast to peer influencers or non-religious voices.

### **Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Evangelization Efforts**

The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in new media evangelization remains underexplored. There is a gap in understanding how AI-driven tools like Chatbots can be used to personalize evangelization efforts for youth, while addressing potential ethical concerns about automation in religious contexts.

### **Comparative Studies of Catholic Digital Evangelization vs. Other Denominations**

The literature lacks comparative studies that examine how digital evangelization efforts in the Catholic Church differ from those in other Christian denominations (e.g., Protestant, Evangelical) and how these different approaches influence youth engagement. Such comparisons could offer insights into best practices or areas where the Catholic Church might improve its digital outreach.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the integration of new media into youth evangelization within the Church is a crucial and evolving process that reflects the broader trends of digital transformation in society. The literature reviewed underscores the potential of digital platforms, particularly social media and mobile applications, to engage young people in meaningful ways, providing avenues for outreach and community building that were previously unavailable. The growing presence of young adults on social media suggests that these platforms are not just supplementary tools but essential channels for evangelization efforts.

However, the Church in Uganda faces significant challenges in this integration process. The digital divide, characterized by disparities in access to technology between urban and rural populations, poses a substantial barrier to widespread engagement. Additionally, the demand for content that connects with the young audiences and is relevant to their lived experiences cannot be overlooked. Issues such as governmental

regulations affecting internet usage further complicate these efforts, highlighting the necessity for strategies that align with the dynamic digital environment.

Moreover, the current body of research reveals critical gaps regarding the long-term impacts of digital evangelization on youth retention and spiritual development. Addressing these gaps is vital for understanding how new media can effectively contribute to the Church's mission in the digital age. As young adults increasingly turn to digital social networks for connection and information, the Catholic Church must innovate and adapt its evangelization strategies to remain relevant.

Ultimately, while new media offers significant opportunities for enhanced communication and outreach, it also presents challenges that require thoughtful navigation. The profound impact of new media on the Church is multifaceted, demanding a commitment to both leveraging its benefits and mitigating potential downsides. By embracing these changes, the Church can foster spiritual growth and maintain youth participation, ensuring that its message resonates powerfully within the digital sphere.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Empirical Approach- Methodology and Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, focusing on the use of online surveys as the primary data collection tool. The rationale for selecting this method is discussed, highlighting its suitability for efficiently gathering insights from a diverse population. Key aspects such as the research design, target population, sampling techniques, and the structure of the survey are detailed. Furthermore, ethical considerations and the processes for ensuring the reliability and validity of the data are explained, providing a foundation for the study's credibility and relevance.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the integration of new media in youth evangelization. This method allowed for both numerical and categorical conclusions, providing new insights from the research data.

#### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis was employed as the primary method for the literature review to systematically evaluate existing research, publications, and media that discuss the role of new media in youth evangelization. This approach enables the recognition of recurring themes, trends, and gaps in the literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge on this topic. Secondary literature, including scholarly articles, church reports, and media content, was analyzed as part of this process. Through reviewing or examining qualitative and quantitative data from diverse sources, the research establishes a solid theoretical foundation for the study.

#### **Online Survey Method**

The empirical data for this research was collected through an online survey method, which facilitated the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data from a broader sample size. The online survey is justified as an effective tool for reaching a geographically dispersed population, particularly in the context of Uganda, where

mobile and internet access is increasingly prevalent among youth. Most of the survey questions were open-ended, allowing respondents to express their thoughts and insights in their own words. This format enhances the richness of the data collected, providing a deeper understanding of the perspectives of young people regarding the integration of new media in evangelization efforts.

### **3.2 Sampling Strategy**

#### **Sampling Methods**

To ensure a robust and representative sample for the online survey, two sampling methods were employed: purposive sampling and random sampling.

#### **Purposive Sampling**

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants for the online survey. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who were deemed relevant to the study. This method involved targeting specific individuals or groups, such as church leaders, youth ministry coordinators, and active young church members who have experience or insights related to the use of new media in evangelization. The reason for employing purposive sampling is its ability to provide in-depth information from those with specific knowledge and experiences, thereby enhancing the richness and relevance of the data collected.

#### **Random Sampling**

In addition to purposive sampling, random sampling was applied to include a broader demographic of young church members. This approach guarantees that every individual in the target group have the same opportunity to be selected, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Random sampling is particularly important for capturing diverse perspectives within the youth demographic, which is essential for understanding the overall impact of new media on evangelization efforts. By combining both purposive and random sampling, the study aims to balance depth of insight with the breadth of representation.

### **3.3 Target population**

Participants were selected based on their involvement in youth ministry, pastoral care, or faith within the Catholic Church in Uganda. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, profession, geographic location, and role within the Church.

The survey questionnaire was created and conducted online, targeting users of social networking sites or the internet. The respondents were mainly Catholic young adults between the ages of 20 and 40. This demographic was chosen because it encompasses those who can access new media in Uganda and many of them are working-class, thus able to afford smartphones and other gadgets that can access new technologies. The assumption of this study is that this group spends significant time using social media networking sites or the internet.

Participants were required to first fill in their age or age bracket, mention their occupation, profession, or work in the Church, and list their personally used social media apps or sites. These were used as filters. A sample of 500 respondents was targeted, and 356 responses were obtained.

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

#### **Online Survey**

An online survey is a tool of gathering data or viewpoints from participants over the internet. It typically involves a set of questions presented on a website or through digital platforms, which respondents can answer at their convenience.<sup>377</sup>

In this research, an online survey technique was employed to answer the “why,” “what,” and “how” questions of the study. The survey was designed using SurveyHero, a secure and user-friendly platform. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions crafted to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the integration of new media in youth evangelization. The questionnaire comprised 11 questions, with instructions provided on how each question should be answered. Only four out of the 11 questions were closed-ended. The survey link was sent to respondents mainly via social networks such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Email.

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<sup>377</sup> Cf. Margaret Rouse, Online Survey, April 26, 2023. <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/27866/online-survey> (Accessed June 10, 2024).

### **3.5 Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis for this research commenced with data cleaning to ensure accuracy, including excluding incomplete responses, removing duplicates, and correcting errors. Data coding followed, where open-ended responses were grouped into thematic categories, and categorical responses were assigned numerical codes. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize the data. Visual tools, including frequency tables and pie charts, were used to present the data clearly.

Thematic analysis was utilized for the qualitative examination to identify recurring themes in open-ended responses, and sentiment analysis categorized responses as positive, negative, or neutral. The findings were compiled into a comprehensive report featuring summary tables, charts, and narrative descriptions. This structured approach ensured a thorough and reliable examination of the survey data, providing valuable insights into the integration of new media in youth evangelization by the Catholic Church in Uganda.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Before participating in the survey, participants' consent was obtained. The questionnaire included confidentiality measures, the rights of participants and the purpose of the study to ensure transparency and informed consent. Participants were not asked to provide their names or identifying information. However, they were asked to specify their age group and occupation.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has described the research methodology, emphasizing the rationale for adopting online surveys and the procedures followed throughout the data collection process. It addressed critical factors such as sampling, survey design, and ethical considerations, ensuring a rigorous approach to achieving the research objectives. By establishing a clear and systematic framework, this chapter supports the validity of the findings and sets the stage for a robust analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Presentation of the Findings from the Online Survey**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which investigated how the Catholic Church in Uganda can effectively integrate new media and digital technology to engage with young people in the modern digital age. Guided by four key research questions, the study explored the Church's successes and challenges in utilizing new media for youth evangelization, as well as the opportunities and potential strategies for improvement.

The data for this research was collected through an online survey method, leveraging social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and email to reach a larger audience. A total of 356 responses were obtained from the targeted 500 respondents, providing a rich mix of quantitative and qualitative insights. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to ensure a balanced capture of statistical data and detailed personal perspectives.

The findings presented in this chapter offer an in-depth analysis of the successes, failures, opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for integrating new media into youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda. These insights form the foundation for practical strategies aimed at enhancing the Church's digital outreach efforts in this critical area.

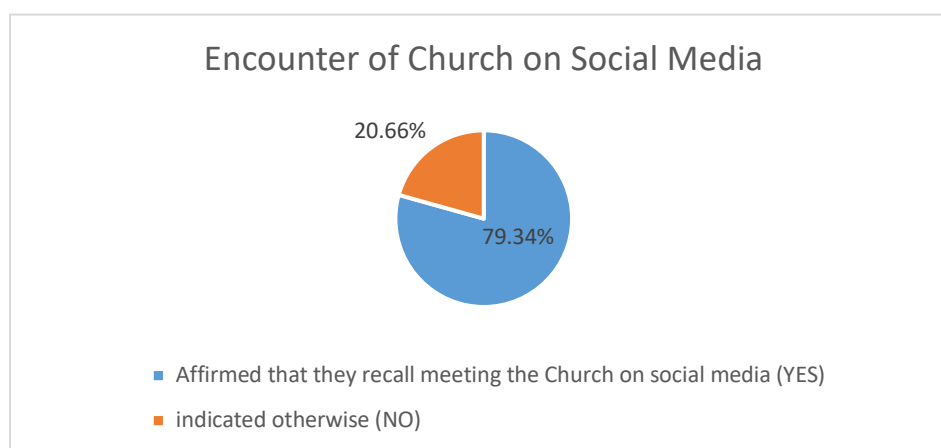
#### **4.1 Do You Remember Meeting the Church in the Social Media?**

This research question delved into the dynamics of individuals' encounters with the Church through social media platforms. A total of 305 respondents participated to answer this question in the survey, with 79.34% affirming that they recall meeting the Church on social media, while 20.66% indicated otherwise. The majority of respondents (79.34%) acknowledge encountering the Church on social media, indicating a significant digital presence for religious engagement.

Of the respondents, 20.66% reported not remembering meeting the Church on social media, suggesting that a noteworthy portion of the population has not had such encounters.

**Table and Figure 4. 1 Online Survey Results: Responses to the Question “Do You Remember Meeting the Church in Social Media?”**

| Response                                                           | Percentage | No.        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Affirmed that they recall meeting the Church on social media (YES) | 79.34%     | 242        |
| indicated otherwise (NO)                                           | 20.66%     | 63         |
| <b>Total</b>                                                       | <b>100</b> | <b>305</b> |



#### **If yes, in which social media did you meet the Church?**

The research question further explored the specific social networking sites and platforms through which respondents reported their interactions with the Church, revealing a diverse range of channels.

The following social networking sites and platforms were identified by respondents as the mediums through which they met the Church: Whatsapp, Facebook, Zoom meetings, Twitter, Youtube, Google, Tiktok, livestreamed masses and prayers, Television streams, Christian literature on social media, Radio, universities, projectors, apps such as I pray and Gaudete, websites, email, Instagram, Telegram, Whatsapp Divine Mercy Family, CatholicVote.org (the Loop), Google Meet, Messenger, LinkedIn, UNCCLA.org (Uganda National Catholic Council of Lay Apostolate), Ugandan Catholics online, among others.

The diverse array of channels reported by respondents underscores the multi-faceted nature of digital engagement with religious institutions.

### **If no, why do you think you did not meet the Church in social media?**

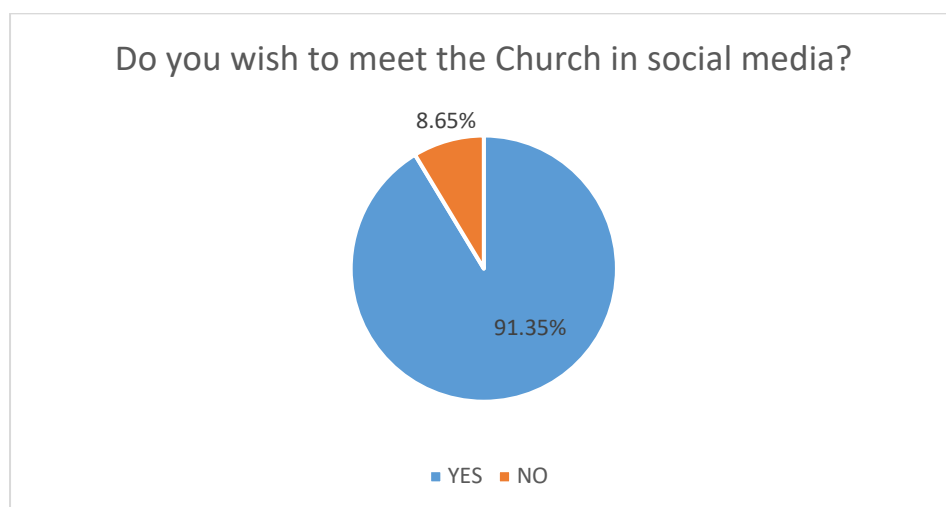
However, the inquiry regarding respondents' failure to meet the church through social media was not explicitly posed. It is conceivable that the respondents' negative responses may have stemmed from divergent interpretations of the term "meeting the church through social media." Notably, certain segments of the data suggest an affirmative acknowledgment of engaging with the church through social media platforms, notwithstanding the apparent discrepancy in their marked responses. This discrepancy could be attributed to potential ambiguity or varied understanding of the term "meeting the church through social media".

### **4.2 Do You Wish to Meet the Church in Social Media?**

Within the survey sample of 266 participants, a notable majority of 243 respondents (91.35%) expressed a desire to engage with the Church through social media platforms. Conversely, a minority of 23 respondents (8.65%) indicated a preference against such interaction, suggesting a reluctance to meet the Church in the realm of social media.

**Table and Figure 4. 2 Online Survey Results: Responses to “Do You Wish to Meet the Church on Social Media?”**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>No.</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
| YES             | 91.35%            | 243        |
| NO              | 8.65%             | 23         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100%</b>       | <b>266</b> |



**If yes, how would you wish to meet the Church in social media?**

This research question delved into the evolving landscape of Church engagement through new media, shedding light on the preferences of congregants for enhanced interaction with the Church in the digital era. In accordance with the collected responses, participants expressed a desire for enhanced engagement with the Church through various modes of new media. Here are the following key findings based on the responses.

**Diverse Online Activities**

Congregants expressed a preference for a variety of online activities, such as prayers, masses, services, reflections, catechism, evangelism, and educational programs. Virtual retreats, conferences, meetings, praise and worship sessions, as well as healing and deliverance services were also highlighted.

**Multimedia Approaches**

Respondents emphasized the importance of multimedia approaches, including video shots, clips for evangelization, and pictorial representations of the Church. Timely notifications, livestreams, videos, and podcasts were considered essential components in fostering connectivity.

**Content Variety and Accessibility**

Participants stressed the significance of increased broadcasting for daily masses and sermons, accompanied by regular dissemination of motivational messages, daily readings, religious narratives, stories of saints, and Bible quotations. Accessible content, such as daily masses, rosaries, adoration, hymns, and reflections on daily readings, was deemed crucial.

**Interactive and Welcoming Engagement**

The overarching theme for media evangelism was identified as being simple, clear, friendly, welcoming, and interactive. Participants expressed a desire for personal inspirational messages, engaging group discussions, and livestreamed Mass for broader accessibility.

### **Varied Implementation Across Churches**

The research data highlighted the varying degrees to which churches are adapting to these preferences. While some churches actively incorporate these strategies, others are yet to fully embrace the potential of new media in enhancing congregational engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This data underscores the prevailing inclination among the surveyed population towards utilizing social media as a means of connecting with the Church

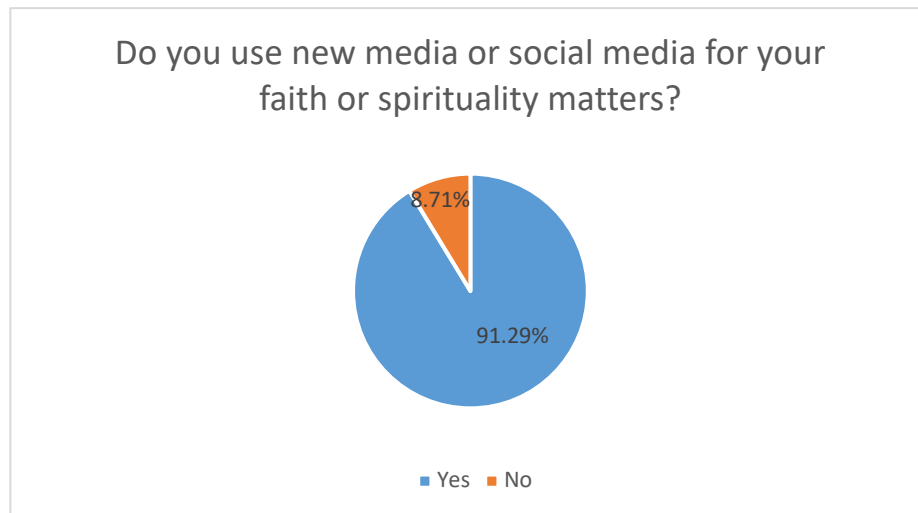
The findings underscore the dynamic nature of Church engagement through new media, reflecting a shift towards a more interactive, diverse, and accessible approach to disseminating religious content. These results provide valuable insights for churches seeking to adapt to the evolving expectations of their congregants in the digital age.

### **4.3 Do You Use New Media or Social Media for Your Faith or Spirituality Matters?**

Out of the 264 respondents, a substantial majority (241 individuals, or 91.29%) reported using social media for matters of faith and spirituality. On the contrary, 23 respondents (8.71%) asserted that they abstain from utilizing social media for these purposes.

**Table and Figure 4. 3 Online Survey Results: Responses to “Do You Use New Media or Social Media for Your Faith or Spirituality Matters?”**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>No.</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
| Yes             | 91.29%            | 241        |
| No              | 8.71%             | 23         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100%</b>       | <b>264</b> |



**If yes, how do you use the new media or social media to enrich or share your faith and spirituality?**

Survey participants indicated their utilization of new media or social media platforms as a means to enhance and disseminate their faith and spirituality. This encompassed engaging in daily contemplation and meditation on religious texts, such as the Word, as well as sharing various spiritual content like daily scriptures, Bible quotations, saints of the day, homilies, reflections, prayers, and participation in online Bible study sessions. Additionally, respondents disclosed their involvement in the digital dissemination of liturgical programs, sharing of Zoom links for church activities, and active participation in live-streamed prayers, Masses, and spiritual retreats.

The respondents further expressed their commitment to online platforms for the purpose of reading spiritual messages, sharing personal testimonies, and recounting life experiences. This digital engagement extended to the organization of church gatherings and retreats through virtual channels. The act of sharing religious content, such as scriptures, novenas, church programs, and church songs, was a common practice across multiple media platforms, including WhatsApp groups.

**Conclusion**

The overwhelming majority of respondents engaging with social media for faith-related matters suggest a pronounced influence of these platforms in shaping religious and spiritual discourse. Further qualitative investigation into the 23 respondents who refrain from social media engagement may reveal valuable insights. The findings of this

research indicate a pervasive use of social media for matters of faith and spirituality among the surveyed individuals.

#### **4.4 Which Social Media Sites Do You Consider More Important in Faith Sharing?**

The survey participants highlighted various platforms integral to their religious practices and evangelization efforts. These included Uganda Catholics Online, Vatican News, WhatsApp, television, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, church-specific WhatsApp groups, Zoom, Twitter, Chrome, radios like Radio Maria, Daily Reflections, Catholic Faith Media, Laudete App, and dedicated church websites. Additionally, respondents emphasized the significance of live streaming Mass, universities, podcasts, Google, emails, various Catholic media channels, Bible study, Creighton University's daily reflections, and platforms such as Google Meet, EWTN, Catholic Beginner, Hallow, Divine UK, and Koinonia Global.

The respondents acknowledged that while each platform is valuable for evangelism, the distinction lies in effective management and creativity in content dissemination. The prevailing sentiment was that all media sites are crucial for spreading the teachings of Jesus, and a comprehensive approach across diverse platforms is necessary to reach a wide audience.

In conclusion, the data underscores the diverse and expansive nature of modern media use in the context of religious outreach and evangelization. The research suggests that inclusivity across various platforms, with a strategic focus on those popular among young individuals, is essential for effectively sharing the message of faith. The emphasis on creativity and management highlights the need for a nuanced and adaptable approach to engage diverse audiences across different mediums.

#### **4.5 In What Ways Do You Think the Church in Uganda has Used New Media to Reach Out to Young People?**

A survey exploring the integration of new media in Uganda's Catholic Church reveals several effective strategies in youth evangelization, showcasing how digital tools have enhanced outreach and engagement among young people. Respondents highlighted numerous successes, reflecting a proactive shift toward more dynamic, accessible, and youth-centered faith practices. This growing embrace of new media reflects the Church's recognition of the digital age's impact on young lives, fostering a more connected and vibrant faith community. Below are key insights from the survey,

demonstrating how new media is being utilized to effectively reach and resonate with Uganda's youth.

### **Embracing Social Media Platforms for Youth Engagement**

In Uganda, many Catholic parishes are increasingly adopting social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and, to a lesser extent, Twitter and Instagram, to strengthen their connection with young people. Respondents highlighted that WhatsApp groups play a key role in organizing prayer meetings, sharing scripture, and discussing upcoming events, creating a vibrant space for youth interaction. Facebook pages and groups further expand this reach, providing updates and inspirational content that appeals to a wider audience. YouTube has also become a valuable tool, allowing parishes to live-stream Mass and share sermon recordings, enabling young people to engage with services virtually when they can't attend in person.

### **Positive Attitudes Toward Digital Evangelization**

Many pastoral agents, youth leaders, and some clergy in Uganda, are increasingly embracing digital tools for evangelization, recognizing their potential to connect with youth in the online spaces where they are most active. Survey findings show a growing acknowledgment that social media can nurture spiritual growth, with youth ministers and clergy proactively using platforms to provide faith-centered support, answer questions, and encourage meaningful discussions. This positive shift helps bridge the gap between traditional church teachings and the digital environment of today's youth. A prominent example is Fr. Kiibi Deogratius, whose TikTok sermons and spiritual talks are widely shared, inspiring many to participate in digital evangelization. Numerous young priests and youth leaders also contribute actively by sharing spiritual content, which encourages their peers to engage and lead in faith-based discussions online.

### **Youth Involvement and Empowerment in Digital Media**

The survey highlights that many Ugandan parishes are empowering young people to take active roles in managing the Church's digital presence, allowing them to lead in content creation and social media engagement. By involving youth directly, the Church taps into their digital skills and creativity, making online content more relatable and engaging for their peers. Young people often bring fresh perspectives, designing youth-centered content that presents the Church's messages in a modern, accessible way. This

approach not only strengthens the Church's digital outreach but also fosters a deeper sense of commitment and ownership among young Catholics, enhancing their connection to their faith community in Uganda.

### **Innovative Approaches to Catechism and Evangelization**

Survey participants highlighted the Church's innovative use of new media to enhance catechism and evangelization, especially among Uganda's youth. Through platforms like online Bible study programs, the Church has been able to educate young people on Catholic doctrine while correcting misinformation and misconceptions. Dedicated social media groups, such as Catholic Apologetics, Catholic Faith Defenders, Divine Mercy Family, and Uganda Catholics Online, have gained recognition for their effectiveness in promoting faith formation and creating vibrant youth engagement.

Respondents acknowledged the proactive role of the Uganda National Catholic Council of Lay Apostolate (UNCCLA) in organizing online Zoom sessions, seminars, retreats, and virtual crusades to nurture young Catholics' spiritual growth. These groups offer safe spaces for peer support, spiritual discussions, and community building, with youth leaders and clergy moderating the conversations to keep them focused and constructive. Beyond social media, some Catholic organizations have also established dedicated online forums for deeper discussions on theological questions, moral issues, and practical challenges of living out Catholic values. These forums allow youth to engage thoughtfully with their faith, ask challenging questions, and receive guidance from experienced Church members. Through this integrated approach, the Church in Uganda is providing a dynamic, supportive environment for young Catholics to explore and strengthen their faith.

### **Media creation and UCTV**

The establishment of Catholic media outlets, particularly Uganda Catholic Television (UCTV), has significantly impacted the Church's outreach and engagement efforts. Survey respondents acknowledged UCTV's role in capturing and broadcasting church events online, making them accessible to a broader audience. This initiative not only archives important church events for future reference but also provides a continuous stream of spiritual content tailored for both young and adult viewers. By utilizing UCTV, the Church enhances its ability to reach and inspire its congregation, fostering a deeper connection to faith through diverse media offerings.

### **Promotion of Church Events Through Digital Media**

Respondents highlighted that the Church in Uganda has effectively leveraged social media to promote major events that resonate with young people, such as the Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations, youth conferences, overnight prayer vigils, and annual faith retreats. By advertising these events on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, the Church reaches a wide youth audience, making it easy for them to stay informed and excited about upcoming gatherings. Respondents particularly noted how online promotions for the Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations, a deeply significant national event, generate strong interest and encourage participation among youth across the country. This dynamic outreach fosters a sense of excitement, community, and connection, inspiring more young people to take part in Church programs and deepen their faith.

### **Promoting the Church Music Industry Through Social Media**

In Uganda, the Church is actively leveraging social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok to promote its Christian music industry and spiritual activities. By encouraging young people to use these platforms for sharing the gospel, praising, worshiping, and connecting with others, the Church fosters an interactive and engaging environment for spiritual expression. This initiative enables youth to enjoy Church music that accompanies sharing the Word of God, participating in prayer, and conducting online prayer meetings, significantly contributing to their spiritual growth and deepening their connection to the Church and their faith.

### **Online Bible Study Groups: Fostering Community and Shared Learning**

Respondents noted that several churches in Uganda have successfully organized online Bible study groups using platforms like Zoom, Facebook, and WhatsApp. These virtual gatherings have created an inclusive space where youth from various regions can come together to engage in Bible study quizzes and discussions. Participants expressed appreciation for the flexibility and accessibility these online groups provide, allowing them to connect with peers and deepen their understanding of scripture regardless of geographical barriers. The interactive nature of these sessions fosters a strong sense of community and shared learning, helping to strengthen their faith and build lasting relationships within the Church.

### **Online Fundraising and Volunteering Platforms**

Respondents highlighted that churches in Uganda have increasingly adopted online platforms for fundraising and volunteering, significantly enhancing youth involvement in church activities. Many young people expressed enthusiasm for this shift, noting that digital fundraising initiatives make it easier for them to contribute financially, even if they cannot attend services in person. Platforms like GoFundMe and local mobile money applications enable youth to support various church projects, such as community outreach programs, youth events, and church maintenance, all from the convenience of their phones.

Moreover, respondents shared that these online platforms have streamlined the volunteering process, allowing them to sign up for church activities and community service projects with just a few clicks. Many appreciated the flexibility of participating remotely or through virtual events, making it possible for them to engage meaningfully in church initiatives despite busy schedules.

Overall, respondents feel that these innovations not only facilitate financial contributions and volunteerism but also strengthen their sense of belonging and commitment to their church community, demonstrating the positive impact of integrating technology into church operations.

### **Church's Digital Outreach During the Pandemic**

Survey participants highlighted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Uganda's Catholic Church effectively used social media to reach out and support its members, demonstrating an essential integration of new media for community outreach. Through live-streamed Masses, online prayer sessions, and daily reflections shared across platforms, the Church provided continuous access to worship and spiritual guidance. Participants noted that these efforts allowed them to engage with faith despite lockdowns, fostering a sense of belonging and hope during difficult times.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Catholic Church in Uganda has made significant strides in utilizing new media to engage with young people, reflecting a growing awareness of the digital landscape's importance in evangelization. Through the embrace of social media platforms, the Church has created spaces for dialogue, community building, and youth empowerment. Innovative approaches to catechism and evangelization, alongside

initiatives like Uganda Catholic Television, have further enriched the Church's outreach efforts. The adaptation during the pandemic, including virtual services and online Bible study groups, highlighted the Church's commitment to staying connected with youth. Overall, these efforts illustrate a proactive response to the needs of younger generations, fostering a more inclusive and vibrant Church community in the digital age.

#### **4.6 How Do You Think the Church in Uganda has Failed to Use New Media to Reach Out to Youths Effectively?**

Here are responses from the online survey highlighting what participants identify as integration failures in the Catholic Church's use of new media to reach youth effectively in Uganda. The points below summarize the challenges noted by participants, underscoring the Church's need for a more engaging, relevant, and adaptive approach to digital evangelization.

##### **Over-reliance on Traditional Media**

From the survey, several respondents noted that the Catholic Church in Uganda relies too much on traditional media, which they see as limiting its outreach on the youth. Many respondents highlighted that while radio and television broadcasts have been longstanding tools for religious programming, they tend to cater to an older audience and lack the interactive and dynamic qualities that are crucial for engaging young people. Specifically, several young Ugandan respondents pointed out that televised and radio-broadcasted masses and events are not as appealing or relatable to their generation, who are increasingly inclined toward platforms that allow for active participation, real-time engagement, and a sense of community that traditional media often lacks.

One respondent emphasized that "the church often focuses on radio and TV programs that are more suited to older people." This observation highlights a gap in the Church's digital strategy, as it suggests that the Church's messaging is not reaching youth in spaces where they naturally congregate and interact online. Another respondent noted that "the Church's digital content, when available, is not differentiated from its TV and radio broadcasts," implying that simply transferring content from traditional to digital formats does not create the engaging, youth-oriented experience they desire.

Furthermore, some respondents argued that the Church's preference for radio and print media reflects an underutilization of new media formats, such as interactive social media campaigns, online discussions, and livestreamed events, which would allow

youth to participate more actively in their faith. In Uganda, where social media platforms are widely used by young people for information and social interaction, the Church's limited online presence leaves a gap that other, often secular, influences readily fill. For instance, a respondent explained that "many youths end up turning to secular social media influencers and YouTube personalities for guidance and entertainment because the Church lacks a similar digital presence."

Additionally, participants observed that the Church's focus on traditional media leads to missed opportunities for reaching marginalized or rural youth who may have limited access to radios and televisions but can sometimes access mobile data for online activities. As one respondent stated, "even in rural areas, young people can access social media on their phones, but the Church is not present there, so these youths feel left out." This comment illustrates that young Ugandans, regardless of location, are increasingly connected online, and the Church's traditional media-heavy approach does not meet the needs of this demographic.

In conclusion, survey responses reflect a clear sentiment that the Catholic Church in Uganda could enhance its youth evangelization efforts by shifting from an over-reliance on traditional media to a more balanced strategy that incorporates social media, interactive platforms, and digital engagement. Such a shift would not only make Church messages more accessible and appealing to youth but also enable a more participatory and community-driven approach that aligns with the preferences and communication habits of today's younger generation.

### **The Catholic Church's Slow Response to Media**

Survey responses indicate that the Catholic Church in Uganda has been slow to adapt to digital media, especially compared to mainstream and Pentecostal churches that have embraced a strong, organized media presence. Respondents noted that while other churches in Uganda frequently use TV stations, online streams, and interactive social media platforms to engage followers, the Catholic Church's online presence is sparse and lacks cohesion. This has limited the Church's ability to effectively reach young Ugandans who are highly active on digital platforms. Many respondents pointed out that Catholic content shared online is often done at an individual level, with no official or consistent presence from the Church's organizational structure. As a result, this fragmented approach weakens the Church's ability to maintain influence and relevance in Uganda's growing digital landscape.

The absence of a coordinated digital strategy has allowed other religious narratives and secular voices to dominate the online space, further reducing the Church's visibility among youth. Respondents highlighted that unlike the Catholic Church, other churches use media creatively to announce activities, respond to societal issues, and engage youth on relevant topics, fostering a stronger connection. The lack of routine, centralized social media engagement from the Catholic Church diminishes opportunities for youth engagement and makes it difficult for young Ugandans to look to the Church for guidance online. By adopting a more strategic, proactive approach to new media, the Catholic Church in Uganda could greatly expand its digital outreach, reinforcing its spiritual leadership and ensuring its messages resonate with a digitally connected generation.

### **Ignorance Among Church Leaders**

Survey responses indicate that a considerable number of Catholic Church leaders in Uganda have not yet recognized the importance of new media. Many priests, catechists, and lay leaders underestimate the influence and reach of digital platforms for communicating the Gospel, which has limited the Church's ability to connect with youth in spaces where they naturally spend time. Respondents pointed out that church leaders' lack of familiarity with the role of social media has led to an oversight of the opportunities available through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, where Ugandan youth frequently turn for information and community. This lack of awareness has, in effect, distanced Church leaders from effectively contributing to the spiritual lives of young people who seek engagement and interaction online.

Moreover, the absence of encouragement or initiative from church leadership to embrace digital outreach contributes to the Church's minimal presence on these platforms.

### **Digital Literacy Gaps**

The survey uncovered that the Catholic Church in Uganda has not made sufficient efforts to promote digital literacy within its congregation, affecting both older members and some youth who lack the skills to fully engage with online platforms. While digital tools have become essential for communication, outreach, and community building, the Church's minimal focus on digital literacy has limited its ability to create an integrated, digitally connected congregation. This lack of digital skills not only restricts their

engagement with the Church's online activities but also impedes their ability to access religious content and connect with fellow young Catholics.

Furthermore, the Church has yet to establish any substantial initiatives aimed at fostering digital literacy across all age groups, an oversight that impacts its mission to reach diverse audiences effectively. Respondents pointed out that while some other organizations or community groups provide basic digital training, there has been little effort from the Church to educate congregants on how to use social media, participate in livestream services, or receive updates online. For instance, one respondent noted, "My parish started livestreaming Masses during the Pandemic, but many people, including some younger members, did not know how to access it because no guidance has been given." By not addressing digital literacy challenges across age groups, the Church has limited the reach of its online presence, missing an opportunity to build a well-integrated, digitally empowered community. Promoting digital skills among both youth and older congregants could significantly enhance the Church's outreach, allowing it to engage more inclusively and effectively in the digital space.

### **Rigidity to Adjust to the Latest Trends**

The study reveals that many churches are still traditional and face challenges in adapting to new technology. They show low technological progress, with many parishes or dioceses lacking websites or social accounts. Some are just starting to consider opening social platforms, but there are no specific channels to follow, and many churches rarely update their social sites or websites. This rigidity hinders the church's ability to stay competitive in reaching out to youngsters in the digital age.

### **Limited Innovative Approaches**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has demonstrated limited innovative approaches to engaging with the youth through new media, which hampers its effectiveness in evangelization. For instance, many churches continue to use standard sermon formats for online services, lacking the dynamic presentation styles or multimedia elements that could capture the attention of a tech-savvy audience.

Additionally, the Church has not taken advantage of popular trends in youth culture, such as the use of short videos, memes, or interactive content that could make faith-related discussions more appealing. One respondent highlighted this gap, stating, "It

would be great if the Church could create fun, engaging videos or use social media challenges to share messages of hope and faith.”

The lack of creativity in the Church’s approach to utilizing new media not only diminishes the relevance of its messages but also risks alienating younger generations who are increasingly looking for engaging and relatable content online. By failing to innovate and adapt to contemporary communication styles, the Church is missing valuable opportunities to encounter them and accompany them well in their spiritual journeys. Embracing creative strategies and formats could revitalize the Church's outreach efforts and foster a more engaging and interactive faith community.

### **Insufficient Investment in Media**

The Catholic Church in Uganda is experiencing a critical failure to invest adequately in media resources, which undermines its outreach and engagement efforts. While the Church has historically relied on volunteerism, this approach is insufficient for attracting and retaining youth, who increasingly seek paid opportunities for employment and sustenance. As a result, the Church's media presence is often limited and under-resourced.

Furthermore, social media platforms are frequently utilized more as bulletins than as dynamic mediums for engagement and interaction. While they serve the purpose of disseminating information, these platforms lack meaningful interaction among the faithful, reducing the opportunity for community building and genuine dialogue. One respondent noted, “Our church posts announcements online, but there’s no real conversation happening. It feels one-sided.” Without a commitment to investing in media tools and strategies, the Church risks falling further behind in its mission to reach and connect with the youth in an increasingly digital world.

### **Absence of Dedicated Social Media Management**

The Catholic Church in Uganda faces a significant challenge due to the lack of dedicated personnel to manage its social media pages effectively. Respondents noted that the majority of parishes and dioceses do not maintain active websites or social media accounts, severely limiting their digital presence and outreach. In cases where churches do have online profiles, these are often inconsistently updated or lack engaging, youth-oriented content, making it difficult for young Ugandans to connect with the Church online. One respondent pointed out, “Our parish has a Facebook page

and a website but it does not update them. There is nothing new to keep young people interested.” This absence hampers the Church's ability to utilize these platforms for evangelization and outreach to the youth.

Furthermore, the Church has not actively advocated for the freedom of social media use, particularly when governmental restrictions threaten online expression. Instead, social media has been used for purposes that diverge from its intended evangelistic mission, with some leaders soliciting funds for personal business ventures and others misusing these platforms to criticize other religions. Moreover, many church leaders active on social media often prioritize political commentary or humor over spiritual discourse, which can dilute the core message of faith. Another respondent observed, “It’s disappointing to see some leaders being more political or entertaining than sharing the Gospel.” This misalignment of focus not only detracts from the Church’s evangelization efforts but also risks alienating young people who are seeking authentic spiritual engagement. Without a strategic and dedicated approach to social media management, the Church cannot fully harness the potential of these platforms to foster community and effectively spread its message.

### **Lack of Youth Engagement in Church Media**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has made insufficient efforts to reach out to and mobilize youth, resulting in their limited involvement in operating the Church's media platforms. This poor mobilization leaves young people feeling disconnected and underrepresented in Church communications. Currently, there is hardly a dedicated space on social media where youth-specific issues are addressed, further alienating this demographic. Respondents noted that the Church’s discipleship models in the media realm are lacking, and its slow response to contemporary youth challenges exacerbates the disconnect. Additionally, one respondent remarked, “We want to be part of the Church’s voice online, but there is sometimes no real effort to include us.” By not prioritizing youth involvement in its media strategies, the Church risks losing a younger generation that could contribute to and enrich the faith community.

### **Ignoring Contemporary Youth Issues**

Survey insights indicate that the Catholic Church in Uganda has made limited efforts to engage with contemporary issues that resonate strongly with young people, adversely affecting its effectiveness in reaching and connecting with youth in the digital age.

Respondents noted that many parishes and dioceses are not addressing topics such as relationships, mental health, poverty, and career development, and other critical issues—such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and gender equality—are also noticeably absent from Church-led discussions. These topics are particularly relevant to today’s youth, who are increasingly aware of and vocal about these challenges, often utilizing digital platforms to discuss and advocate for change. The Church’s lack of dialogue on these significant issues has led to a perceived disconnect, creating a gap between its teachings and the lived experiences of young Ugandans.

This absence of engagement with relevant contemporary issues reflects a broader integration failure, as the Church’s digital and social media presence often lacks the relevance needed to engage youth in meaningful ways.

### **Perception of Social Media as Evil**

According to survey feedback, a significant portion of church leaders and members in Uganda view social media with deep skepticism, often perceiving it as a potentially harmful or “evil” influence. This perception stems from concerns that the extensive range of content on social media could expose users, particularly youth, to ideas and values that conflict with the Church’s teachings, potentially weakening their moral foundation. Respondents noted that some leaders fear that by engaging with social media, young congregants may encounter content promoting materialism, secularism, or other influences that could detract from their faith.

This cautious stance has created a barrier to using digital media for youth evangelization within the Church, as leaders are hesitant to fully embrace it. According to respondents, this skepticism has led some parishes to avoid developing a social media presence altogether, limiting the Church’s ability to reach younger audiences in a relatable way. For instance, one respondent shared, “Our parish priest always discourages social media use among the youth, believing it can mislead them, rather than seeing it as a means to guide and inspire.” As a result, this perception has hindered the Church’s capacity to leverage social media’s potential as a modern platform for faith-based engagement and outreach.

### **Disconnect from Youth Culture**

Findings from the survey reveal a limited understanding of youth trends within the Catholic Church in Uganda, highlighting a significant failure to adapt communication

content to better resonate with young people. Many respondents noted that the Church's messaging often fails to reflect the interests, language, and cultural references of today's youth, rendering it less appealing and accessible.

This disconnect has created a barrier to effective engagement, as young people may feel alienated or unrepresented by the Church's messaging. One respondent expressed this concern, stating, "When some Church leaders talk about faith, it feels outdated or too abstract and does not connect with the realities we face daily. They need to use language and examples that we relate to." By failing to adapt its communication strategies to reflect the contemporary context of youth culture, the Church risks losing relevance and failing to establish meaningful connections with the younger generation in Uganda.

### **Gaps in Youth Interaction and Feedback Channels**

Respondents highlighted that the Catholic Church in Uganda lacks interactive platforms for youth to actively engage, share their perspectives, and discuss faith-related matters. They observed that while the Church uses digital media to broadcast messages, it rarely provides spaces for young people to voice their questions, thoughts, or challenges.

Additionally, respondents pointed out that the Church has no formal mechanisms to gather feedback from young people on its digital outreach. Without understanding the youth's preferences and ideas, the Church struggles to adapt its digital content and strategies to meet their needs effectively. Respondents suggested that by creating feedback channels—such as surveys, social media polls, or forums—the Church could regularly gather insights into youth perspectives and refine its outreach approach accordingly. This interactive approach would not only make young people feel heard and valued but would also allow the Church to remain relevant in the lives of Ugandan youth, who are seeking a Church that understands and engages with their realities.

### **Poor Marketing Strategies and Lack of Influencer Engagement**

Respondents noted that the Catholic Church in Uganda has not invested in effective marketing strategies to reach the youth on digital platforms, limiting awareness and engagement among young people. Rather than strategically advertising to capture attention, the Church relies on traditional posting, which has limited reach and fails to attract youth. One respondent mentioned, "The Church could do so much more if they advertised on the platforms we actually use" With targeted advertising and active

promotion, the Church could significantly enhance visibility and foster meaningful engagement with youth.

In addition, respondents observed that the Church has not leveraged local influencers or young leaders who could act as bridges between faith and popular culture, appealing directly to Ugandan youth. Youth engagement could be amplified by collaborating with prominent figures in music, sports, and social causes—individuals whom young people already admire and follow. Such partnerships remain unexplored, missing an opportunity to present faith messages in a relatable way through people youth trust and respect.

### **Failure to Address Digital Divide**

Respondents highlighted that the Catholic Church in Uganda has not made efforts to address the digital divide, which limits many young people's access to online content and, in turn, reduces the Church's outreach impact. While urban youth with internet access can engage with digital evangelization efforts, a significant portion of young people in rural areas or low-income communities do not afford to avail themselves with internet and digital gadgets. One respondent pointed out, "Most of us in rural areas rarely get to see any online posts from the Church because data is expensive, and internet connectivity is poor." This oversight creates an engagement gap, as rural youth are excluded from online initiatives, leaving them disconnected from the Church's digital message. By not prioritizing solutions to bridge this divide, such as offering offline faith resources or investing in localized digital access solutions, the Church misses an opportunity to reach a broader youth demographic across Uganda.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, survey responses reveal that the Catholic Church in Uganda faces significant challenges in leveraging new media to connect with youth. An over-reliance on traditional media, combined with a slow adaptation to digital trends, has limited its outreach. Limited digital literacy among church leaders, a lack of investment in innovative media strategies, insufficient social media management, and a disconnect from youth culture and interests have further weakened engagement. Additionally, the Church's failure to address pressing youth issues, perceptions of social media as harmful, and the lack of efforts to reduce the digital divide underscore the gaps in its digital evangelization efforts. Addressing these challenges is essential for the Church to

fully harness the potential of new media in reaching and inspiring Uganda's young generation.

#### **4.7 What Opportunities Do You See in Using New Media as Form of Youth Evangelization?**

##### **Opportunities of Using New Media for Youth Evangelization**

###### **Catalyst for Catechesis and Evangelism**

According to survey respondents, new media serves as a catalyst for catechesis and evangelization, particularly among tech-savvy Ugandan youth. With a strong interest in technology, young people are increasingly inclined toward digital platforms, making social media a promising avenue for catechetical instruction. The Church can leverage these platforms to deliver doctrinally sound teachings, provide accessible resources, and clarify questions about faith. Wisely curated content—ranging from short videos and infographics to in-depth articles and interactive Q&As—enables young Ugandans to deepen their understanding of the Church doctrine and faith in a way that is engaging, contemporary, and responsive to their spiritual needs. This digital approach not only builds a solid foundation for faith but also aligns with youth preferences, encouraging them to engage more actively with religious education.

Moreover, social media facilitates the Church's reach beyond traditional teaching channels, engaging young people who might otherwise be inaccessible due to geographical, cultural, or logistical barriers. Through catechetical content on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, the Church can connect with youth in diverse and remote settings, potentially fostering interest in Christianity and promoting conversions. Thus, by embracing new media, the Church not only expands its catechetical outreach but also cultivates a vibrant, inclusive space for spiritual growth and evangelization among Uganda's youth.

###### **Easy Reach to a Big Population of Youth**

Survey respondents emphasized the significant potential of new media to reach a great number youth, making it an effective platform for evangelization. Unlike traditional sermons delivered within the confines of a physical church, social media can transcend geographic, cultural, and social boundaries, enabling religious messages to reach young people simultaneously across the country. This broad reach not only maximizes exposure to spiritual content but also allows for messages with enduring impact, as

online content can be revisited, shared, and preserved long after its initial release. By capitalizing on the extensive coverage and accessibility of social media, the Church can build a sustained digital presence that continues to influence and inspire beyond the limitations of physical gatherings.

Additionally, social media's ubiquity among Ugandan youth enhances its effectiveness as a tool for evangelization. With the majority of young people spending considerable time on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and a substantial number owning smartphones, social media is naturally embedded into their daily routines. This integration means that youth feel at ease engaging with spiritual content on these platforms, where they are already active participants. Respondents further noted that the familiarity and comfort associated with social media foster a welcoming environment, allowing the Church to reach youth on a personal level, effectively sharing teachings and values in a medium that resonates with their lifestyles. Thus, the widespread use and comfort with social media among young people position it as a crucial avenue for the Church's outreach efforts, facilitating a broad, inclusive, and enduring form of evangelization in Uganda.

### **Enhancing Creativity**

Survey respondents highlighted creativity as a distinct advantage of using new media for youth evangelization in Uganda. They observed that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube encourage innovative and engaging ways of sharing religious messages, which resonate well with young people. Respondents emphasized that creative expressions make complex teachings more accessible and relevant, transforming abstract spiritual concepts into visually engaging and easily digestible content.

Additionally, the respondents noted that new media allows youth to take active roles in creating and sharing faith-based content, fostering a peer-driven approach to evangelization. Through this participatory engagement, youth become not only recipients of religious teachings but also contributors, using their creativity to communicate faith in a language that resonates with their peers. This dynamic approach, as respondents observed, not only enhances engagement but also revitalizes the practice of evangelization, making it more appealing and effective for today's generation.

### **Enhancing Youth Education and Guidance**

Survey respondents emphasized that the use of new media for evangelization in Uganda could significantly enhance educational resources, providing vital education and guidance to youth in their spiritual journeys. They noted that digital platforms allow for the dissemination of a wide range of educational content, including Bible studies, catechetical materials, and theological discussions, which are easily accessible to young people.

For example, a virtual seminar on contemporary ethical issues from a Christian perspective could attract participants from across Uganda, allowing them to discuss and seek guidance on relevant challenges they face in their daily lives. Overall, respondents underscored that new media not only broadens the availability of educational resources but also fosters a collaborative learning environment where Ugandan youth can grow in their faith and find support in navigating their spiritual journeys.

### **Cost-Effective Evangelization**

Respondents identified new media as a cost-effective means of youth evangelization, offering a financially viable alternative to traditional methods. The widespread ownership of smartphones and digital devices among young people significantly lowers the financial burden on the Church, eliminating the need to invest in physical outreach resources. With data prices gradually becoming more affordable, young Ugandans increasingly have internet access, enabling the Church to disseminate its teachings at a fraction of the cost compared to traditional methods.

### **Peer-to-Peer Evangelization**

According to survey respondents, peer-to-peer evangelization through new media offers a powerful, innovative approach to youth outreach in Uganda. Involving young people directly in managing and disseminating religious content fosters a sense of ownership, allowing for more creative, relatable evangelization strategies tailored to their peers' interests and preferences. By leveraging their unique perspectives and communication styles, young people can reach others in ways that traditional church channels may not, making evangelization more engaging and relevant to today's youth culture.

Furthermore, social media creates a networked environment where youth can form new connections that reinforce spiritual growth and a sense of community. These digital spaces foster friendships that often extend beyond faith, supporting young Ugandans in

areas like social connection, financial empowerment, and mutual encouragement. This peer-driven model of evangelization strengthens bonds within the youth community, as individuals uplift one another in meaningful ways—financially, socially, and spiritually. As respondents highlight, this collaborative model not only amplifies evangelization efforts but also builds a supportive community aligned with shared values, making new media an invaluable tool for youth empowerment and spiritual enrichment in Uganda.

### **Accessibility and Flexibility**

According to survey respondents, new media enhances the Church's mission of evangelization by offering unparalleled accessibility and flexibility, making it a valuable tool for engaging youth in Uganda. Unlike physical church services, which are constrained by factors such as weather, location, and time, digital platforms can be accessed anytime and anywhere, provided there is internet connectivity. This flexibility allows youth to interact with faith-based content on their own schedules, accommodating their varied responsibilities and routines. Respondents highlighted that this “always-on” nature of new media creates opportunities for continuous spiritual engagement, as content remains available around the clock.

Furthermore, the ability to download and revisit religious content represents a unique advantage of new media over physical services, which occur only once and cannot be revisited without additional resources. Social media and other digital platforms allow youth to engage with sermons, teachings, and other spiritual materials multiple times, fostering a deeper understanding and reflection. Consequently, new media not only broadens the Church's outreach but also enhances the quality of engagement by enabling flexible, self-directed interaction with spiritual content. Respondents thus underscore new media as an essential extension of the Church's evangelization mission, adapting to the needs and realities of Uganda's youth.

### **Overcoming Geographical Barriers**

Respondents identified overcoming geographical barriers as a significant benefit of using new media for youth evangelization. They emphasized that digital platforms enable the Church to reach young people in remote or underserved areas who might otherwise lack access to traditional forms of ministry. This expanded outreach allows for a more inclusive approach, ensuring that youth from diverse backgrounds and

locations can engage with the Church's teachings and activities, regardless of their physical distance from a church building.

Additionally, participants noted that new media facilitates connections among youth across different regions, fostering a sense of community that transcends geographical limitations. Through online forums, social media groups, and virtual events, young people can interact, share experiences, and support one another in their faith journeys, regardless of their physical locations. This ability to connect with peers and mentors from various backgrounds enhances their spiritual growth and reinforces the idea that they are part of a larger, global faith community. Overall, respondents highlighted that leveraging new media not only broadens the Church's reach but also enriches the spiritual lives of youth by creating opportunities for engagement that are not confined by geographical boundaries.

### **Source of Inspiration and Spiritual Nourishment**

Survey respondents underscored social media tailored to evangelization as a significant source of inspiration and spiritual nourishment for young people. Platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Tiktok, Twitter, Instagram could provide a continuous stream of religious and spiritual content that reaches youth across the country, offering them motivation and encouragement in their daily lives. By sharing sermons, motivational quotes, testimonies, and practical spiritual guidance, religious organizations and individuals are able to foster spiritual transformation within youth. This digital access to faith-based messages enables young people to maintain a consistent connection with their beliefs, making spiritual engagement a regular part of their social media experience. Such readily available content contributes to a positive spiritual environment, offering solace, hope, and direction, even amid life's challenges.

Furthermore, social media allows for a personalized and immediate impact on youth, amplifying the Church's influence in their spiritual journey. Respondents reported that inspiring messages shared online have influenced their outlook on life, enhanced their resilience, and strengthened their moral convictions. Through encouraging and relatable messages, social media platforms provide a sense of community and emotional support that resonates with young people. This medium thus enables the Church to reach youth at a personal level, supporting their spiritual growth while also addressing the unique social and psychological needs of young people in Uganda. Consequently, social media

emerges not only as a tool for outreach but as a continuous source of spiritual sustenance, offering youth guidance and encouragement on a day-to-day basis.

### **Engaging Youth with Instant Communication**

Study participants indicated that social media plays a crucial role in providing real-time updates and information about youth activities within the Church. Youth pastors can leverage new media to keep young congregants informed and engaged, ensuring they are aware of upcoming events, activities, and pertinent information related to their spiritual community. The instantaneous nature of digital communication facilitates the rapid dissemination of important announcements, allowing for timely updates regarding religious activities, retreats, and conferences. This swift circulation of information not only enhances engagement but also fosters a sense of belonging among youth, as they remain connected to the Church's initiatives.

Additionally, participants emphasized that social media serves as an effective platform for advertising youth projects and events. The ease and speed with which information can be shared make it simpler to mobilize young people for various activities, including charitable initiatives and community outreach. By utilizing digital platforms, the Church can promote youth events and gatherings efficiently, ensuring that participants are well-informed and prepared to engage actively.

### **Attraction to Youth**

Study participants noted that digital media is an effective tool for capturing the attention of young people, making it highly relevant for youth evangelization. Respondents pointed out that millennials and Generation Z are not only active users of new media but also have a great level of familiarity and proficiency with it. This technological adeptness means that young people are particularly drawn to engaging content that incorporates music, audio, and visual elements, which are proven to be more captivating than traditional formats. With effective mobilization strategies, the Church can leverage these media forms to minister to youth more effectively than ever before, fostering deeper connections with their faith.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted that social media and digital technology offer additional benefits beyond engagement; they can also provide employment chances for youth skilled in these areas. As the Church embraces digital platforms for evangelization, it opens avenues for youth to apply their technical knowledge and

creativity in meaningful ways, potentially leading to employment in digital ministry or related fields. This dual appeal of attraction and opportunity makes social media an essential component of contemporary youth evangelization efforts.

### **Providing Digital Pastoral Care and Support during crisis times**

Survey respondents indicated that new media has become an essential tool for providing pastoral care and support during crisis times, particularly when physical gatherings are restricted. They emphasized that digital platforms enable the Church to offer virtual counseling sessions, online prayer groups, and support networks that address various needs, ensuring that individuals receive the spiritual and emotional assistance they require, even from a distance. This adaptability allows the Church to maintain a vital connection with its members during challenging times.

Respondents highlighted the significant role that live-streaming services and events played during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing congregants to participate in worship from their homes. Many individuals turned to platforms like YouTube, Zoom, and Facebook to attend mass and engage in religious activities, experiencing a sense of belonging and spiritual nourishment even while isolated. This shift not only enabled the Church to continue its mission but also provided a lifeline for many, allowing them to connect with their faith and community in unprecedented ways.

### **Building and Strengthening Community**

Survey respondents in Uganda highlighted the vital role of social media in fostering online faith communities, underscoring its importance in community building within the context of evangelization. Social media and messaging platforms enable young people to gather, discuss, and nurture their faith collaboratively, providing spaces where they can connect with others who share similar beliefs and values. These virtual communities allow for peer support, prayer groups, and mentorship that extend across vast distances, overcoming the physical limitations that might otherwise prevent such engagement. Respondents noted that by facilitating discussions, sharing spiritual resources, and supporting one another in their journeys, these platforms contribute to a stronger, more resilient faith community that transcends traditional church boundaries.

### **Feedback and Engagement Metrics**

Respondents underscored the importance of feedback and engagement metrics offered by digital platforms in enhancing youth ministry. They noted that these analytics provide youth pastors with valuable insights into engagement levels, enabling them to measure participation and understand the specific interests and preferences of young congregants. This data-driven approach allows religious leaders to tailor their outreach and messaging to better align with the needs and expectations of the youth, fostering a more effective ministry.

Moreover, the immediate feedback facilitated by technology encourages a two-way dialogue between religious leaders and young people. This dynamic interaction allows pastors to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns, questions, and perspectives that youth bring to their faith journeys. Ultimately, participants emphasized that leveraging analytics and feedback mechanisms enhances engagement and cultivates a more responsive and inclusive church environment, empowering youth to actively participate in their spiritual development.

### **Social Media as a Tool for Vocations Promotion**

Study participants highlighted that social media plays a crucial role in promoting vocations to religious life and the priesthood, offering expansive outreach and interactive engagement that traditional methods may lack. Respondents emphasized that these platforms provide unique opportunities for personal storytelling, allowing religious individuals to share their journeys and experiences in a relatable manner. By showcasing the diverse and modern aspects of religious life, social media helps demystify the discernment process, making it more accessible and understandable for young people contemplating a vocation.

Moreover, social media engagement with vocation aspirants allows for real-time questions, discussions, and encouragement, further inspiring youth to explore their spiritual calling. By leveraging the power of digital platforms, the Church can connect with younger audiences in ways that resonate with their lifestyles, ultimately making the idea of pursuing a vocation more inviting and attainable. As respondents noted, this innovative approach not only raises awareness of religious vocations but also actively engages youth in meaningful conversations about their faith and potential paths within it.

### **Encouraging Inclusivity**

Respondents identified inclusivity as a significant advantage of using new media in church evangelization. Digital platforms offer accessibility features such as subtitles, screen readers, and audio content, enabling people with hearing, visual, or mobility impairments to engage fully in spiritual activities and community events. This inclusivity broadens the Church's reach, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of physical limitations, have equal opportunities for participation, spiritual growth, and connection within the faith community.

### **Conclusion**

The use of new media into youth evangelization offers a wealth of opportunities for enhancing faith formation and engagement. By being cost-effective and flexible, new media enables peer-to-peer evangelization and provides essential accessibility to spiritual resources. Social media can be used to promote inspiration, educational guidance, and creative expression, making it particularly appealing to young people. It facilitates meaningful connections across geographical boundaries, supports the Church during crises, promotes vocations, and encourages inclusivity.

### **4.8 What Are the Challenges of Using the New Media as a Form of Youth Evangelization?**

Survey respondents in Uganda highlighted various challenges associated with using new media as a tool for youth evangelization. These include the following:

#### **Reduction in Physical Church Attendance**

Respondents expressed concern that digital engagement could lead to a decline in physical church attendance among youth, as the convenience of online access might discourage in-person participation. They noted that relying solely on digital interactions may weaken the sense of community and diminish the personal connections fostered within the Church.

Furthermore, evangelization through new media can promote laziness among the youth. Many respondents observed that attending Masses or services online during the COVID-19 pandemic made some congregation members reluctant to return to physical church services. This reliance on online attendance reduces physical interaction and the personal connection with church leaders and fellow believers.

In their view, the physical presence in worship and communal gatherings is vital for deepening spiritual bonds and fostering a sense of belonging, which may be compromised if youth increasingly opt for virtual engagement over attending services and Church activities in person.

### **Exposure to Misinformation and Fake News**

Respondents expressed concerns about misinformation and fake news spread through social media, which can distort or undermine authentic religious teachings. In the Ugandan context, where internet usage among youth has surged, respondents noted that unverified or misleading information often circulates rapidly on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok. This misinformation may include distorted interpretations of religious doctrines, sensationalized stories about religious figures, or even politically biased narratives that falsely attribute statements to Church leaders. Such content can create confusion among young people about authentic Catholic teachings and values, and, without guidance, youth may struggle to discern reliable sources from unreliable ones. Respondents emphasized the need for careful monitoring and digital literacy education within the Church's youth ministry to help young people navigate online information responsibly and maintain a clear understanding of their faith.

### **The Concern About Digital Divide**

Study participants highlighted digital divide as a significant challenge to digital evangelization in Uganda, pointing out that access to new media platforms remains uneven across the country. They revealed that disparities in internet connectivity, the availability of devices, and levels of digital literacy particularly affect rural areas, where many young people lack the resources to engage with online content fully. This uneven access restricts the Church's ability to reach all youth equally, leaving some isolated from evangelistic efforts that are primarily conducted through digital channels. Participants emphasized that, without broader digital inclusion, many young people may be left out of essential faith-building activities, potentially widening the gap between urban and rural youth in terms of spiritual development and community participation.

## **Addiction**

The study revealed that social media can become highly addictive, often consuming a substantial amount of time that could otherwise be devoted to spiritual practices. Some participants admitted that they spend more time on their phones than in prayer, which, they observed, can lead to spiritual negligence and a weakened connection with their faith. The allure of constant updates, notifications, and interactive content may divert attention from personal reflection and prayer, potentially diminishing the focus on spiritual growth and discipline that in-person faith practices encourage. Respondents emphasized that while digital engagement offers valuable opportunities, it also poses the risk of shifting priorities away from essential spiritual activities.

## **Affects Sacramental Life of the Church**

Study participants pointed out that while digital platforms offer valuable tools for evangelization and engagement, they cannot fully substitute the in-person experience, especially when it comes to the sacraments, which are central to Catholic practice. The sacraments—such as the Eucharist, Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Anointing of the Sick—require direct, personal interaction and are traditionally administered within a physical church setting by a priest. Respondents noted that, without access to these sacraments, young people engaged primarily through digital platforms may miss out on essential aspects of Catholic spiritual life.

For instance, during times of online-only engagement, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, many youths were unable to receive the Eucharist, which Catholics consider a core element of spiritual nourishment and communion with God. Likewise, the sacrament of Reconciliation, which requires confession to a priest, cannot be conducted online due to its deeply personal and confidential nature. Respondents observed that, while digital platforms provide ways to teach and discuss these sacraments, they cannot replicate the unique grace and presence experienced in person. As a result, an exclusively digital approach to evangelization may unintentionally limit the fullness of spiritual experience and formation that the Church traditionally offers, underscoring the importance of balancing online engagement with opportunities for in-person sacramental participation.

## **Generational Gaps Pose Challenges**

Respondents identified generational gaps as a notable challenge in digital evangelization, particularly highlighting the disconnect between older Church leaders

and the younger generation in Uganda. While many youths are highly adept in the use of social media and digital communication, older clergy and church leaders may have limited experience with these technologies, resulting in difficulties in engaging effectively with young people online. Respondents noted that this generational divide can lead to communication barriers, as older leaders may struggle to use the informal, fast-paced, and visually oriented language that resonates with today's youth. For example, young people in Uganda often communicate in a blend of local languages, English, and slang on social media, whereas older leaders may be more accustomed to formal modes of communication that are less appealing to a younger audience. This gap not only hinders the Church's efforts to reach youth effectively but also risks creating a sense of disconnection or alienation, as young people may feel that their cultural and generational identity is not understood or valued within the Church's digital outreach.

### **Limited Digital Literacy**

Respondents viewed limited digital literacy among both youth and church leaders as a significant challenge that hampers effective engagement in evangelization efforts. Many young people, despite their familiarity with social media, may lack the deeper technical skills necessary to navigate more complex digital tools or platforms that could enhance their spiritual experience. Similarly, some church leaders may struggle with basic digital skills to manage online interactions, or utilize available resources for faith formation effectively. This lack of technical proficiency not only affects the quality of online outreach but also limits the Church's ability to engage meaningfully with its youth. For instance, respondents noted that when church leaders are unable to communicate effectively online, it can lead to missed opportunities for connection, mentorship, and guidance that are crucial for young people's spiritual growth. As a result, there is a pressing need for targeted training and resources to improve digital literacy within both youth and church leadership, enabling them to utilize new media more effectively in fostering community and faith.

### **Privacy and Security Concerns**

Privacy and security concerns emerged as significant issues among respondents, who highlighted the risks associated with young people engaging in the digital space. They pointed out that youth may inadvertently expose personal information, making them vulnerable to online exploitation and predatory behavior. The digital landscape is

fraught with potential threats, including hacking, cyber-attacks, and the spread of malicious viruses, which can compromise users' data and privacy. Respondents recounted specific incidents where hackers disrupted online church sessions by posting inappropriate content, creating an uncomfortable and unsafe environment for participants. Furthermore, they emphasized that the lack of stringent laws and rules regarding social media utilization in Uganda exacerbates these risks, as there are insufficient protections in place to safeguard users' privacy and security. This environment of uncertainty can deter young people from fully engaging in online faith communities, ultimately limiting the Church's ability to leverage new media effectively for evangelization. To address these challenges, respondents underscored the importance of implementing robust security measures and educating both youth and church leaders on safe online practices to enhance the overall security of digital evangelization efforts.

### **Cultural Resistance and Traditional Mindsets**

Respondents highlighted cultural resistance and traditional mindsets as significant obstacles to the effective use of new media in evangelization efforts within Uganda, particularly in rural and conservative communities. Many individuals in these areas may perceive digital platforms with skepticism, often viewing them as tools that could disrupt established social norms and religious practices. This skepticism is rooted in a deep respect for tradition and a preference for face-to-face interactions, which have long been the bedrock of community life and spiritual engagement. Participants noted that some community members believe that the use of social media and other digital technologies may lead to the erosion of family values, promote distractions, or even encourage behaviors contrary to cultural and religious teachings. This resistance is particularly pronounced among older generations, who may feel more comfortable with conventional methods of communication and pastoral care. Respondents emphasized the need for education and awareness-raising initiatives to bridge this cultural divide, demonstrating how new media can be harmonized with, rather than opposed to, established cultural and religious values.

### **Immorality**

Many respondents raised alarms about the role of social media in fostering immorality among youth, citing concerns about exposure to improper behavior and harmful content.

They noted that platforms often expose young people to pornography. Additionally, digital technology can entice youth into engaging in bad habits for the sake of money and fame, creating a culture where immoral behavior is rewarded and normalized. Respondents pointed out that the open nature of social media allows anyone to post inappropriate content, further eroding moral standards and making it challenging for young people to navigate what is acceptable and what is not. Moreover, social media is often a breeding ground for false rumors and malicious political activities, contributing to a climate of distrust and negativity.

### **Political Interference**

In the Ugandan context, respondents pointed out that political interference poses a significant challenge to the effective use of new media for evangelization. They highlighted that government regulations and censorship can severely restrict the freedom to share religious messages openly on digital platforms. For instance, there have been instances where the Ugandan government has temporarily banned access to social media during politically sensitive times, effectively silencing voices that seek to convey spiritual guidance and support through these channels. Respondents expressed concern that such actions not only limit the Church's ability to communicate its teachings but also create an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship among religious leaders and youth alike. This political climate can deter individuals from engaging in open discussions about faith and spirituality online, ultimately undermining the Church's outreach efforts. The respondents emphasized the importance of advocating for a more open digital environment where religious messages can be freely shared, enabling the Church to fulfill its mission of evangelization without fear of repression or censorship.

### **Technological Distractions**

Respondents highlighted technological distractions as a significant issue that hinders effective engagement in faith-based discussions. Social media distractions can divert youth from focusing on church information, as the constant influx of online content—including advertisements, jokes, and various forms of non-religious material—can easily capture their attention. Respondents pointed out that pop-up ads, some of which contain inappropriate content, often interrupt their online activities, further diminishing their concentration on spiritual messages. This incessant barrage of distractions leads to

divided attention, and youth may not engage deeply with faith-related topics when their minds are continually pulled in multiple directions by various digital stimuli. As a result, meaningful interactions and discussions that are crucial for spiritual growth may be compromised. Furthermore, the prevalence of non-religious content not only affects individual engagement but can also diminish the overall effectiveness of digital evangelization efforts, as youth may prioritize entertainment and social interaction over active participation in their faith communities. To counteract these distractions, there is a pressing need for strategies that encourage intentional use of technology, allowing youth to prioritize their spiritual development amidst the myriads of online distractions.

### **Digital Fatigue**

Digital fatigue, stemming from excessive online engagement, may further diminish young people's interest in spiritual content. Respondents expressed concern that the relentless exposure to various digital platforms can lead to a sense of exhaustion and disengagement. When young people are inundated with information—whether from social media, streaming services, or constant notifications—they may find it challenging to muster the energy or motivation to engage with faith-related materials. This overwhelming environment can result in diminished enthusiasm for spiritual discussions and activities. As digital fatigue sets in, the allure of entertainment and non-religious content can overshadow the significance of spiritual messages, leading to a decline in participation and engagement in online faith communities. To address this challenge, it is crucial for church leaders and youth pastors to develop strategies that encourage balanced online engagement, helping young people cultivate a deeper connection to their faith while managing their digital consumption effectively.

### **Financial Limitations**

Budgetary constraints were recognized as a significant challenge by respondents, who noted that many churches operate with limited financial resources, thereby hindering their ability to develop and maintain robust new media platforms. The costs associated with creating and maintaining websites, developing mobile applications, and producing high-quality digital content can be prohibitively expensive for many parishes. Additionally, respondents emphasized the financial challenges faced by youth in accessing the internet and acquiring necessary gadgets. Poverty and unemployment among the youth in Uganda make it difficult for them to afford data packages and

smartphones, further limiting their engagement with digital evangelization efforts. Many parishes also lack the funds to sponsor youth activities or produce relevant content for social media, resulting in missed opportunities to connect with young people in meaningful ways. To effectively leverage new media for evangelization, respondents advocated for increased investment in digital initiatives, as well as collaborative efforts to provide resources and support to both churches and youth in overcoming these financial barriers.

### **Consistency in Engagement**

Respondents expressed concerns about the challenge of maintaining consistent engagement with youth through new media, emphasizing that it requires continuous effort and innovation. Many churches struggle to sustain the necessary level of commitment to keep youth actively involved, often leading to periods of inactivity in their digital outreach efforts. This inconsistency can result in a gradual loss of interest among young followers, who may seek engagement elsewhere if they perceive that their church is not actively fostering a vibrant online community. Respondents highlighted that without regular updates, interactive content, and innovative approaches to engagement, the potential for meaningful connection diminishes. To respondents, it is crucial for churches to develop structured strategies for ongoing engagement, such as regular online events, interactive discussions, and dynamic content creation that resonates with youth interests. By prioritizing consistency in their digital outreach efforts, churches can enhance their ability to connect with and nurture the spiritual growth of young people in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

### **Language Barriers**

Language barriers emerged as a significant concern among respondents, particularly given Uganda's linguistic diversity. The multiplicity of languages spoken across the country can complicate efforts to create content for all youth. Respondents noted that social media evangelization is rarely available in local languages, which can alienate young people who lack knowledge of English or other foreign languages. This lack of language accessibility can severely limit the reach and effectiveness of digital evangelization efforts, as many youths may struggle to engage with content that is not presented in a language they understand. Consequently, the Church risks excluding a substantial portion of the youth population from its digital outreach initiatives,

undermining the goal of fostering a vibrant and inclusive faith community. To overcome these challenges, it is essential for church leaders to prioritize the development of content in various local languages, ensuring that all young people, regardless of their linguistic background, can access and benefit from the Church's digital evangelization efforts.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Respondents highlighted the challenge of cultural sensitivity, noting that many churches struggle to develop messages and materials that effectively reflect the cultural nuances and values of various communities. When churches fail to consider these cultural dynamics, the content can feel irrelevant or even alienating to certain groups of young people, undermining the effectiveness of digital evangelization efforts. Respondents pointed out that culturally insensitive content may not only miss the mark in engaging youth but could also foster a sense of disconnect between the Church and its followers. Engaging local leaders and youth representatives in content creation can ensure that messages are tailored to be culturally relevant, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging deeper connections to their faith. By prioritizing cultural sensitivity, churches can enhance their outreach initiatives and cultivate a more inclusive environment for all young people.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, while new media offers significant opportunities for youth evangelization, survey respondents in Uganda highlighted numerous challenges that can hinder its effectiveness. They noted that digital engagement risks reducing physical church attendance and may expose young people to misinformation, fake news, digital fatigue, digital divide and online distractions. Privacy and security concerns, along with potential political interference, and limited digital literacy pose further barriers to safe and open engagement. Additionally, cultural resistance, generational gaps, and language barriers present obstacles. Furthermore, respondents raised concerns that new media might inadvertently promote passivity, polarizing attitudes, and exclusivity, failing to fully address inclusivity and gender needs. Addressing these challenges will be essential for the Church to use new media effectively, ensuring it enhances rather than detracts from meaningful spiritual growth and community.

#### **4.9 What Would You Wish the Church to Know or Do as Regards Using New Media to Reach Out to the Youth?**

The presentation of findings from online questionnaires explores the perspectives of respondents on how the Church can utilize new media for youth evangelization and the strategies that can be employed to maximize its impact.

##### **Balancing Traditional and New Media**

A balanced approach to evangelization is essential for the Church, as it allows digital strategies to enhance rather than replace traditional practices. Respondents emphasized the need for an active online presence to reach and engage youth effectively, while also encouraging their physical attendance and participation in Church activities. This dual focus creates a comprehensive experience of community and faith. Digital platforms serve as powerful tools for inspiring initial interest, sharing resources, and providing support; however, the depth of spiritual growth is often cultivated through face-to-face connections, communal worship, and shared service.

By integrating both online and offline methods, the Church can foster a more resilient faith community. Respondents noted that while new media can attract young people, it is the personal relationships and direct engagement found in traditional settings that truly nurture their spiritual journeys. This synergy not only helps to bridge the gap between digital and real-world interactions but also encourages youth to feel connected, supported, and motivated to participate actively in both spheres of Church life.

##### **Catechesis and Apologetics Using Social Media**

Respondents advocated for social media use to encounter youth and help them deepen their understanding of the faith through accessible catechesis and apologetics. With many young people facing gaps in their knowledge of Church teachings, particularly those rooted in the early Church Fathers, the Church could use social media to offer well-crafted, easy-to-understand explanations of these foundational doctrines. This approach would make teachings that are often difficult to access more relatable and available to a wider audience. Regular online seminars, Q&A sessions, and educational content could be created to address common questions and misconceptions, providing young people with a strong grounding in their faith. By offering structured, engaging catechesis through social media, the Church can empower youth to feel confident and

knowledgeable about their beliefs, reducing the tendency to migrate between denominations and reinforcing their connection to the Church community.

### **Embracing Social Media**

Respondents emphasized the importance of the Church fully embracing social media as a vital tool for evangelization, recognizing it as a powerful and permanent fixture in modern society. By viewing social media as an opportunity rather than a challenge, the Church can create dedicated digital spaces—such as Church-specific apps, official social media pages, and interactive platforms—that attract and hold the attention of youth. These spaces could feature diverse, youth-friendly content such as inspirational posts, thought-provoking discussions, live streaming of services, Q&A sessions, and even virtual prayer groups.

### **Prioritizing Digital Literacy and Safety**

It is recommended that Church prioritizes digital literacy and safety as part of its evangelization efforts. Respondents suggested that educating youth on responsible online engagement—such as balancing online and offline life, managing mental health, and addressing online challenges—can help align their digital habits with their values and protect their well-being. By integrating guidance on these topics into its digital outreach, the Church can empower young people to use new media in ways that strengthen their faith and foster healthy, supportive communities.

Providing resources, such as workshops or informational content on topics like online etiquette, cyberbullying, and mental health in the digital age, would help them develop skills to engage meaningfully and safely. Through these efforts, the Church can create a framework that encourages young people to not only share their faith online responsibly but also to cultivate a balanced and values-driven digital life.

### **Customized Content for Youth**

Creating content tailored specifically for young people is essential to capture their interest and foster engagement. Respondents recommended that the Church develop customized programs and messages that resonate with the youth, offering clear and relatable depictions of the Good News, as well as daily readings accompanied by modern interpretations. By using engaging formats like short videos, interactive posts,

and regular updates, the Church can make religious content more accessible and appealing.

### **Engaging, Empowering, and Involving the Youth**

Directly involving young people in Church activities and digital evangelization is essential for meaningful engagement. Respondents suggested that the Church educate youth on effective media evangelization techniques and encourage them to share their faith with peers. This peer-to-peer approach can increase the relatability and resonance of the Church's message. Furthermore, involving youth in creating and managing social media content ensures that it remains relevant, dynamic, and aligned with current trends, enhancing both engagement and impact. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and active participation among young people in spreading the faith.

### **Training Personnel on New Technology**

For effective evangelization, it is vital that the Church invests in training personnel on new technology. Respondents suggested implementing training programs within major seminaries and offering continuous education for priests and Church leaders, focusing on modern media strategies and best practices. By empowering Church personnel in this way, the Church can ensure that its digital outreach is both professional and impactful, allowing its message to reach and resonate with young audiences in meaningful ways.

### **Understanding Youth Needs and Trends**

Understanding the needs and trends of young people is vital for the Church to remain relevant and impactful. Respondents recommended that the Church conduct regular needs assessments to design programs that resonate with youth interests and address their unique challenges. This approach involves not only tailoring content to be visually appealing and using language that reflects today's culture, but also identifying and utilizing the digital platforms most frequented by young people. By staying updated on youth trends, the Church can create engaging, accessible programs that speak directly to the heart of young people's lives and experiences.

### **Strengthening Faith and Hope in a Digital Age**

Strengthening faith and hope among young people through digital evangelization is essential in today's digital age. Respondents suggested that the Church could organize

online preaching sessions and virtual meetings to support youth in navigating their unique challenges and struggles. By creating dedicated platforms for praise and worship, including music, inspirational videos, and live-streamed worship services, the Church can offer youth an uplifting and engaging digital experience. These interactive online spaces provide an opportunity for young people to connect with their faith, experience a sense of community, and find hope and inspiration amidst their daily lives.

### **Addressing Economic Challenges**

Addressing economic challenges is crucial for effective digital evangelization, as financial constraints limit many young people's access to online content. Respondents highlighted that high costs for internet access and digital devices create significant barriers to participation. They suggested that the Church explore partnerships with internet providers to offer affordable, possibly subsidized, internet packages that allow youth to access faith-based content securely. Additionally, empowering young people through job creation initiatives—such as Church-led skills training or small business support—could help alleviate economic barriers, enabling more consistent access to digital platforms and fostering long-term engagement with the Church's mission.

### **Monitoring and Controlling Content**

To maintain the authenticity and integrity of religious teachings shared online, respondents stressed the need for the Church to implement stringent monitoring and control measures to ensure that young people and other followers receive trustworthy and reliable information about their faith. Respondents highlighted the risk of misinformation spreading on digital platforms, making it essential to actively oversee all content and swiftly address any inaccuracies. Constant monitoring not only upholds doctrinal accuracy but also fosters a safe and dependable online environment for all seeking spiritual guidance.

### **Investment in New Media**

Investing in new media is essential for the Church to develop a strong and engaging online presence, a task that requires dedicated resources and strategic planning. Respondents noted that treating digital outreach with the professionalism and commitment seen in private sector businesses—such as budgeting for quality production, skilled personnel, and innovative content—could significantly improve the

Church's effectiveness in reaching young audiences. This approach involves not only financial investment but also a commitment to staying current with digital trends, using analytics to understand audience engagement, and adapting content to different platforms. By prioritizing these efforts, the Church can establish a dynamic online presence that connects authentically with youth and sustains their interest over time.

### **Flexibility and Adaptation**

Flexibility and adaptation are essential for the Church's outreach to youth through digital means. Respondents suggest that the Church could blend faith-based content with elements of entertainment, such as music, art, or drama, which are deeply woven into the cultural fabric and appeal strongly to the youth. By integrating uplifting music, popular beats, or even contemporary storytelling, the Church can create an inviting atmosphere that draws in young people naturally, meeting them in spaces where they already feel a connection.

Furthermore, incorporating digital media formats popular among youth—such as short video clips, social media challenges, or interactive online events—can capture their interest in ways that feel modern and familiar. This flexibility allows the Church's message to become more dynamic and accessible, helping young people experience faith in ways that resonate with their everyday experiences.

### **Diversity in Languages**

Respondents emphasized that for digital evangelization to truly resonate with young people, it must be available in multiple local languages, such as Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, Runyoro-Rutooro, Acholi, and Ateso among others. While English is common, many youths connect more deeply with messages in their native languages, where cultural nuances and emotions can be better expressed. Providing content in these languages fosters inclusivity, respect for cultural identity, and accessibility, especially for those with limited English proficiency. By embracing a multilingual approach, the Church can make its outreach more impactful, culturally relevant, and accessible to young Ugandans across diverse linguistic backgrounds.

### **Fostering Collaboration with Digital Influencers**

Survey respondents suggested that the Church consider collaborating with digital influencers to broaden its reach among young people. Given the strong influence that

online personalities have on youth culture, partnerships with influencers who share compatible values can make faith-based messages more accessible and relatable. These influencers could help convey the Church's teachings in a style that resonates with younger audiences, whether through collaborative videos, social media takeovers, or interactive Q&A sessions on faith topics. Respondents emphasized that engaging trusted digital voices can create a bridge between the Church and the online world where many young people spend their time. By fostering these collaborations, the Church can extend its message to new audiences, increasing its visibility and appeal in a way that feels authentic and current.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, respondents highlighted a multifaceted approach for the Church to effectively reach and engage youth through new media. They emphasized balancing digital outreach with traditional practices to foster a holistic faith experience, while embracing social media and tailoring content to resonate with young people's interests. Empowering youth as active participants in evangelization, providing training for Church personnel, and prioritizing digital literacy and safety were seen as essential steps. Addressing economic barriers, investing in relevant technologies, and offering content in diverse languages ensures accessibility and inclusivity. Additionally, creating partnerships with digital influencers and maintaining rigorous content monitoring were recommended to expand the Church's reach while preserving doctrinal integrity. This comprehensive strategy reflects a deep understanding of young people's needs and challenges in the digital age, allowing the Church to build a meaningful, resilient, and faith-centered online presence.

## **General Conclusion for the Chapter**

This chapter has outlined the study's findings on the integration of new media and digital technology in youth evangelization by the Catholic Church in Uganda. The data revealed both successes and challenges in the Church's use of digital platforms, highlighting areas where progress has been made and where gaps still exist. Opportunities for leveraging new media to foster deeper engagement with young people were identified, alongside significant obstacles such as technological limitations, resource constraints, and gaps in digital literacy.

The insights gathered from the survey responses also shed light on practical recommendations for improving the Church's digital evangelization strategies. These include strengthening the Church's presence on popular social media platforms, investing in digital capacity-building for clergy and laity, and tailoring content to resonate with the youth's spiritual and cultural contexts.

Overall, the findings underscore the critical role of new media in modern evangelization efforts and provide a foundation for actionable steps that the Catholic Church in Uganda can take to remain relevant and effective in its mission to engage and inspire young people in the digital age.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **New Media and Evangelization: A Discussion of Empirical Data and Scientific Literature**

The rapid advancement of new media technologies has transformed various aspects of society, including religious practices and outreach. This chapter aims to critically discuss the findings and assess how the Church in Uganda has adopted new media for youth ministry, identify the failures and barriers encountered in this integration process, explore the benefits and opportunities that new media offer, and provide recommendations for more effective utilization of these tools in youth evangelization. The methodology employed to gather data for this assessment was an online survey, targeting a broad demographic of young people and church leaders across Uganda.

Guided by specific research objectives, this chapter begins with an examination of the strategies and practices currently employed by the Church in Uganda to engage youth through new media platforms. It then delves into the shortcomings and obstacles that have hindered successful integration, including technological, infrastructural, and socio-cultural barriers. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the potential advantages of embracing new media, such as enhanced engagement, wider reach, and the ability to foster a more interactive and dynamic faith experience.

Finally, the chapter offers a set of recommendations aimed at overcoming existing challenges and maximizing the benefits of new media in youth evangelization.

#### **5.1 Assessment on How the Church Has Used New Media in Uganda: Successes and Failures**

##### **5.1.1 Successes or Positive Steps by the Catholic Church in Uganda to Reach Young People Using New Media and Digital Technology**

The study respondents identified several positive steps the Church has taken to engage young people using digital technology. These initiatives, which emerged particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflect a growing recognition of the importance of new media. This section analyzes these positive steps, supported by relevant literature.

### **Embracing New Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Catholic Church in Uganda significantly increased its use of social media channels to reach its congregation. With physical gatherings restricted, digital platforms became essential for maintaining community and continuing religious practices.

As observed by Campbell (2020) in “Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World”, many religious institutions globally adopted new media to sustain their operations during the pandemic. The author highlights that the crisis accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in religious practices, fostering greater online engagement.<sup>378</sup>

The Church’s use of social media during this period included live-streaming masses, sharing daily prayers, and providing religious content online. Embracing social media maintains a sense of community and spiritual continuity among the youth, who are avid users of these platforms.

The rise of social networks has further changed the nature of communication, shifting it from mere information sharing to fostering relationships both online and offline. For the Ugandan Church, this recognition underscores the importance of integrating digital communication into its evangelization mission, particularly to engage young adults effectively.

### **Positive Attitude Towards Media by Some Youth Pastors and Ministries**

Respondents noted that many youth pastors have shown a positive attitude towards meeting young people through media, recognizing its potential for effective engagement. This proactive approach by certain youth ministries has fostered better relationships and more meaningful interactions with young congregants.

According to Booker Gideon (2023) in his work “Youth Ministry in the Digital Age,” digital technology has transformed youth ministry by enhancing engagement and inspiration among its members. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram offer churches and youth groups a convenient means to connect with their community and disseminate messages of hope and encouragement. The attitudes of religious leaders towards media significantly influence its adoption and effectiveness.

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<sup>378</sup> Cf. Heidi, A. Campbell, Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World (2020).

Positive engagement with media by youth pastors can inspire confidence and participation among the youth.<sup>379</sup>

Youth pastors who are enthusiastic about using digital media often spearhead initiatives that make religious content more accessible and engaging. Their openness to media reflects a broader trend of adopting contemporary methods to reach the youth.

### **Online Outreach Initiatives by Parishes, Dioceses, and Communities**

Participants outlined various online outreach initiatives undertaken by parishes, dioceses, and communities, including virtual prayers, conferences, and youth retreats. These activities have provided valuable spiritual support and community interaction during times when in-person gatherings were not possible.

As noted by Dawson and Cowan (2004) in “Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet”, online religious activities can effectively complement traditional practices by providing additional avenues for engagement and spiritual growth. The authors highlight the potential of virtual gatherings to foster community and deepen faith experiences.<sup>380</sup>

These online initiatives have allowed the Church to maintain active engagement with young people, providing continuity and a sense of belonging even in the absence of physical meetings.

### **Efforts in Using New Media and Social Networking Sites for Catechesis and Evangelization**

The Church has made efforts to utilize new media and social networking sites for catechesis and evangelization. This includes creating and sharing educational content about faith, moral teachings, and religious practices through digital platforms.

In “Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media”, Campbell (2012) discusses the importance of using digital media for religious education. Campbell argues that digital platforms offer unique opportunities for interactive and accessible catechesis, which can be particularly effective for engaging the youth.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Cf. Gideon, Booker, Youth Ministry in the Digital Age: Leveraging Social Media to Engage and Inspire, 2023. <https://ministryanswers.com/church-ministry/youth-ministry-in-the-digital-age-tips-for-leveraging-social-media-to-engage-and-inspire/> (Accessed July 20, 2024).

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, eds., Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet, Routledge, New York 2004. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203497609> (Accessed August 24, 2023).

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Heidi, Campbell, Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media, Routledge, New York 2012.

These efforts demonstrate the Church's recognition of the changing landscape of religious education and its willingness to adapt to meet the needs of young people

### **Promotion of Church Events**

The Church has also used digital media to promote events such as youth crusades, conferences, seminars, charitable activities, and sports. These promotions help raise awareness and encourage participation among the youth. In "Marketing Management," Kotler and Keller (2016) discuss the importance of digital marketing, including the use of social media and other digital channels, to promote events and engage a broader audience. They highlight how these tools can be particularly effective in targeting and reaching specific demographics, such as youth, and enhancing engagement through various activities.<sup>382</sup>

### **Empowering Youth to Evangelise Fellow Youth Digitally**

Some churches have empowered young people to participate in evangelizing their peers through digital means. Peer-to-peer evangelization plays a vital role in spreading the message of faith and fostering spiritual growth.

As highlighted by Smith and Denton (2005) peer influence plays a significant role in shaping religious beliefs and practices among young people. Empowering youth to evangelise their peers harnesses this dynamic, making religious engagement more relatable and impactful.<sup>383</sup>

### **Promoting Church Music Industry**

The promotion of the Church music industry has been another avenue for engaging the youth. The Church's support for religious music can attract and inspire young people. Harris (2009) discusses the impact of music on youth development and engagement in her book "Music and the Young Mind: Enhancing Brain Development and Engaging Learning". The book provides a comprehensive framework for educators, both

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<sup>382</sup> Cf. Philip, Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, *Marketing Management*, 15th ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2016. [https://books.google.at/books/about/Marketing\\_Management.html?id=UbfwtwEACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.at/books/about/Marketing_Management.html?id=UbfwtwEACAAJ&redir_esc=y) (Accessed July 22, 2024).

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Christian, Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, 2005; online ed., Oxford Academic, October 1, 2005). <https://doi.org/10.1093/019518095X.001.0001> (Accessed May 10, 2024).

experienced and novice, to incorporate music into their teaching practices effectively.<sup>384</sup> Music can be a compelling medium for conveying religious messages and fostering a sense of belonging among young people.<sup>385</sup> By promoting church music through the new media, the Church provides a creative and appealing way for the youth to participate in worship and community activities.

### **Establishment of Online Faith Communities**

The establishment of online faith communities, such as Uganda Catholics Online, has provided a virtual space for young people to connect, share, and grow in their faith. These communities offer support, fellowship, and a sense of belonging, essential for spiritual growth.

In his work, “Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X” (2000), Roof explores how online faith communities can meet the spiritual needs of younger generations. Roof argues that these virtual spaces can provide meaningful religious experiences and foster a sense of community.<sup>386</sup>

The creation of such online faith communities demonstrates the Church’s commitment to meeting young people where they are and providing accessible platforms for religious engagement.

### **Conclusion**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has made significant strides in using digital media to evangelize young people. These efforts, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, include embracing social media, fostering positive attitudes towards digital engagement among youth pastors, initiating online outreach programs, utilizing social networking sites for catechesis and evangelization, promoting church events, empowering youth to evangelise digitally, promoting the church music industry, and establishing online faith communities.

These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the importance of new media in contemporary evangelization and the potential it holds for connecting with the youth.

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<sup>384</sup> Cf. Maureen, Harris, *Music and the Young Mind: Enhancing Brain Development and Engaging Learning*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781607090618/Music-and-the-Young-Mind-Enhancing-Brain-Development-and-Engaging-Learning> (Accessed May 12, 2024).

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Ian, Cross, *Cognitive Science and the Cultural Nature of Music*, in: *Musical Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (July 18, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2012.01216.x> (Accessed January 24, 2024).

<sup>386</sup> Cf. Wade, Clark Roof, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). [https://books.google.at/books/about/Virtual\\_faith.html?id=C07kAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.at/books/about/Virtual_faith.html?id=C07kAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y) (Accessed July 12, 2024).

By continuing to innovate and adapt, the Church can overcome the challenges identified earlier and foster a more engaged and vibrant faith community among young people

### **5.1.2 Integration Failures of New Media for Youth Evangelization in the Catholic Church in Uganda**

The effective integration of new media into youth evangelization is crucial for the Catholic Church in Uganda to engage with contemporary audiences and maintain its relevance. Despite the opportunities that digital platforms present, the Church faces significant failures in leveraging these tools to connect with the youth. These integration failures were identified through online survey responses. This section explores these failures in detail, drawing on local observations and academic insights to underscore the urgent need for the Church to reassess and revitalize its digital evangelization strategies.

#### **Over-Reliance on Traditional Media**

The Catholic Church in Uganda's over-reliance on traditional media such as print, radio, and television also hampers its ability to engage the youth through new media. While traditional media still holds value, it does not resonate as strongly with the digitally native younger generation.

As noted by Pew Research Center (2018), the youth increasingly favor digital and social media platforms over traditional forms of communication.<sup>387</sup> The Church's persistent use of traditional media overlooks the preferences and habits of the youth, thereby reducing the effectiveness of its evangelization efforts.

Heidi Campbell's edited volume "Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media" (2012) explores how digital media is transforming religious practices and suggests that for religious institutions to remain relevant in the contemporary world, they must adapt by integrating digital media into their communication strategies. This adaptation is necessary to engage with adherents and seekers who are increasingly present in digital spaces.<sup>388</sup> Her insights highlight the need for the Catholic Church in

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<sup>387</sup> Cf. Pew Research Center, *Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018*, May 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/> (Accessed July 10, 2024).

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Heidi, Campbell, ed. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, New York 2012.

Uganda to balance its use of traditional and new media to effectively reach and engage the youth.

### **Church's Slow Response to New Media**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has been slow to respond to the opportunities presented by new media. This sluggishness results in missed opportunities to engage with the youth, who are early adopters of new technologies and platforms. However, the Church's slow response can be attributed to institutional inertia and a reluctance to change long-established practices. Rogers (2003) suggests that fostering an environment that encourages experimentation and openness to change is crucial for overcoming this rigidity.<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, Heifetz and Linsky (2009) argue that leaders must be willing to challenge the status quo and embrace new methods to address contemporary challenges.<sup>390</sup> For the Catholic Church in Uganda, cultivating adaptive leadership could help overcome the inertia that hinders its ability to keep pace with digital trends.

Lines (2021) passionately asserts that the Great Digital Commission has been commanded, calling believers to spread the Good News through every available digital means. He urges believers to use their online presence as a tool for spreading the Gospel, leveraging posts, tweets, memes, videos, events, pins, and personal online interactions.<sup>391</sup> Timely adoption of new media is essential for modern evangelization. The failure to adapt could result in diminished influence and connectivity with future generations.

### **Ignorance Among Church Leaders and General Poor Digital Literacy**

Respondents also pointed out that some church leaders in Uganda are unaware of the critical role digital media plays in youth evangelization. This ignorance can lead to underinvestment in digital tools and a lack of support for digital initiatives.

Barna and Kinnaman (2014) highlight the growing disconnect between traditional church leadership and contemporary communication methods. They argue that leaders

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293958274\\_Digital\\_Religion\\_Understanding\\_Religious\\_Practice\\_in\\_New\\_Media\\_Worlds](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293958274_Digital_Religion_Understanding_Religious_Practice_in_New_Media_Worlds) (Accessed July 11, 2024).

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Rogers, Everett M., *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Free Press, New York 2003.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, first published February 18, 2010. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2009.01168\\_4.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2009.01168_4.x) (Accessed February 20, 2024).

<sup>391</sup> Cf. Caleb J. Lines, *The Great Digital Commission: Embracing Social Media for Church Growth and Transformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021). [https://books.google.at/books/about/The\\_Great\\_Digital\\_Commission.html?id=kM1AEAAAQBAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.at/books/about/The_Great_Digital_Commission.html?id=kM1AEAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y) (Accessed September 2, 2021).

must understand and embrace digital media to remain relevant and effectively reach their communities.<sup>392</sup>

Furthermore, Dumain (2017) argues that churches rooted in traditional, physical ministry settings may view the digital transformation as distant or irrelevant. However, this perspective risks creating a divided church, with older and younger generations growing increasingly disconnected.<sup>393</sup> Poor awareness and digital literacy among church members and youth ministries pose a significant barrier to effective digital evangelization. Without adequate understanding and skills to navigate digital platforms, the Church cannot fully leverage these tools for evangelization.

Initiatives to improve digital literacy within the Church could include training programs, workshops, and collaboration with tech-savvy members of the congregation. Enhancing digital literacy would empower both leaders and laity to engage more effectively in digital evangelization.

### **Lack of Creativity and Innovation in Digital Content Creation**

The Church has not effectively utilized creative and innovative methods in developing engaging digital content tailored to the youth. This problem is critical because the youth are drawn to engaging, dynamic, and interactive content that traditional methods of evangelization often fail to provide. Clayton Christensen (2016) discusses why established companies often miss out on new waves of innovation. The core of his argument is that the very practices that make these companies successful can also make them vulnerable to disruption. Institutions that do not innovate risk becoming obsolete. Companies that fail to innovate may not keep pace with consumer demands or technological advancements, leading to a loss of market share. “No matter the industry, he says, a successful company with established products WILL get pushed aside unless managers know how and when to abandon traditional business practices”.<sup>394</sup> Christensen's insights can be applied to the Church's evangelization efforts. The Church's reliance on conventional methods without adapting to new, creative approaches limits its ability to capture the interest of the youth.

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<sup>392</sup> Cf. Barna, George, and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2014.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. Dumain, Liz, *Youth Ministry in a Digital Age: Understanding and Reaching a Generation of Digital Natives*, Grove Books Ltd, 2017.

<sup>394</sup> Cf. Clayton, M. Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, MA: Harvard Business School Press, Boston 1997.

Similarly, Keith (2015) argues that digital creativity and innovation are essential for effective ministry in the digital age. Keith highlights successful examples of faith communities using multimedia, interactive content, and creative storytelling to engage their audiences, suggesting that the Catholic Church in Uganda could benefit from similar approaches.<sup>395</sup>

### **The Failure to Invest in New Media**

Respondents in this study have indicated that the Church's failure to invest adequately in new media is a substantial problem. This issue is critical, as new media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for engaging with the youth, who are increasingly consuming information and forming their beliefs through digital means.

The Catholic Church's traditional methods of evangelization, which rely heavily on physical interactions and printed materials, may no longer suffice in an age where digital communication is paramount.

For instance, Campbell and Garner (2016) in their book "Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture" argue that the digital age has fundamentally transformed the way religious communities interact and engage with their members.<sup>396</sup>

Additionally, Pauline Hope Cheong, Fischer-Nielsen, Gelfgren, and Ess (2012) examine the interplay between digital media and religion, including how social media can enhance religious engagement among youth. The authors and contributors discuss various perspectives and practices, highlighting the potential for social media to facilitate deeper engagement and participation in religious communities, particularly among younger demographics. They suggest that digital platforms offer unique opportunities for interactive and participatory forms of evangelization that can complement traditional methods.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Cf. Keith, Anderson, *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015. <https://www.perlego.com/book/3047552/the-digital-cathedral-networked-ministry-in-a-wireless-world-pdf> (Accessed July 20, 2024).

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Campbell, Heidi A., and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. <https://www.christianbook.com/networked-theology-negotiating-digital-culture-ebook/heidi-campbell/9781493404391/pd/88299EB?msocid=169310483bee6e243fa400e83af06fc8> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Cheong, Pauline Hope, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, and Charles Ess, eds., *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, Peter Lang, New York 2012. [https://books.google.at/books/about/Digital\\_Religion\\_Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Cultur.html?id=A3QrdEUZjxE&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.at/books/about/Digital_Religion_Social_Media_and_Cultur.html?id=A3QrdEUZjxE&redir_esc=y) (Accessed July 13, 2024).

### **Failure to Empower and Involve the Youth**

The respondents highlighted the problem of not sufficiently empowering and involving the youth in evangelization efforts. Youth and young adults today are more engaged with technology than ever before, yet they remain one of the most emotionally and spiritually disconnected generations. Jodi G. Hunt (2019) notes that despite this reality, Catholic youth ministry has largely failed to address the digital lives of youth and young adults.<sup>398</sup>

Dean (2010) in “Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church” underscores the need for churches to actively engage and empower young people. Dean argues that meaningful involvement in church activities helps youth develop a deeper, more personal faith and encourages them to take ownership of their spiritual journey.<sup>399</sup>

### **Shortage of Dedicated Social Media Personnel**

The shortage of dedicated personnel to manage the Church’s social media presence can be a great hindrance. Effective social media evangelization requires individuals who are not only skilled in digital communication but also deeply committed to the Church’s mission.

As discussed by Barger (2011) in “The Social Media Strategist: Build a Successful Program from the Inside Out”, having a dedicated team is crucial for building a strong online presence. Barger emphasizes the importance of specialized roles, including content creators, community managers, and analysts, to develop and maintain effective social media strategies.<sup>400</sup>

This shortage of personnel in the Catholic Church in Uganda means that its social media efforts are often ad hoc and lack strategic direction. Investing in training and hiring dedicated social media staff could significantly improve the Church’s outreach to the youth.

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<sup>398</sup> Cf. Jodi, G. Hunt, *The Digital Way: Re-imagining Digital Discipleship in The Age of Social Media*, in: *Journal of Youth and Theology* 18, no. 2 (2019): 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24055093-01802003>. (Accessed November 15, 2023).

<sup>399</sup> Cf. Kenda, Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford University Press, 2010. [https://books.google.at/books?id=qIpnwK5S7FgC&pg=PR7&source=gbs\\_selected\\_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.at/books?id=qIpnwK5S7FgC&pg=PR7&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false) (Accessed July 13, 2024).

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Christopher, Barger, *The Social Media Strategist: Build a Successful Program from the Inside Out*, McGraw-Hill, New York 2011. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.5555/2207869> (Accessed May 7, 2022).

### **Inconsistent Online Presence**

According to the survey that was conducted in this research, many churches in Uganda lack a consistent online presence, which can undermine their efforts to engage young people. While some churches are active on social media and other digital platforms, others post irregularly or have outdated content. This inconsistency can lead to disengagement and loss of interest among young audiences who expect regular updates and interactions.

Edwards and Fredriksson (2017) explore the concept of inconsistency in organizational communication and its implications. they argue that inconsistency impacts perceptions of organizational authenticity and trustworthiness.<sup>401</sup> The irregularity in posting and outdated content can create a perception of neglect or irrelevance, particularly detrimental in a fast-paced digital environment.

### **Poverty or Economic Challenges**

Economic challenges present a significant barrier to the advancement of new media for youth evangelization in Uganda. High levels of poverty limit access to digital technologies and the internet, both for the Church and the youth it aims to reach.

According to the World Bank (2024), many Ugandans live below the poverty line, this can limit their ability to afford internet-enabled devices and reliable internet access.<sup>402</sup> This economic disparity exacerbates the digital divide, making it challenging for the Church to implement digital evangelization strategies effectively.

In their study, Michelle W. L. Fong, (2009) in “Digital Divide: The Case of Developing Countries” discusses how economic limitations hinder the adoption of digital technologies in developing nations. The author suggests that targeted investments and subsidies are necessary to bridge this divide.<sup>403</sup> For the Catholic Church in Uganda, partnerships with NGOs and government initiatives could help alleviate some of these economic barriers, allowing for broader access to new media tools.

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<sup>401</sup> Cf. Lee, M., Edwards and Magnus Fredriksson, Forum: Inconsistency and Communication in Organizations, in: Management Communication Quarterly 31, no. 3 (March 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318917699886> (Accessed June 21, 2023).

<sup>402</sup> Cf. World Bank, Poverty & Equity Brief: Uganda, April 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/poverty-and-equity-briefs> (Accessed July 23, 2024).

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Michelle, W. L. Fong, Digital Divide: The Case of Developing Countries, 2009. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242626548\\_Digital\\_Divide\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Developing\\_Countries](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242626548_Digital_Divide_The_Case_of_Developing_Countries) (Accessed July 20, 2024).

## **Perception of Social Media as Evil**

According to the respondents, some clergy and church members view social media as potentially harmful, regarding it as an “evil” influence that distracts from spiritual growth. Concerns center around its potential to expose users, especially youth, to harmful content that may contradict faith-based values. This perspective leads to reluctance in using social media as an evangelistic tool, as many prefer traditional methods that align more closely with their views on preserving spiritual integrity. Consequently, this resistance highlights a broader challenge in integrating modern platforms within faith-based outreach. While social media can lead to harmful situations, it is important to recognize that the potential for both good and evil exists in nearly all aspects of society.

Jana Marguerite Bennett in her book “Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age” (2012) discusses the complexity of the internet’s moral and theological implications, emphasizing that it is part of God’s creation yet also affected by the fallen nature of the world.<sup>404</sup> Miriam Westen (2024) notes that the tendency to label the Internet as wholly good or bad, or to simply conclude it is both, reflects its status as a distinct power.<sup>405</sup> This observation highlights the inherent duality of the internet, reflecting its status as part of the broader, morally complex world.

Ward van Zoonen, Anu E. Sivunen, and J. Treem (2023) explore how perceptions of enterprise social media can affect its adoption and usage within organizations. The authors find that negative perceptions of online communication prompt avoidance behaviors, leading to reduced platform usage.<sup>406</sup> Such findings argue against a one-dimensional vilification of social media, advocating instead for a more sophisticated understanding of its role and impact within professional settings.

## **Conclusion**

The Catholic Church in Uganda faces substantial integration failures in utilizing new media for youth evangelization, which has significantly hindered its ability to engage

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<sup>404</sup> Cf. Bennett, Jana Marguerite, *Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age*, T&T Clark Int, New York 2012. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Aquinas-on-the-Web%3A-Doing-Theology-in-an-Internet-Bennett/9afd7844685102b5dc6eea7d01ecd8c895e683d9> (Accessed July 15, 2024).

<sup>405</sup> Cf. Miriam Westen, *Social Media in the New Evangelization*. [https://www.academia.edu/4855716/Social\\_Media\\_in\\_the\\_New\\_Evangelization](https://www.academia.edu/4855716/Social_Media_in_the_New_Evangelization) (Accessed November 24, 2024).

<sup>406</sup> Cf. Ward, van Zoonen, Anu E. Sivunen, and Jeffrey W. Treem, *Examining the Implications of Negativity Perceptions for Enterprise Social Media Use*, in: *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 28, no. 5 (2023): 666-689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2023.2269835> (Accessed August 1, 2024).

with the younger generation effectively. These failures encompass a lack of creativity and innovation in digital content creation, a shortage of dedicated social media personnel, and widespread ignorance among church leaders about the critical role of digital media. Additionally, the Church's slow response to emerging media trends, poor digital platform awareness or literacy, and economic challenges have further compounded these issues, leading to a significant gap in the Church's ability to connect with youth through modern digital avenues.

To address these integration failures, the Catholic Church in Uganda must adopt a comprehensive strategy that involves educating church leaders on the importance of digital media, investing in new media technologies, and fostering a culture of creativity and innovation. Empowering young people to take active roles in digital evangelization and developing a consistent and engaging online presence are also essential steps. By embracing these changes, the Church can overcome its current shortcomings and effectively harness the potential of new media to inspire and connect with the youth, ensuring its mission and message resonate in the contemporary digital landscape.

The synthesis of local observations with broader academic insights underscores the necessity for the Catholic Church in Uganda to reassess and revitalize its evangelization strategies to remain relevant in the digital age.

## **5.2 Benefits and Opportunities of Using New Media in Evangelizing Youth in Uganda**

The integration of new media for youth evangelization presents a multitude of benefits and opportunities for the Catholic Church in Uganda. As a dynamic and rapidly evolving landscape, digital media provides innovative avenues for spreading the Gospel, fostering community, and engaging young people in meaningful ways. This discussion underlines how new media can enhance youth evangelization, supported by relevant literature and contextualized within the unique environment of the Church in Uganda. By leveraging these opportunities, the Church can more effectively reach Uganda's large young population in its demographic, thereby promoting a vibrant and engaged faith community.

### **New Media as Vehicles for Evangelization and Catechesis**

Digital media platforms like social networking sites serve as effective tools for evangelization and catechesis. They provide accessible and engaging ways to share

religious teachings and foster spiritual growth. The Vatican's document *Communio et Progressio* (1971) highlights the importance of media in the Church's mission of evangelization. By utilizing these platforms, the Church in Uganda can minister a great number of the tech-savvy youth, and present catechetical content in a format that resonates with them.

The Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, (2002) notes; "The Internet is relevant to many activities and programs of the Church—evangelization, including both re-evangelization and new evangelization and the traditional missionary work ad gentes, catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction..."<sup>407</sup> The New media can be effective for re-evangelization, targeting those who may have drifted away from the Church, and new evangelization, aiming to spread the faith in a fresh and engaging manner. The internet enables the Church to present its message in innovative ways that resonate with contemporary audiences, utilizing multimedia content such as videos, podcasts, and interactive websites. These modern channels provide unique opportunities to spread the Gospel, engage inactive members, and reach out to potential new followers.

Digital platforms also support traditional missionary work by allowing the Church to reach people across the globe, including those in regions where physical presence might be challenging. This global reach facilitates the sharing of the Gospel with diverse populations and cultures.<sup>408</sup>

Digital platforms offer a space for apologetics, where the Church can address questions and challenges about the faith. This can be done through blogs, forums, and social media, providing clear and reasoned explanations that defend and clarify Church teachings.<sup>409</sup>

### **Source of Inspiration and Encouragement**

Digital media can be a source of inspiration and encouragement for young people. According to *The Joy of the Gospel* (Pope Francis, 2013), modern means of communication are crucial for spreading the joy of faith and hope. Social media

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<sup>407</sup> Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church) (Accessed April 10, 2023).

<sup>408</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

campaigns and online communities can provide the encouragement young people need in their faith journey.<sup>410</sup>

New media can be used as a vital instrument that offers a supportive virtual community where young people can share their experiences and find solace in the collective wisdom of their peers. Digital platforms enable religious communities and Churches to engage with youths on a personal level, sharing inspirational messages, quotes, and images that resonate with their daily experiences. This online interaction emphasizes shared humanity and strengthens relationships, even in times of physical separation.<sup>411</sup>

Digital social media and Christian video clips provide a dynamic platform for disseminating inspirational content, offering young Christians access to messages of hope and encouragement tailored to their needs and interests. This form of media allows for a personalized spiritual experience, where youths can interact with content that resonates with them on a deeper level, fostering a sense of belonging and connection within their faith community. Testimonies and real-life stories shared online offer tangible examples of faith and resilience, inspiring young believers to lead a spiritually enriched life style. Regular exposure to such uplifting digital content helps cultivate a positive mindset, which is crucial for building resilience and maintaining hope in the face of life's challenges. According to "Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media" by Heidi Campbell (2013), personal stories shared online can have a profound impact on others' spiritual journeys.<sup>412</sup>

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications underscores this potential, highlighting how social media platforms can provide continuous inspiration, encouragement, and opportunities for worship. Thus, new media emerges as an indispensable resource in contemporary youth evangelization, bridging gaps and creating a vibrant, supportive faith community.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Vatican Press, Vatican City 2013.

<sup>411</sup> Cf. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ethics in Communication, n.11. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20000530\\_ethics-communications\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000530_ethics-communications_en.html) (Accessed April 13, 2023).

<sup>412</sup> Cf. Heidi, Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, New York 2013.

<sup>413</sup> Cf. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ethics in Communication, n.11. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20000530\\_ethics-communications\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000530_ethics-communications_en.html) (Accessed April 13, 2023).

## Encouraging Creativity

Digital media encourages creativity by allowing young people to express their faith through various forms of media, including videos, graphics, and blogs. This creative engagement can make evangelization more dynamic and relatable. As noted in “Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age” (Lyte, 2013), creativity in digital media can enhance faith formation by making it more interactive and engaging.<sup>414</sup>

For instance, visual platforms like Instagram and Vine have enabled churches to share snapshots of their internal activities with external audiences. One particularly innovative approach is the use of geocaching, where churches place markers on online maps as part of the global orienteering movement. This strategy allows churches to creatively draw visitors by encouraging interactive engagement on their property.<sup>415</sup>

The new communication capabilities can be used to reach and engage people always, the only barrier is the extent of one's imagination.<sup>416</sup> This highlights the potential for creative outreach and personal expression facilitated by new media.

In “Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration” by Ed Catmull et al (2014) discusses on fostering creativity within the context of business and organizational leadership, particularly drawing from Catmull’s experiences at Pixar Animation Studios. The work offers insights to inspire a creative culture that nurtures innovation and originality. Catmull’s discussion is rich with principles that can be applied broadly, including potentially in religious practice.<sup>417</sup>

## Education and Guidance

The digital media is a great way to grow and expand one’s knowledge. For example, Zsupan-Jerome (2014) suggests that blogs can be especially valuable as a pedagogical

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<sup>414</sup> Cf. Lytle, J. A., *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age*, Morehouse Publishing, New York, 2013.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. *How Social Media Is Changing the Church*. In: *The Conversation*, 2016. <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-is-changing-the-church-57405> (Accessed August 8, 2024).

<sup>416</sup> Cf. Pam Smith, *Online Mission and Ministry: A Theological and Practical Guide*, SPCK Publishing, London 2017. <https://www.christianbook.com/online-mission-ministry-theological-practical-guide/pam-smith/9780281071517/pd/071510?msocid=169310483bee6e243fa400e83af06fc8> (Accessed November 6, 2024).

<sup>417</sup> Cf. Catmull, Ed, and Amy Wallace, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*, Random House, New York 2014. [https://www.academia.edu/39725079/Creativity\\_Inc\\_Overcoming\\_the\\_Unseen\\_Forces\\_That\\_Stand\\_in\\_the\\_Way\\_of\\_True](https://www.academia.edu/39725079/Creativity_Inc_Overcoming_the_Unseen_Forces_That_Stand_in_the_Way_of_True) (Accessed on 22 July, 2024).

tool in ministerial education, fostering growth in communication that aligns with the values of Christian ministry and outreach.<sup>418</sup>

The Pontifical Council on Social Communications underscores the transformative role of new media in various spheres, including education, culture, commerce, politics, intercultural dialogue, and religion. In its document *Ethics in Internet*, it describes new media as powerful tools for connecting individuals to religious and spiritual resources, such as libraries, museums, and places of worship. These technologies can also provide access to Church teachings, writings of Church Fathers, and the wisdom of religious traditions, while fostering virtual communities of faith for mutual encouragement and support.<sup>419</sup>

Similarly, *The Church and Internet* document highlights how the Church can use media to bridge distances and counter isolation by promoting faith-based virtual communities. This serves both Catholics and non-Catholics by providing curated, useful information through online platforms.<sup>420</sup> The educational potential of media is further emphasized by Social Communication Departments in Africa like AMECEA and IMBISA. They advocate for the use of media to present Christian teachings, encourage discussions, and stimulate creativity through interactive content and video production from a Christian perspective.<sup>421</sup>

The communications media are important tools for evangelization and “for educating the African peoples to reconciliation in truth, and the promotion of justice and peace”<sup>422</sup>

### **New Media Aids Timely Communication**

New media enables timely communication, allowing the Church to quickly disseminate information and respond to current events. This immediacy is crucial for keeping the youth informed and engaged. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Pope Paul VI, 1975) emphasizes the need for the Church to utilize modern communication methods to stay relevant and connected with the faithful.

New media can be an effective communication platform and it easily allows one to obtain feedback. John Paul II, in his message on 24<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day,

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<sup>418</sup> Cf. Daniella, Zsupan-Jerome, Fostering the Public Voice: Blogging as a Pedagogical Practice in Ministerial Education, in: Teaching Theology & Religion 17, no. 4 (2014): 331–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2014.911628> (Accessed July 3, 2023).

<sup>419</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Ethics in Internet*, n.1.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002, n.5.

<sup>421</sup> Cf. Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Communication in the Church and Society*, volume 3, Paulines Publications Africa, 1999, p. 140.

<sup>422</sup> Cf. *Africae Munus*, AM 145.

acknowledged the potential of immediate access to information to deepen the Church's dialogue with contemporary society. By utilizing communication tools, the Church could effectively share its beliefs, clarify its positions on various issues, and actively participate in global discussions. This integration fosters a collective search for solutions to critical human challenges, demonstrating the Church's readiness to interact meaningfully with public opinion and societal concerns.<sup>423</sup> Live streaming of religious events, services, and discussions allows for real-time interaction and engagement.

### **Utilizing Social Media for Information, Updates, and Event Promotion**

Social media and websites provide a platform for the Church to share important information and updates with the community, including announcements, event details, and news. Keeping the community informed helps maintain a sense of connection and involvement. Scott C. Stevenson (2011), in "76 Ways to Increase Special Event Attendance" encourages use of social networks to promote events or spread information.<sup>424</sup>

Digital media offers an opportunity to stay informed in real time about current events in the Church worldwide. Social media extends church activities to the online world. Faith is a full-time commitment, and since we use new media almost every day, the two naturally overlap. For instance, Christians are increasingly using social media to share insights from the Bible or their experiences. They can also bring their Christian perspective to discussions about local, national, and international politics.<sup>425</sup>

Any organization, including the Church, that needs to announce upcoming fundraising events or unveil new initiatives can effectively use social media. With social media, one can reach millions of youths 24/7 and the best part is that this can be done for free. The only limitation is the time one is willing to invest in the endeavor. The Church can use social media to alert people about upcoming events and publish sermons, making digital media a powerful tool for evangelism.<sup>426</sup>

Digital media is particularly effective for promoting Church events such as youth conferences, retreats, and charitable activities. By using social media and email

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<sup>423</sup> John Paul II, Message on 24<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day 1990. [https://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/index.htm](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/index.htm) (Accessed April 12, 2023).

<sup>424</sup> Cf. Scott C. Stevenson, ed., 76 Ways to Increase Special Event Attendance, Hoboken, NJ: Stevenson, Inc., 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118703892> (Accessed August 8, 2024).

<sup>425</sup> Cf. How Social Media is Changing the Church. <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-is-changing-the-church-57405> (Accessed November 6, 2023).

<sup>426</sup> Cf. Kunle Badmos, Effect of Social Media on the Church, Annual Conference of Theological Friends and Fellows, The Redeemed Christian Bible College, Lagos, Nigeria, 2014.

campaigns, the Church can reach a larger audience and encourage participation. *The Church and New Media* (Vogt, 2011) highlights the importance of digital promotion in attracting young people to Church events.<sup>427</sup>

### **Encouraging involvement and participation**

Online platforms can facilitate greater involvement and participation by providing opportunities for young people to engage in discussions, volunteer, and contribute to Church activities. This involvement fosters a sense of belonging and ownership. “Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media” by Campbell (2021) explores how online communities can enhance participation and engagement in religious activities.<sup>428</sup>

Social media has reshaped traditional approaches to Christian ministry by enabling ordinary believers to engage in one-to-one conversations about their faith, bypassing the hierarchical, clergy-led model of preaching<sup>429</sup>. This shift fosters a more participatory and decentralized view of the Church, as Pam Smith (2015) argues, portraying it as “a collection of followers of Jesus” rather than “a monolithic organization” that is often critiqued for its institutional shortcomings.<sup>430</sup> Smith also highlights the alignment of this model with the ministry of Jesus, who frequently engaged with individuals personally.<sup>431</sup> Additionally, social media encourages active participation in church activities, allowing congregants to interact with sermons, ask questions, share content, and extend discussions beyond Sunday services.<sup>432</sup>

### **New Media Changes the Historical Pattern of Preaching or Proclamation**

The emergence of digital media is significantly altering traditional approaches to preaching and evangelization. It offers new channels, such as videos, podcasts, and social media posts, which diversify how messages are communicated and help reach varied audiences, particularly the youth.<sup>433</sup> Schneider (2017) discusses how digital

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<sup>427</sup> Cf. Vogt, Brandon, *The Church and New Media: Blogging Converts, Online Activists, and Bishops who Tweet*, 2011. <https://brandonvogt.com/church-and-new-media/> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

<sup>428</sup> Cf. Heidi, Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, New York 2021.

<sup>429</sup> Cf. Bex, Lewis, *From Pokémon Go to Hashtags: How Digital and Social Media Is Changing the Church*, 2016.

<sup>430</sup> Cf. Pam Smith, *Online Mission and Ministry: A Theological and Practical Guide*, SPCK, London 2015.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> Cf. *How Social Media is Changing the Church*. <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-is-changing-the-church-57405> (Accessed November 6, 2023).

<sup>433</sup> Cf. Matthew P. Schneider, *Applying Six Offline Models to Online Evangelization*, 2017. <https://www.>

formats make sermons universally accessible, enabling preachers to specialize their topics to address niche audiences effectively without being limited by geographical or temporal constraints. The integration of video production and editing into preaching transforms its methodology, allowing visual elements to enhance the delivery and context of the message. This approach not only makes sermons more engaging but also facilitates a broader and more flexible means of proclamation.<sup>434</sup>

### **Social Media Overcomes Geographical Barriers**

Churches and religious leaders increasingly leverage digital media to overcome geographical barriers, making spiritual content accessible from anywhere. Online sermons, podcasts, and YouTube channels provide youth with convenient access to discussions and teachings. As Kunle Badmos (2014) notes, social media helps overcome barriers that church members face in promoting social relationships, such as the lack of safe, accessible, and welcoming public places to gather, limited transportation, and structured activities like school and sports. Social media challenges these barriers by being accessible 24/7 from various physical locations and through different technologies, such as computers and mobile devices.<sup>435</sup>

Social media serves as a dynamic platform for creating and sustaining communities regardless of physical location. Danah Boyd (2014) highlights how social media enables youth to establish “cool spaces” where they can interact informally with their peers, creating a virtual equivalent of traditional public spaces such as malls and football games.<sup>436</sup> This digital transformation expands socialization opportunities, particularly for teens who may not have access to traditional gathering spaces.

In religious contexts, digital media proves invaluable in bridging gaps created by geographical and infrastructural challenges. In regions like Uganda, where access to physical church services can sometimes be limited in remote areas, online platforms become relevant. Tim Hutchings (2017), explores how digital platforms facilitate religious practices and foster communities that transcend physical boundaries.<sup>437</sup>

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hprweb.com/2017/06/applying-six-offline-models-to-online-evangelization/ (Accessed November 12, 2023).

<sup>434</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Kunle Badmos, *The effect of Social Media on the Church*, 2014.

<sup>436</sup> Cf. Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2014. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281562832\\_It's\\_Complicated\\_The\\_Social\\_Lives\\_of\\_Networked\\_Teens](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281562832_It's_Complicated_The_Social_Lives_of_Networked_Teens) (Accessed October 23, 2024).

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Tim, Hutchings, *Creating Church Online: Ritual, Community and New Media*, Routledge, New York 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203111093> (Accessed July 3, 2024).

### **Cost-Effective Evangelization**

Utilizing digital media for evangelization is cost-effective compared to traditional methods. Creating and distributing digital content requires fewer resources than printing materials or organizing large in-person events. This cost-effectiveness is crucial for the Church in Uganda, where financial resources may be limited. Digital evangelization is cost-effective because it allows religious groups to reach large audiences with minimal financial resources. Heidi Campbell states that digital media offers a cost-effective means of outreach, enabling engagement with global audiences without substantial financial investment. The scalability and sustainability of digital platforms further enhance this cost efficiency compared to traditional methods.<sup>438</sup>

Social media mission is cheap and this makes its accessibility easy. One does not need to be a computer expert to join a social network. It is a grassroots tool. It does not require one to buy or own a computer. Smartphones, digital cameras, video cameras and recorders can provide a lot content that can be shared on the net, digital technology enables also simpler and deeper interaction and participation. It is sometimes free of charge.<sup>439</sup> The Internet offers a relatively inexpensive way to connect with many people. Pope John Paul II said: “Don’t be afraid of new technologies!”<sup>440</sup>

### **Encourages Peer-to-Peer Evangelization**

Digital platforms facilitate peer-to-peer evangelization, where young people can share religious content and engage in discussions with their peers. This approach can be particularly effective, as messages delivered by peers may be more relatable and impactful. The Youthscape Research Report, “INFLUENCERS (2022) shows that peers play a crucial role in influencing young people to become Christians, with 38% of surveyed Christian youth citing peers their age as a significant influence and 39% acknowledging at least some influence.<sup>441</sup> This influence is even more pronounced among unchurched youth, with 85% reporting peer impact. Given that social media is a great communication channel for today’s youth, it is a highly effective platform for

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<sup>438</sup> Cf. Heidi, Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge, New York 2013.

<sup>439</sup> Antonia Spadaro, *WEB 2.0 Relationships in the Internet Age*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2014, P. 14.

<sup>440</sup> Apostolic Letter, *The Rapid Development of the Holy Father John Paul II to those Responsible for Communications*, January 24, 2005, n.14.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Youthscape Research, *INFLUENCERS: Peer to Peer Evangelism Amongst Young People in the UK (2022)*. <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/published-research/influencers> (Accessed July 23, 2024).

peer-to-peer evangelism. Social media facilitates the sharing of personal faith stories, spiritual growth, and invitations to religious events in a relatable and engaging manner, making it an ideal medium for evangelism.<sup>442</sup>

The digital media facilitates peer-to-peer evangelism by enabling individuals to share their faith experiences and religious content directly with others in their social networks.

### **Connecting With Younger Generations**

Social media provides opportunity to connect with young people. Digital media allows the Church to connect with younger people on social sites they frequently use and this connection is vital for maintaining relevance and engagement. In “iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives”, Craig Detweiler (2013) emphasizes that youth today, often referred to as digital natives, have grown up with technology as an integral part of their lives. This means that effective youth ministry must meet them where they are—online and engaged with digital media.<sup>443</sup>

The *Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (October 27, 2018) highlights the central role of the internet in the lives of young people, emphasizing its function as their primary source of information and main communication tool.<sup>444</sup> It observes that the internet and social networks serve as a “public square” where young people frequently meet, dialogue, and exchange ideas, although disparities in access persist in various global regions.<sup>445</sup> The digital realm also provides opportunities for socio-political engagement, active citizenship, and the circulation of independent information, which can protect vulnerable individuals and spotlight rights violations. Moreover, these platforms are pivotal in pastoral outreach and engaging youth in spiritual initiatives.<sup>446</sup>

The YouTube Franciscan priest, Fr. Sandesh Manuel in his book “*Der Herrgott hat gelacht*” holds that YouTube mission is an important mission that reaches many young people and he describes YouTube as a stage or platform where one can perform without

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<sup>442</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> Cf. Craig, Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*, Brazos Press, New York: 2013. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-4381>. (Accessed July 24, 2023).

<sup>444</sup> Cf. *Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, October 27, 2018, n. 22.

<sup>445</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

stage fright.<sup>447</sup> Social media is very entertaining and can thus be a great evangelization for the younger generations.

### **Building and Strengthening a Church Community**

Online platforms can help build and strengthen Church communities by providing spaces for interaction, support, and fellowship. Digital media is a powerful tool for building and maintaining faith-based communities. For example, *Chayil Church Online* utilizes tools like social media pages and forums to provide young people and other users with opportunities for spiritual engagement, creating a supportive, inclusive space where members can connect and grow in faith.<sup>448</sup> Keith Anderson (2015) discusses online communities within the context of church ministry. He acknowledges the significant impact of digital social media and mobile technologies on how people interact, communicate, and form communities. His concept of a “Digital Cathedral” extends beyond physical church buildings to include virtual spaces where people gather and engage with each other.<sup>449</sup>

Pope Francis in his message for the World Day of Social Communications 2019 entitled “We are members one of another” (Eph 4:25) From social network communities to the human community, released on the feast day of St Francis de Sales, Patron Saint of Journalists, said that social networks “help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another”. the Pope underlined that the Internet and social media are an important resource. If a family, he said, “uses the Net to be more connected, to then meet at table and look into each other’s eyes, then it is a resource. If a Church community coordinates its activity through the network, and then celebrates the Eucharist together, then it is a resource...”<sup>450</sup>

According to Schneider (2017), the new media can encourage fraternity or brotherhood. It can promote brotherhood by encouraging people with similar interests, even those from long distances, to socialize: for example, Catholic youth pastors in small towns or

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<sup>447</sup> Cf. Manuel, Sandesh, *Der Herrgott hat gelacht. Mein Leben mit Hip-Hop und Kloster*, Kösel-Verlag, München, 2022, p. 75.

<sup>448</sup> Cf. Chayil Church, Chayil Church Online: Nurturing Faith in the Digital Age, in: Medium, September 12, 2023. <https://medium.com/@chayilchurch96/chayil-church-online-nurturing-faith-in-the-digital-age-8ff32b20a664> (Accessed November 10, 2024).

<sup>449</sup> Cf. Keith, Anderson, *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*, 2015. [https://books.google.at/books/about/The\\_Digital\\_Cathedral.html?id=sOBvCQAAQBAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.at/books/about/The_Digital_Cathedral.html?id=sOBvCQAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y) (Accessed July 13, 2024).

<sup>450</sup> Cf. Lydia O’Kane, Pope highlights pros and cons of internet and social media use - Vatican News 2019. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-01/pope-highlights-pros-and-cons-of-internet-and-social-media-use.html> (Accessed November 6, 2023).

Catholic mothers who home-school autistic children can connect with this community. He notes that online platforms, despite their “disembodied” nature, can create inclusive environments that make even introverts feel welcome in faith-based communities.<sup>451</sup>

### **Nonverbal Communication via New Media Leads to Effective Communication**

For Caramazza (2002), on television, the spoken word only accounts for 7 to 10% of communication. 35 to 40% of communication is achieved through modulation of voice, choice of vocabulary and rhythm. The rest, more than 50% of the message, is conveyed to us through the human body, its appearance and movements, and its environment. This means that the message is better understood through images, sounds and descriptions.<sup>452</sup>

Non-verbal communication, such as images, videos, and gestures, can enhance evangelization by making messages more impactful. William A Dyrness (2001), in “Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue” explores the importance and role of visual communication in religious practice. Dyrness argues that visual art can significantly enrich worship and theological reflection. The book delves into how art can be a form of expressing and experiencing faith, fostering a deeper understanding of theology and enhancing the worship experience.<sup>453</sup>

It is further psychologically argued that people learn more from visual and non-verbal cues than from text alone. Studies indicate that humans process visual information 60,000 times faster than text and that 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual. The human brain processes visual data 60,000 times faster than text, which enhances comprehension and retention. This rapid processing helps overcome the inefficiencies associated with reading text, as the brain views words as individual images requiring recognition.<sup>454</sup>

### **Youth Demographic as an Opportunity**

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2024), 77% of Uganda's population is under the age of 30, highlighting the importance of targeting youth in evangelization

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<sup>451</sup> Cf. Applying Six Offline Models to Online Evangelization, 2017.

<sup>452</sup> Caramazza, Giuseppe, News Reporting and Broadcasting, Don Bosco Printing Press, Nairobi, 2002, p.9.

<sup>453</sup> Cf. William, A Dyrness, in Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001. [https://www.academia.edu/77893003/Visual\\_faith\\_art\\_theology\\_and\\_worship\\_in\\_dialogue](https://www.academia.edu/77893003/Visual_faith_art_theology_and_worship_in_dialogue) (Accessed July 23, 2024).

<sup>454</sup> International Forum of Visual Practitioners, Why Our Brain Loves Pictures, 2023. <https://ifvp.org/content/why-our-brain-loves-pictures> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

efforts. This demographic represents a vast opportunity for the Church to foster a vibrant and engaged faith community through new media. The youthful demographic is eager for connection and innovation, making digital media an ideal tool for engagement.

### **Enhanced Interactivity**

New media allows for enhanced interactivity between the Church and young people, enabling more dynamic and engaging forms of evangelization. Torie Mathis highlights essential webinar features like live streaming, polls, Q&A sessions, and discussion forums. These interactive tools are highly effective for engaging audiences across a variety of contexts, including religious content, digital marketing, and tech discussions, by fostering participation and creating a dynamic experience.<sup>455</sup>

In “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century,” Jenkins et al. (2009) highlight how digital media enables new forms of participatory engagement. These forms of engagement make it easier for social connections and active involvement in various communities, including faith-based activities.<sup>456</sup> Leonardi, Huysman, and Steinfield (2013) argue that new media technologies support two-way communication. Social media enables interactive communication.<sup>457</sup>

### **Fostering Global Connections**

Digital media transcends geographical boundaries, allowing the youth in Uganda to connect with fellow Catholics worldwide. Global connectivity helps create a connection to a larger community and provide diverse perspectives on faith. In his seminal work, “The Rise of the Network Society”, Manuel Castells elucidates the transformative impact of digital networks on global society. Castells asserts that the advent of digital networks has fundamentally reshaped the way people interact, leading to unprecedented levels of cross-cultural exchange and shared experiences.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Cf. Torie, Mathis, Discover the Best Webinar Software for Small Businesses. <https://toriemathis.com/best-webinar-software> (Accessed November 26, 2024).

<sup>456</sup> Cf. Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, The MIT Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8435.001.0001> (Accessed June 22, 2023).

<sup>457</sup> Cf. Paul M. Leonardi, Marleen Huysman, and Charles Steinfield, *Enterprise Social Media: Definition, History, and Prospects for the Study of Social Technologies in Organizations*, in: *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, October 18, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12029> (Accessed May 23, 2023).

<sup>458</sup> Cf. Manuel, Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* in: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444319514> (Accessed June 22, 2024).

## **Immediate Feedback and Dialogue**

Digital platforms enable immediate feedback and dialogue, allowing the Church to respond quickly to the needs and concerns of young people. The advantage of immediate feedback and dialogue in digital social media is widely recognized across various fields of study, including communications, marketing, and social sciences. Shirky (2008) discusses the transformative impact of social media on communication, highlighting the immediacy of feedback and the potential for real-time dialogue.<sup>459</sup>

Jenkins, et al (2006), explores how digital media allows for direct interaction between content creators and their audiences, facilitating immediate feedback.<sup>460</sup> Also, Tufekci's book "Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest" (2017) discusses the role of social media in activism, noting the advantages of immediate feedback and dialogue in organizing and mobilizing social movements.<sup>461</sup>

## **Promoting Inclusivity**

New media makes religious content more accessible to those with disabilities, offering features such as audio, video, and text-to-speech options. This inclusivity ensures that all young people, regardless of their physical abilities, can participate in faith-related activities. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the role of digital technologies in promoting inclusivity and accessibility for people with disabilities.<sup>462</sup> Alper's "Digital Youth with Disabilities" (2014) focuses on how young people with disabilities use digital and social media to participate in society, emphasizing the accessibility benefits of these platforms.<sup>463</sup>

Katie and Mike (2011) discuss how digital media can both hinder and enhance accessibility for individuals with disabilities. They note that while new technologies like video and animation often reduce user control and embed ablest assumptions, thereby excluding disabled users, Web 2.0 platforms like social networking sites and virtual worlds offer significant opportunities for inclusivity. These platforms enable new forms of connection and participation for people with disabilities. Ellis and Kent argue that for

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<sup>459</sup> Cf. Clay, Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Penguin Press, New York 2008. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.46-1205> (Accessed June 22, 2024).

<sup>460</sup> Cf. Jenkins, Henry, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, The MIT Press, 2009.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. M. Altman and Z. Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, in: *Voluntas* 29 (2018): 884–885. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9927-0> (Accessed August 2, 2023).

<sup>462</sup> Cf. World Health Organization (WHO), *World Report on Disability*, Geneva 2011.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. Alper, Meryl, *Digital Youth with Disabilities*, MA: The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2014.

the internet to be truly accessible, disability must be recognized as a cultural identity on par with class, gender, and sexuality. Thus, the book presents a nuanced view, highlighting both the challenges and the potential of new media to support accessibility.<sup>464</sup>

### **Supporting Evangelization in Difficult Times**

During difficult times when physical meetings cannot take place, digital media can continue to provide spiritual support and maintain community connections. This resilience is crucial in ensuring continuous evangelization efforts. Ryan P Burge and Miles D Williams (2019), in “Is Social Media a Digital Pulpit? How Evangelical Leaders Use Twitter to Encourage the Faithful and Publicize Their Work,” underline the role of digital media in sustaining religious practices during challenging times.<sup>465</sup> “Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World” by Heidi A. Campbell explores how religious communities adapted to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Religious groups rapidly shifted to online platforms for worship and community engagement. The pandemic forced religious communities to rethink how they foster connections and support among members without physical gatherings.<sup>466</sup>

In Uganda, during COVID19 Lockdowns, Online Churches or online faith communities helped to strengthen bonds among members by providing a space for praying together, accessing spiritual information, sharing experiences, offering support, and building relationships.

### **Promoting Religious Vocations**

Digital platforms can be used to promote religious vocations by sharing stories of priests, nuns, and other religious figures. This visibility can inspire young people to consider religious life as a viable and fulfilling vocation. In his 2002 message for the 36th World Communications Day, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the

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<sup>464</sup> Cf. Katie Ellis and Mike Kent, *Disability and New Media*, Routledge, New York 2010. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203831915>(Accessed February 28, 2024).

<sup>465</sup> Cf. Ryan Burge and Miles D. Williams, *Is Social Media a Digital Pulpit? How Evangelical Leaders Use Twitter to Encourage the Faithful and Publicize Their Work*, in: *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 3 (December 2019): 309–339, <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00803004> (Accessed March 25, 2024).

<sup>466</sup> Cf. Heidi A. Campbell, *Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World*.

advancements in communication and information technologies have offered the Church unique and unprecedented opportunities to carry out her mission.<sup>467</sup>

In his eBook “How to Attract and Nurture Top Vocation Candidates with Social Media”, Kevin Banet (2013) discusses the strategy and importance of promoting religious vocations through various forms of Digital media. Banet's approach focuses on leveraging social media platforms like Facebook, as well as utilizing newsletters and paid advertising to reach out to potential candidates. This credits the modern digital media marketing tools within the religious context.<sup>468</sup>

## **Conclusion**

New media can offer numerous advantages and opportunities for reaching and evangelizing youth in Uganda. It can serve as an effective vehicle for evangelization and catechesis, providing inspiration, encouragement, and creative outlets for the younger generation. The educational and guidance capabilities of new media ensure timely communication and access to essential information, updates, and event promotion.

Social media platforms foster greater involvement and participation, contributing to the humanization and openness of the Church. These platforms transform traditional preaching methods, offering cost-effective and peer-to-peer evangelization opportunities. They help connect with younger generations and build a stronger church community through non-verbal communication and interactive engagement.

Uganda's youth demographic, characterized by a significant number of young believers, presents a unique opportunity for the Church. New media enhances interactivity between the Church and young people, overcoming geographical barriers and fostering global connections. Digital platforms enable immediate feedback and dialogue, promoting inclusivity by making religious content accessible to those with disabilities.

Moreover, new media offers flexibility and convenience, supporting evangelization efforts during challenging times and promoting religious vocations online. In essence, leveraging new media for evangelization in Uganda not only adapts to contemporary communication trends but also strengthens the Church's mission and community among the youth.

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<sup>467</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 36<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 2002.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Kevin Banet, How to Attract and Nurture Top Vocation Candidates with Social Media, 2013.

### **5.3 Challenges and Barriers in Integration of New Media to Youth Evangelization in Ugandan Context**

Evangelization mission in a digital environment is not without challenges. There are significant challenges that the new media presents to the Church.<sup>469</sup> As the Catholic Church in Uganda seeks to embrace digital tools to engage with young people, it needs to handle a variety of potential pitfalls. The following discussion explores in detail the challenges and barriers that were mentioned in the online survey and drawing on relevant literature, this section analyses the obstacles and challenges that the Church must address to effectively harness new media for youth evangelization.

#### **Reduction of Physical Engagement**

Digital media significantly reduces physical engagement and face-to-face socialization, posing a challenge to personal relationships. The convenience and ease of connecting online can result in a preference for digital interactions over traditional face-to-face encounters.<sup>470</sup> This trend is particularly concerning because it threatens the quality and depth of personal relationships. The immediacy and impersonal nature of digital interactions can hinder the development of essential social skills, such as empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution.

The impact of reduced face-to-face interactions is profound. When individuals communicate online, they are less likely to experience the full spectrum of human emotions and social cues that come with physical presence. In the digital realm, it is easy to ignore, block, or unfriend someone, actions that would be more difficult and socially complex in person. This digital barrier not only makes it easier to avoid dealing with interpersonal conflicts but also prevents individuals from developing and honing their social problem-solving skills.<sup>471</sup> Over time, this can lead to a decrease in one's ability to navigate and resolve conflicts in real-world settings, potentially retarding social skill development and impacting personal growth.<sup>472</sup>

In the context of evangelizing young people in Uganda, these challenges are particularly pertinent. The autonomy and anonymity provided by the virtual world can lead

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<sup>469</sup> Synod of Bishops, Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, Final Document, Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, p.98.

<sup>470</sup> Cf. Brainly, What cultural impacts did the computer have? Equity deficits. <https://brainly.com/question/40978780> (Accessed November 26, 2024).

<sup>471</sup> Cf. How Does Social Media Affect Social Skills? In: *NHWS*, September 23, 2024. <https://nhws.us/2024/09/23/how-does-social-media-affect-social-skills/> (Accessed October 21, 2024).

<sup>472</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

individuals to create fantasy personas, which can conflict with the values of authenticity and integrity emphasized in Christian teachings. According to Kunle Badmos, the pretense facilitated by social media is contrary to Christian values, posing a significant obstacle to genuine spiritual engagement and growth.<sup>473</sup> For the Church, leveraging new media to connect with the youth necessitates a balanced approach that promotes digital engagement without compromising the development of critical face-to-face social skills.

### **Prevalence of Misinformation and Fake News**

While misinformation has been a part of human history for centuries, social media has transformed its scope by enabling individuals to create and share content quickly and extensively.<sup>474</sup>

As noted by Dhiman (2022), social media and the internet facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of false information. This proliferation of misinformation can have serious consequences for communities, individuals, and entire countries.<sup>475</sup> In the context of youth evangelization, the spread of false information can tarnish the Church and affect its teachings, confuse young people, and create distrust in digital platforms used for spiritual guidance.

The speed and scale of digital communication make it challenging to correct or debunk false information once it is disseminated. This means that sensational or provocative misinformation is more likely to be amplified and seen by a wider audience. As Dhiman (2019) points out, malicious actors can exploit these algorithms to spread fake news for political influence or financial gain. These actors use bots, fake accounts, and other tools to manipulate public opinion and amplify false narratives.<sup>476</sup> For young people in Uganda, who may rely heavily on social media for information, this can lead to confusion and misinformed decisions.

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<sup>473</sup> Cf. Kunle Badmos, *The effect of Social Media on the Church*, 2014.

<sup>474</sup> Cf. Sijing Chen, Lu Xiao, and Akit Kumar, *Spread of Misinformation on Social Media: What Contributes to It and How to Combat It*, in: *Computers in Human Behavior* 134 (2022): 107643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107643> (Accessed July 24, 2023).

<sup>475</sup> Cf. B. Dhiman, *Condition of Women Prisoners in Model Jail, Chandigarh: A Communication Study*, SSRN Scholarly Paper, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4205096> (Accessed June 20, 2024).

<sup>476</sup> Cf. Bharat Dhiman, *Effects of Online News Applications for Android: A Critical Analysis*, SSRN Scholarly Paper, September 7, 2022. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4222791> (Accessed June 20, 2024).

## **Polarisation and Division Within the Church Community**

Digital platforms can be used to distort or misrepresent religious teachings, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations among believers. Edited videos, out-of-context quotes, and manipulated images can circulate widely, damaging the church's reputation and credibility. The ease of digital manipulation challenges the authenticity and integrity of religious communications. Boyd (2014) explores how digital media can be used to manipulate public perceptions and beliefs.<sup>477</sup>

Digital media platforms are not neutral; they often prioritize content that drives engagement, which can lead to the amplification of sensationalist or divisive material. This dynamic can undermine the Church's efforts to promote thoughtful and reflective engagement with faith. As reflected by Zeynep Tufekci (2017), the algorithms that govern social media platforms shape the flow of information in ways that are not always conducive to healthy discourse.<sup>478</sup>

## **Addiction and Overuse of New Media**

Addiction to and overuse of new media is one of the critical challenges identified in findings of this research and in the contemporary digital landscape. According to Dhiman (2019), addiction to new media is characterized by a behavioral dependency that disrupts personal and professional life, affecting relationships and daily responsibilities. Overuse, while not always leading to addiction, still exerts a detrimental impact on mental well-being.<sup>479</sup> The implications of this addiction are profound. Many youths are increasingly spending more time on social media, often at the expense of church attendance and spiritual engagement. This overuse can lead to significant physical and mental health issues, including eyestrain, sleep disturbances, and mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.<sup>480</sup>

Brockman (2021) argues that social media increasingly resembles a drug, with constant access readily available in our pockets. Many Christians turn to platforms like Twitter and Facebook seeking affirmation, attention, and a sense of importance. The alluring nature of social media can stimulate and amplify desires for attention and fame (or

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<sup>477</sup> Cf. Boyd, Danah, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2014.

<sup>478</sup> Cf. Altman, M., and Z. Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, in: *Voluntas* 29 (2018): 884–885. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9927-0> (Accessed August 2, 2023).

<sup>479</sup> Cf. Bharat Dhiman, *Effects of Online News Applications for Android: A Critical Analysis*.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. Bharat Dhiman, *The Practice of Media Education and Media Research: A Review on Five Asian Countries*, Social Science Research Network, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4205888> (Accessed June 22, 2024).

notoriety). This addictive quality can distort our motives and impair our judgment.<sup>481</sup> The potential for addiction and overuse of these technologies poses a substantial barrier to youth evangelization in the digital age.

### **Income Inequality and Digital Divide**

The digital divide in world underscores a critical challenge in integrating new media into youth evangelization and broader societal participation. The digital divide poses a significant challenge in addressing income inequality and social disparity. In Uganda, many youths lack the financial means to afford essential digital devices such as smartphones, computers, or consistent internet connectivity. This gap in access creates a profound digital divide where individuals with technology access reap greater benefits than those without. The Pontifical Council on Social Communications describes this divide as a modern form of discrimination, separating the “information rich” from the “information poor” based on access to new information technology, thereby updating the concept of socio-economic disparity to include digital dimensions.<sup>482</sup>

The implications of this divide are far-reaching. John Paul II, in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, highlighted that mass media could exacerbate individual and social problems, hindering human solidarity and integral development. Issues such as secularism, consumerism, materialism, dehumanization, and neglect of the poor are aggravated by the unequal access to media.<sup>483</sup> This scenario is evident in Uganda, where income inequality limits many individuals' ability to access new media, further marginalizing disadvantaged groups. The inability of lower-income individuals to afford high-speed internet or digital devices restricts their participation in online discussions and their access to educational resources.

The digital divide not only amplifies existing social inequalities but also restricts access to critical information and opportunities. Dhiman (2023) discusses how income inequality and the digital divide are critical issues in new media, highlighting how they exacerbate social inequalities and limit access to vital information and opportunities.<sup>484</sup> In Uganda, these challenges are particularly acute due to significant variations in

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<sup>481</sup> Cf. Rob Brockman, 5 Biblical Principles for Social Media, The Gospel Coalition (Canada). <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-biblical-principles-for-social-media/> (Accessed September 27, 2021).

<sup>482</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Ethics in Internet*, n.10.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 41, in *AAS*, LXXXIII (1991), p. 841.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Bharat Dhiman, Key Issues and New Challenges in New Media Technology in 2023: A Critical Review, in: *Journal of Media & Management* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–4. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4387353> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

technological access across different socio-economic and geographic groups. The lack of digital infrastructure in rural areas further exacerbates this divide, making it challenging for youth in these regions to engage with online evangelization activities or educational content.

Geographical disparities, combined with socio-economic factors, intensify the digital divide. Rural areas often suffer from limited internet infrastructure, preventing youth from participating in digital evangelization activities or accessing educational resources.

### **Privacy and Security Concerns**

Integrating new media into youth evangelization introduces significant privacy and security challenges. Digital technologies offer innovative platforms for engagement but also facilitate the unprecedented collection, storage, and dissemination of personal information.<sup>485</sup> According to Wu (2018), Social media platforms, in particular, collect extensive personal data from users, including passwords, browsing history, location data, and even biometric information. This data is often shared with third-party advertisers and other organizations.<sup>486</sup> Such widespread collection and distribution of sensitive data pose substantial risks to the privacy of individuals involved in digital evangelization.

The Pontifical Council on Social Communications has highlighted the ethical questions surrounding privacy, data security, and confidentiality brought about by the spread of the Internet, emphasizing the need to protect young people's personal information in youth evangelization efforts.<sup>487</sup>

Additionally, Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, addresses the new forms of violence facilitated by social media, including cyberbullying. Church members may also be exposed to harassment or inappropriate contact unless internet content is diligently filtered.

### **No Sacraments Are Received Online**

The virtual reality of cyberspace raises significant concerns for religion, particularly regarding the reception of sacraments. The Pontifical Council on Social Communications (2002) asserts that all Sacraments require physical presence and

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<sup>485</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Cf. Wu, Yanfang, Social Media Engagement in the Digital Age: Accountability or Threats, in: Newspaper Research Journal 39, no. 3 (2018): 287–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532918796236> (Accessed June 22, 2024).

<sup>487</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, 2002

cannot be administered or received over the Internet. The religious experiences facilitated by digital means, although possible by the grace of God, are deemed insufficient without real-world interaction with other faithful individuals.<sup>488</sup>

This perspective underscores the importance of maintaining a tangible connection to religious practices and community. The Internet, while offering new opportunities for engagement and spiritual enrichment, lacks the capacity to provide the sacramental graces that are integral to the Catholic faith. The sacraments of the Church such as Eucharist, Penance, etc, require direct, physical participation, which virtual platforms cannot offer. This limitation highlights the irreplaceable value of in-person worship and the communal aspects of religious life that foster deeper faith and spiritual growth. Moreover, the reliance on digital media for religious purposes should not diminish the necessity of physical presence in communal worship and sacramental life.

### **Generational Gaps**

Generational gaps between church leadership and the youth can also contribute to difficulties in adopting new media. Older church leaders may lack understanding or appreciation of the digital habits and preferences of young people, leading to a disconnect between the Church's outreach strategies and the needs of its young congregation

According to Ben Read's 2011 article "The Problem with Social Media in Youth Ministry," there is a generational gap in how social networks are perceived and utilized. While youth pastors did not grow up with social media, today's youth have been immersed in it from a young age.<sup>489</sup> This discrepancy will persist for some time.

This perspective underscores the importance of leveraging social media networks for youth evangelization in Uganda. As youth pastors may not have the same intuitive grasp of social media as younger generations, they must actively learn and adapt to these platforms to connect effectively with the youth.

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<sup>488</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002, n.9. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html) (Accessed April 12, 2023).

<sup>489</sup> Cf. Ben, Read, *The Problem with Social Media in Youth Ministry*, December 16, 2011. [https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-blogs/157504-ben\\_read\\_the\\_problem\\_with\\_social\\_media\\_in\\_youth\\_ministry.html](https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-blogs/157504-ben_read_the_problem_with_social_media_in_youth_ministry.html) (Accessed December 5, 2022).

## **The Pervasiveness of Social Media and Internet Greatly Affects the Youth**

The pervasiveness of social media and the internet significantly impacts the youth, serving as a “super-peer” that profoundly influences their development and education. This term, coined by researchers Levin and Kilbourne, underscores the dominant role mass media plays in shaping adolescents' values and beliefs.<sup>490</sup> The concept is further explored by Ross, who notes that Catholic educational environments often fail to embrace media or provide the necessary tools for teenagers to make fully informed moral decisions. Consequently, youth turn to new media, which acts as a “super-peer,” overshadowing the guidance of parents, teachers, and religious leaders in navigating complex messages about sex and sexuality presented through television, movies, and music.<sup>491</sup> This shift in influence highlights the urgent need for Catholic educational frameworks to integrate media literacy to better support the moral development of adolescents.

Dr. Christina Grant also emphasizes the critical nature of media messages during adolescence, a stage when teenagers are particularly vulnerable as they are still forming their values and beliefs.<sup>492</sup> The cognitive immaturity of youth further complicates their ability to critically analyze these pervasive media messages, leading them to potentially uncritically apply these influences to their lives.<sup>493</sup> The reliance on media for answers to personal questions highlights a significant challenge for integrating new media into youth evangelization efforts. As Ross (2018) articulates, the tendency of youth to seek out media as a source of answers underscores the necessity for religious and educational leaders to develop strategies that engage with new media effectively, ensuring that young people receive balanced and morally sound guidance.<sup>494</sup> This dynamic presents a formidable challenge, necessitating a proactive and integrative approach to media within Catholic education to mitigate the overwhelming influence of the “super-peer” and foster a more grounded moral development among the youth.

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<sup>490</sup> Cf. Levin, D. E & Kilbourne J, (ed.), *So Sexy So Soon, The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents can do to Protect their Kids*, New York, 2009, p. 149.

<sup>491</sup> Cf. Ross, Karen, *The Future of Catholic Sexual Pedagogy: A Case Study of Sexual Development and Flourishing of Catholic Young Women*, in: Sigrid Müller, Piotr Jan Morciniec, (Eds.), *Bio Ethik in der Diskussion*, 3 (2021), pp. 138-139.

<sup>492</sup> Cf. Grant, C., *Teens, Sex and the Media, Is There a Connection?* In: *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 2003, 8, 5, pp.285-86.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Ross, 2021, pp. 138-139.

<sup>494</sup> Cf. Ross, K. E., *Deconstructing the “Good Catholic Girl”: A Critique of Sexual Pedagogies for Young Women in Catholic Ethics*, Doctoral Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2018, 258. [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/2982](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2982) (Accessed March 28, 2023).

In the context of youth evangelization, this polarization can severely hinder efforts to engage and connect with young people. Online discussions about religious matters can quickly become polarized and divisive, turning debates into conflicts and potentially causing fragmentation within the Church community. The echo chambers created by social media platforms make it difficult to foster understanding and empathy between individuals with differing viewpoints. This may be a hard challenge to address yet it is crucial for successful evangelization efforts, as it requires creating digital spaces that promote open dialogue, mutual respect, and a willingness to consider diverse perspectives.

### **Increases Craving for Attention Among Youth**

The obsession with followers, shares, comments and likes on social networking sites can foster a craving for attention and validation among young people. This can detract from their focus on spiritual growth and lead to issues such as narcissism and low self-esteem. Jean Twenge's *iGen* (2017) discusses how social media has contributed to a rise in mental health issues among young people, emphasizing the need for guidance in navigating these platforms.<sup>495</sup>

### **Little or No Control of Digital Media**

The Church has limited control over the content and policies of digital media platforms. This lack of control leads to failure in ensuring that religious content is appropriately moderated and accessible. The shifting algorithms and policies of these digital sites can also affect the Church's messages or evangelization efforts. “Technological determinist” thinkers who argue that technologies may have power over human life that cannot ultimately be controlled.<sup>496</sup> Marshall McLuhan argued that the real power of any medium lies not in its power to communicate, but rather in the way that a medium “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action”.<sup>497</sup> As discussed in “The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think,” Eli Pariser writes, “Google now tries to predict what you are most likely to click on,” reflecting how personalization has altered our web experience.

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<sup>495</sup> Cf. Twenge, Jean M., *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*, Atria Books, New York 2017.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. Andrew Murphie and John Potts, *Theoretical Frameworks*, in *Culture and Technology* Palgrave, London 2003, 11–30. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08938-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08938-0_2) (Accessed July 20, 2023).

<sup>497</sup> Cf. W. Terrence, Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding*, Basic Books, New York 1997, p. 282.

He argues that “personalized filters are sweeping the Web, creating individual universes of information for each of us,” and warns that “we will increasingly be typed and fed only news that is pleasant, familiar, and confirms our beliefs,” thereby limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and stifling innovation and democratic exchange.<sup>498</sup> The lack of transparency and control over digital content curation can hinder effective communication. Church leaders and administrators may find it challenging to manage and moderate negative interactions on social media.

### **Immorality**

The internet is rife with content that promotes immorality, including pornography, violence, and other harmful material. This pervasive immorality can negatively influence young people and undermine the Church's efforts to promote virtuous living. As highlighted in “The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography” by Wendy and Larry Maltz (2009), exposure to online pornography can have detrimental effects on mental health and relationships, necessitating robust pastoral responses.<sup>499</sup>

In “iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood” Twenge (2017) discusses how social media can expose young people to risky and immoral behaviors. She notes, “Social media platforms often showcase risky behaviors and can normalize these actions, leading to increased exposure and potentially more engagement in such behaviors”<sup>500</sup>.

In “Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now,” Jaron Lanier (2018) provides a critical view of social media platforms and their effects on behavior and society. Lanier discusses how social media algorithms promote extreme content to increase engagement. He notes, “Social media is structured to reward more sensational and extreme content, which often leads to the spread of immoral and harmful ideas”.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Cf. Eli, Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think*, Penguin Press, New York: 2012. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.50-0926> (Accessed August 20, 2023).

<sup>499</sup> Cf. Maltz, Wendy, and Larry Maltz. *The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography*, Harper Collins, New York 2008.

<sup>500</sup> Cf. Twenge, Jean M., *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*, Atria Books, New York 2017.

<sup>501</sup> Cf. Lanier, Jaron, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 2018.

### **Lack of Depth in Interactions**

While social media facilitates broad engagement, the nature of these interactions is often superficial. Likes, shares, and brief comments do not equate to meaningful engagement or deep spiritual growth. Sherry Turkle, a media scholar, in her book “Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age” explores how the shift from face-to-face conversation to digital communications has harmed relationships, creativity and productivity. Turkle highlights the negative impacts of this trend or shift, such as diminished attention at the dinner table, reduced workplace commitment and superficial online political discourse. She points out that while technology offers convenience, it often leads to isolation, and lack of Empathy.<sup>502</sup> This implies that digital interactions potentially undermine the church's efforts to foster genuine relationships and spiritual development.

### **Exposure to Harassment, Manipulation and Exploitation**

Church members, especially youth, may be exposed to online harassment, manipulation, and exploitation through cyberbullying, scams and predatory behaviours that online environment facilitates. Hinduja, and Patchin (2015) in their book “Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying” emphasize the detrimental effects of cyberbullying, noting its impact on emotional well-being and community cohesion. The authors underline that although internet fosters global connectivity, crime and deviance increasingly transcend temporal and geo-spatial borders. Online behaviours like bullying and stalking have surged, facilitated by the anonymity or perceived anonymity that the digital world provides to offenders.<sup>503</sup> This environment not only emboldens malicious activities but also complicates efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, highlighting a significant downside of virtual communication.

### **Technological Distractions**

The omnipresence of social media can lead to distractions and superficial engagements with faith. The constant availability of digital devices can be a major distraction from prayer, reflection, and spiritual practices.

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. Turkle, Sherry, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Penguin Press, New York 2015.

<sup>503</sup> Cf. Hinduja, Sameer, and Justin W. Patchin, *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015.

Nicholas Carr's book "The Shallows: What Internet is Doing to Our Brains" delves into the complex relationship between technology and human cognition. Carr contends that the internet is altering the way our brains function, making us more adept at skimming information but less capable of deep thinking and reflection. He remarks for instance, "The more pieces of information we can access and the more quickly we can access them, the more we tend to prefer these quick and easy solutions".<sup>504</sup> This highlights his concern that the rapid access to information is changing our brain's ability to focus deeply. Adam Gazzaley and Larry Rosen (2016) in "The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World" explores how digital distractions impact mental performance and overall well-being, highlighting the necessity of mindful technology use. Despite our pride in handling multiple tasks simultaneously, such as reading emails, texting, checking social media, and more-the authors clarify that our attention is not vivid.<sup>505</sup>

### **Online Preaching Makes One to Guess the Audience's Reaction**

The disembodied nature of the Internet challenges preachers to better guess the audience's reaction. An in-person sermon creates an immediate feedback loop: If a preacher says something overly strong, he or she can see how people's faces react to it, or if one is boring, one can see them close their eyes, look dazed, or nod off. Online sermons have none of this interaction with those listening to what the preacher is saying. Therefore, those who preach online need to be better at assessing how people react to their spoken comments to avoid making them seem boring or so strong that the preacher comes off as offensive.<sup>506</sup>

### **Traditional Mindsets or Cultural Resistance**

Many churches in Uganda are rooted in traditional practices and the new media technologies are resisted because of a belief that traditional methods of evangelization, such as in-person sermons and community gatherings, are more authentic and effective. This reluctance to change can hinder the Church's ability to reach young people who

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<sup>504</sup> Cf. Nicholas, G Carr, *The Shallows: What Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.

<sup>505</sup> Cf. Gazzaley, Adam, and Larry Rosen, *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2016.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Matthew P. Schneider, *Applying Six Offline Models to Online Evangelization*, 2017. <https://www.hprweb.com/2017/06/applying-six-offline-models-to-online-evangelization/> (Accessed November 12, 2023).

are increasingly engaged with digital platforms. As noted by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel Huntington in “Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress” (2000), deeply ingrained cultural values can significantly impact the adoption of new technologies.<sup>507</sup>

Furthermore, Uganda is a culturally diverse country, and effective evangelization must consider this diversity. The Church must tailor its digital outreach to reflect the unique cultural dynamics of Uganda. Some churches may fail to create culturally sensitive content that resonates with different ethnic and cultural groups. Insensitivity or a one-size-fits-all approach can alienate young people from diverse backgrounds, reducing the effectiveness of the Church’s outreach. Ensuring that digital evangelization efforts are culturally relevant and resonate with the local context thus remains a significant challenge. As noted by Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington (2000), cultural sensitivity is crucial for effective communication and engagement.<sup>508</sup>

### **Limited Technological Infrastructure**

Many churches in Uganda struggle with limited technological infrastructure, which hampers their ability to produce and disseminate high-quality digital content. Issues such as inadequate internet access, outdated equipment, and lack of technical support can prevent churches from fully leveraging new media for evangelization. This is particularly problematic in rural areas where technological resources are scarce.

While urban areas in Uganda may have relatively better access to digital infrastructure, rural regions often face significant challenges, including limited internet connectivity and access to digital devices. The World Bank’s report on digital development highlights the challenges of digital infrastructure in developing countries, including Uganda, and the impact on socio-economic development.<sup>509</sup>

### **Language Barriers**

Uganda is a multilingual country with over 40 different languages spoken and the Church must navigate these complexities to effectively use new media for evangelization. This linguistic diversity can pose challenges for digital evangelization, as some churches may find it hard or ignore to create content that is consumed by all

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<sup>507</sup> Cf. Harrison, Lawrence E., and Samuel P. Huntington, eds. *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, Basic Books, New York 2000.

<sup>508</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>509</sup> Cf. World Bank, *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends*, Washington, D.C., 2016.

linguistic and cultural groups. Content predominantly in English or in urban-centric contexts may not resonate with rural or non-English-speaking youth. According to Ethnologue addressing language barriers is crucial for effective communication and engagement in multilingual societies.<sup>510</sup>

### **Economic Constraints**

Economic constraints can limit both the Church's ability to invest in digital technologies and the youth's ability to access them. Effective digital evangelization requires investment in technology, content creation, and training. However, many churches in Uganda operate on limited budgets and may prioritize other pressing needs over digital initiatives. This financial constraint can result in inadequate resources to develop and maintain a robust digital presence, limiting the Church's reach and engagement.

Many young people in Uganda may not have the financial means to afford smartphones, data plans, or other digital devices necessary for participating in online evangelization efforts. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) emphasizes the economic barriers to digital inclusion, particularly in low-income countries.<sup>511</sup>

Churches often compete with other organizations and initiatives for limited financial resources. Allocating funds to new media projects may be seen as less urgent compared to basic needs of life like food, health care etc. This competition for resources can hinder the Church's ability to fully invest in digital evangelization efforts.

Furthermore, financial constraints lead to limited Integration of Digital Tools.

A comprehensive digital strategy involves integrating various digital tools and platforms to create a cohesive and engaging online experience. Some churches have failed to effectively integrate their digital efforts, resulting in fragmented and less impactful evangelization. For instance, a church may have a website, social media accounts, and a YouTube channel, but without coordination and cross-promotion, the potential reach and impact are diminished.

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<sup>510</sup> Cf. Ethnologue, *Languages of the World*, 22nd ed., SIL International, Dallas 2019.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. International Telecommunications Union (ITU), *Measuring the Information Society Report*, Geneva 2020.

## **Political Interference**

Political interference and regulations can impact the Church's use of digital media. Government policies and actions, such as internet shutdowns or restrictions on online content, can hinder the Church's digital evangelization efforts. According to Freedom House's report on internet freedom, Uganda has experienced internet disruptions and censorship, which can limit the effectiveness of online religious activities.<sup>512</sup> For instance, the social media was banned by the government of Uganda ahead of the January 2021 general elections, the president ordered the Facebook platform to be blocked. The move followed Facebook's removal of numerous accounts linked to the Ugandan government, which Facebook claimed were involved in manipulating public discourse.<sup>513</sup> The Ugandan government argued that the ban was out of security reasons and the need to control misinformation as reasons. However, critics argue that the ban was a way to stifle free expression and limit opposition during a critical election period.<sup>514</sup> The move forced many Ugandans to use virtual private networks (VPNs) to access Facebook.

## **Lack of Digital Skills**

Poor digital skills among both clergy and laity can be a significant hindrance to effective digital evangelization. Without adequate training in using digital tools and platforms, the Church may struggle to create and manage online content effectively. The UNESCO report on digital literacy underscores the importance of digital skills training for effective participation in the digital economy and society (UNESCO, 2018).<sup>515</sup> Vaishali (2024) emphasizes that digital literacy is not confined to technical competencies but also includes critical thinking and ethical awareness.<sup>516</sup> This perspective underlines the multifaceted nature of digital literacy, advocating for a more comprehensive approach that prepares individuals to navigate the complexities of the

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<sup>512</sup> Cf. Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2020: The Pandemic's Digital Shadow*, Washington, D.C. 2020.

<sup>513</sup> Cf. Halima, Athumani, *Ugandan Government restores Social media Sites except Facebook*, 2021. [https://www.voanews.com/a/africa\\_ugandan-government-restores-social-media-sites-except-facebook/6201864.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_ugandan-government-restores-social-media-sites-except-facebook/6201864.html) (Accessed July 12, 2024).

<sup>514</sup> Cf. NetBlocks, *Social Media and Messaging Restricted, Internet Shut Down for Uganda Elections*, January 12, 2021. <https://netblocks.org/reports/social-media-and-messaging-platforms-restricted-in-uganda-ahead-of-general-election-XB7aaO87> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

<sup>515</sup> Cf. UNESCO, *Digital Literacy in Education*, Paris 2018.

<sup>516</sup> Cf. Vaishali, *Navigating the Digital Age: Balancing Distraction and Innovation in Classrooms*, in: *Countercurrents*, February 24, 2024. <https://countercurrents.org/2024/02/navigating-the-digital-age-balancing-distraction-and-innovation-in-classrooms/> (Accessed July 12, 2024).

digital world responsibly. Furthermore, Howard Rheingold in “Net Smart: How to Thrive Online” argues that without digital literacy, individuals are vulnerable to manipulation, misinformation, and exploitation.<sup>517</sup>

### **Digital Fatigue**

Digital fatigue is brought on by excessive and prolonged use of digital devices and platforms. This phenomenon has become particularly prevalent with the rise of remote and hybrid work models, which often require extended periods of screen time for communication, collaboration, and task completion. According to research data from this study, digital fatigue can lead to decreased participation in online religious activities. Carr (2010) discusses the impact of prolonged digital engagement on mental health and productivity, highlighting the need for balance.<sup>518</sup>

Similarly, in “Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World”, Cal Newport (2019) presents digital fatigue as a result of the overwhelming and often fragmented nature of constant digital engagement. He argues that our constant interaction with digital devices and platforms can lead to mental exhaustion and reduced attention span.<sup>519</sup>

### **Inclusivity Issues and Gender Disparities**

Inclusivity is also crucial for effective digital evangelization. Content that does not consider the perspectives of marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, young women, or people with disabilities, can lead to exclusion. Churches must strive to create inclusive content that speaks to the diverse experiences of all young people however in Uganda it is difficult for the Church and State to recognize LGBTQ+ rights.

According to a report from the Human Rights Watch (2024), “the Ugandan government has intensified its crackdown on LGBTQ+ individuals following the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which criminalizes same-sex relations with harsh penalties. The law not only criminalizes LGBTQ+ activities but also facilitates discrimination and

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<sup>517</sup> Cf. Rheingold, Howard, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, MA: MIT Press, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>518</sup> Cf. Nicholas, Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*.

<sup>519</sup> Cf. Newport, Cal, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*, Penguin Press, New York 2019.

violence against sexual minorities, undermining their basic human rights and freedoms”<sup>520</sup>.

### **Gender Disparities**

Gender disparities in access to and use of digital technologies can also pose challenges. For example, in many regions of Uganda, women and girls often have reduced access to social media and digital gadgets compared to men, hindering their involvement in online evangelization efforts. Moreover, the gender distribution among social media users highlights a stark imbalance, with 62.2% of users being male and only 37.8% female.<sup>521</sup> Such disparities prompt critical concerns about equitable access to technology and the promotion of digital literacy. The GSMA’s report (2020) on the mobile gender gap highlights the barriers women face in accessing and using mobile technology, particularly in developing countries.<sup>522</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The integration of new media into youth evangelization presents significant challenges and barriers that the Catholic Church in Uganda must address to harness its full potential. These challenges include the reduction of physical engagement, misinformation, and Addiction, digital divide, privacy and security concerns, and the inability to receive sacraments online. Additional issues such as generational gaps, the pervasive impact of social media, increased craving for attention among youth, limited control of digital media, managing negative interactions, and exposure to immorality, harassment, manipulation, and exploitation further complicate the landscape. Technological distractions, cultural resistance, traditional mindsets, limited digital infrastructure, language barriers, economic constraints, political interference, lack of digital skills, digital fatigue, inclusivity issues, and gender disparities also pose significant obstacles.

By recognizing and addressing these multifaceted challenges, the Church can develop more effective and inclusive digital evangelization strategies that foster meaningful connections, spiritual growth, and community building among Uganda's youth. The

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<sup>520</sup> Cf. Human Rights Watch, Uganda: Court Upholds Anti-Homosexuality Act, April 4, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/04/uganda-court-upholds-anti-homosexuality-act> (Accessed July 23, 2024).

<sup>521</sup> Cf. Digital 2024: Uganda, DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-uganda> (Accessed October 15, 2024).

<sup>522</sup> Cf. GSMA, The Mobile Gender Gap Report, London 2020.

Church's ability to navigate these complexities will determine its success in leveraging digital tools to engage and inspire the next generation of faithful.

#### **5.4 Practical Recommendations for Effective Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization in Uganda**

To effectively integrate new media in youth evangelization, the Catholic Church in Uganda needs to address the challenges and build on its successes with a strategic and practical approach. The following recommendations are drawn from the analysis and supported by relevant literature.

##### **Balance Traditional and New Media Approaches**

From the survey, it was recommended that the Church in Uganda integrates new media strategies with traditional media to create a balanced approach to evangelization that caters to diverse audience preferences. While new media is essential for engaging the youth, traditional media remains valuable for specific segments of the congregation.<sup>523</sup> The Church should create a hybrid communication strategy that leverages the strengths of both traditional and new media. This approach helps to ensure that all Christians are reached effectively.

Henry Jenkins, is one of the prominent authors who supports a balanced approach to the new media. In his Work, “Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide” (2006), Jenkins argues for a balanced understanding of media convergence, where traditional media and new digital platforms co-exist and influence each other.

In his introduction, Jenkins states, “Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways”.<sup>524</sup> This passage highlights Jenkins core argument that understanding media convergence requires recognizing the mutual influence of old and new media and active role of consumers in shaping media experiences. Therefore, a diversified communication strategy that includes both

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<sup>523</sup> Cf. Embracing Transformative Newspaper Industry Trends, Osum Blog, March 15, 2024. <https://blog.osum.com/newspaper-industry-trends/> (Accessed May 20, 2024).

<sup>524</sup> Cf. Henry Jenkins and Adolfo Plasencia, Chapter Title, in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 135–146 MA: MIT Press, Cambridge 2017. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262036016.003.0012> (Accessed September 5, 2023).

traditional and digital media to enhance religious practice or maximize outreach and engagement across different demographics is a practical recommendation.<sup>525</sup>

### **Balancing Online and Offline Life**

The findings revealed that the virtual church should never under normal circumstances substitute the physical church. They recommended the existence of both online and offline church life. In “iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives”, Craig Detweiler discusses the need for balance between online and offline interactions.<sup>526</sup>

The Church emphasizes that while the Internet can supplement faith practices and provide valuable resources, it cannot replace the essential elements of sacramental worship and the embodied experience of faith within a community. Sacraments are not be virtually celebrated or received. The value of having many people in virtual participation does not add up to the value of the people present in the Liturgy. In my view, it would be also good to for the online presence of church to aim at bringing youth back to the physical Church.

Thus, the integration of new media in religious contexts must be approached with a clear understanding of its limitations and the irreplaceable nature of real-world religious interactions.

### **Embracing the Digital Environment and Culture**

Social media offers a powerful tool for engaging with young people in Uganda, where traditional methods may not be as effective. By embracing social media, youth pastors can meet young people where they are, using platforms they are familiar with to spread their message and foster community.

The online or digital encounter may not destroy the traditional or physical gathering community. Julie Masson, director of communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention, highlighted during a round table discussion on the theme “Technology Cannot Replace In-Person Community” that the widespread belief that e-books would replace print books proved incorrect. She noted that, while e-books offer convenience, they have primarily fueled a

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<sup>525</sup> Cf. Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* Routledge, London 2006. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203503201> (Accessed August 6, 2023).

<sup>526</sup> Cf. Craig, Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*, 2013.

greater desire for physical books. Drawing a parallel to online church services, Masson suggested that these digital alternatives might similarly increase the longing for in-person church gatherings.<sup>527</sup>

The church must not remain a passive observer; instead, it should actively engage with various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, 2go, Pinterest, Snapchat, Skype, and blogs, among others.<sup>528</sup>

Christians must not make the usual excuse that this media is polluted - if it is so polluted, who would cleanse it? Will their reluctance to use them cause believers, especially young people, to use them less?" Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet".<sup>529</sup>

### **Investing in Digital Infrastructure and Accessibility**

It is recommended that the Church makes an effort to improve digital infrastructure and access to new media by investing in necessary technologies and ensuring widespread internet availability. The digital divide, exacerbated by poverty and economic challenges, remains a significant barrier to effective digital evangelization. To bridge this gap, the Church should collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organizations to enhance digital infrastructure. Initiatives such as providing free Wi-Fi hotspots in communities, offering subsidies for internet access, and distributing affordable digital devices can make a substantial impact.

Hilbert (2011) discusses the importance of targeted investments in digital infrastructure to reduce the digital divide.<sup>530</sup> Such investments are crucial for enabling broader access to digital tools and platforms necessary for modern evangelization.

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<sup>527</sup> Cf. Jason Thacker, Jay Kim, John Dyer, and Julie Masson, Technology Can't Replace In-person Community: A Roundtable Discussion, in: Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, July 9, 2020. <https://erlc.com/research/technology-cant-replace-in-person-community/> (Accessed October 9, 2023).

<sup>528</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> Pontifical Council on Social Communications, The Church and Internet, 2002. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html) (Accessed April 23, 2023).

<sup>530</sup> Cf. Martin Hilbert, Digital Gender Divide or Technologically Empowered Women in Developing Countries? A Typical Case of Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics, in: World Development 39, no. 11 (November, 2011): 2047–2065. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.07.001> (Accessed June 29, 2023).

### **Training of Personnel in ICT and Artificial Intelligence**

The Church should invest in the training of its ministers in Communication, Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance its digital evangelization efforts. Barger (2011) emphasizes the need for specialized training to build a successful social media program within organizations.<sup>531</sup> To effectively utilize new media, the Church needs personnel who are proficient in ICT and AI. Training programs should be developed for clergy, youth pastors, other pastoral agents, lay leaders and digital evangelists to equip them with the necessary technical skills. These programs should focus on digital content creation, social media management, and effective online communication strategies. This will enable the Church to leverage advanced technologies for evangelization, such as AI-driven chatbots for pastoral care, virtual reality experiences for religious education, and data analytics for understanding engagement trends. In response to *Communio et Progressio*'s directive for the media training of clergy, the Congregation for Catholic Education released a document outlining guidelines for preparing priests to engage with media in various capacities—as “informed viewers, pastoral leaders, and media specialists”.<sup>532</sup>

Additionally, Schwab (2016) in *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* emphasizes the need for leadership and strategic thinking to manage the profound changes new technologies bring. By equipping Church personnel with ICT and AI skills, the Church can harness these technologies to enhance its outreach and engagement.<sup>533</sup> The shortage of dedicated social media personnel and the general lack of digital literacy among church leaders can be mitigated through targeted training programs.

### **Prudent and Wise Use of New Media**

The prudent and wise use of new media is essential for the church's mission of evangelization. Pope Benedict XVI message for the World Youth Day in 2013 encouraged young people to leverage social media for evangelization while remaining cautious about the potential risks associated with technology. He urged them to use media wisely, warning against addiction, the blurring of the real and virtual worlds, and

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<sup>531</sup> Cf. Christopher, Barger, *The Social Media Strategist: Build a Successful Program from the Inside Out*, McGraw-Hill, New York 2011.

<sup>532</sup> Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication*, 1986.

<sup>533</sup> Cf. Schwab, Klaus, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Crown Business, New York 2016.

the replacement of personal encounters with online interactions.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, highlighted the necessity of prudence in modern communication. He emphasized that contemporary tools of communication should foster genuine encounters, seek truth, serve others, and promote the common good.<sup>535</sup> This approach ensures that digital interactions transcend superficiality and contribute to meaningful community building and social justice.

Scriptural guidance further reinforces the need for wisdom in utilizing technology. Jesus' advice in *Matthew 10:16* to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" is crucial for navigating the digital landscape. Bryan Barrineau interprets this as a call for youth ministers to approach technology with Spirit-given wisdom, balancing shrewd understanding with integrity. The continuous presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:18; Matthew 28:20) offers divine guidance, ensuring that technological engagement aligns with gospel values and promotes peace and truth.<sup>536</sup>

The *Instruction Aetatis Novae* by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications highlights the importance of audiovisual media in the context of evangelization. Emphasizing the enduring relevance of the "see, judge, act" principle, the document advocates for giving audiovisual media due attention in the Church's communication strategies to enhance its missionary and pastoral activities.<sup>537</sup>

### **Foster Creativity and Innovation in Digital Content**

Encourage creativity and innovation in digital content creation to make religious messages more engaging and relatable for the youth. The lack of creativity and innovation in current digital content is a major hindrance. The Church should explore various multimedia formats, such as videos, podcasts, interactive posts, and storytelling techniques, to create compelling content. Engaging young people in content creation can also bring fresh perspectives and ideas.

Clayton Christensen (2016) in "The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail" highlights the necessity for organizations to innovate

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<sup>534</sup> Cf. Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the 28<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day 2013. <https://worldyouthday.com/message-of-his-holiness-benedict-xvi-for-the-twenty-eighth-> (Accessed December 13, 2023).

<sup>535</sup> Cf. Francis Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, no. 205.

<sup>536</sup> Cf. Bryan Barrineau, Can Theology and Technology Co-exist?, Blog. <https://www.youthpastortheologian.com/blog/can-theology-and-technology-coexist> (Accessed December 13, 2023).

<sup>537</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Instruction Aetatis Novae*, The Holy See, February 22, 1992.

continuously to remain relevant.<sup>538</sup> Encouraging creative approaches to digital evangelization can help the Church capture and retain the interest of the youth.

### **Enhance Online Outreach and Community Building**

It is recommended that the Church expands and diversifies online outreach initiatives and foster the development of online faith communities to enhance engagement and community building. The Church's online outreach initiatives, such as virtual prayers, conferences, and youth retreats, have been successful. Building on these efforts, the Church should develop a comprehensive digital strategy that includes regular online events, interactive forums, and virtual support groups. Creating online faith communities where young people can connect, share experiences, and grow spiritually is essential.

Dawson and Cowan, in "Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet" (2004) discuss the potential of online religious activities to complement traditional practices and build community. They investigate various ways people engage with religion online, including virtual worship, religious discussions, and accessing religious information. Expanding online outreach initiatives can strengthen the Church's connection with the youth.<sup>539</sup>

### **Promoting Digital Literacy and Awareness**

It is indispensable to implement digital literacy programs to educate church leaders, youth, and the broader congregation about the importance and use of new media. "If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in this domain".<sup>540</sup> Poor digital platform awareness and literacy among church members limit the effectiveness of digital evangelization. The Church should organize workshops, seminars, and online courses to improve digital literacy. These programs should cover basic digital skills, internet safety, and relevant material for evangelization. Hargittai (2010) emphasizes the importance of digital literacy for effective engagement with digital media.

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<sup>538</sup> Cf. Clayton, Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, Harvard Business Review Press, January 5, 2016. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.5555/2888487> (Accessed July 20, 2024).

<sup>539</sup> Cf. Dawson, Lorne L., and Douglas E. Cowan, eds., *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, Routledge, New York 2004.

<sup>540</sup> *Inter Mirifica*, no. 4, in *AAS*, LVI (1964), p. 146.

Improving digital literacy within the Church community can enhance participation and maximize the impact of digital evangelization efforts.<sup>541</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, asserts that all Internet users are obligated to engage with the medium in an informed and disciplined manner, ensuring its use for morally good purposes. He further emphasizes the role of parents in guiding and supervising their children's use of the Internet.<sup>542</sup> Similarly, pastors are called to provide their congregations with guidance on navigating media, especially given the often conflicting and at times harmful messages it conveys.<sup>543</sup>

### **Encourage Peer-to-Peer Evangelization**

Facilitate peer-to-peer evangelization by empowering young people to evangelize their peers using digital means. Peer influence is powerful among young people. The Church should support initiatives where young people are encouraged to share their faith and evangelize using social media and other digital platforms. Providing training and resources for peer evangelization can enhance the authenticity and relatability of the messages.

Smith and Denton (2005) in their work “Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers” highlight the impact of peer influence on religious beliefs and practices among teenagers. The authors discuss how social networks, including friends, and peers, play a great role in the spiritual development of teens. These social networks often facilitate the sharing of religious ideas and practices, even if indirectly. So, encouraging online peer-to-peer evangelization can make a great contribution towards effective evangelization of the youth in a digital age.<sup>544</sup>

### **Developing a Theology of New Media**

The Church needs to develop a suitable theology of technology if she is to be effective in providing holistic guidance to the young millennial. Samuel Baker (2017) argues that an integrative approach to a theology of technology must thoughtfully engage with Scripture and theological frameworks, addressing contemporary cultural issues. This

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<sup>541</sup> Cf. Hargittai, Eszter, Digital Natives? 2010, 92-113.

<sup>542</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, Vatican Press, Vatican City 1981. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html), n. 76 (Accessed September 9, 2024).

<sup>543</sup> Cf. Code of Canon Law, canon 822.2, 3.

<sup>544</sup> Cf. Smith, Christian, and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

approach is crucial for understanding the impact of digital disruption on the spiritual lives of post-familial emerging adults.<sup>545</sup>

Developing a theology of new media involves creating a framework that aligns digital technology with the Church's teachings and evangelistic goals. This would provide a coherent approach to using digital tools for ministry, ensuring that their use is theologically sound and spiritually enriching.

In "Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture" (Campbell and Garner, 2016), the authors argue for the importance of developing a theological perspective on digital media to guide religious practice in the digital age.<sup>546</sup> By fostering a theology of new media, the Church can ensure that its digital engagement is both effective and faithful to its core mission.

The Church in Uganda should develop a theology of new media in her own context that integrates digital technology with the Church's mission and values. This can be initiated by the Episcopal conference and involve youth pastors and local theologians. The episcopal conference can spearhead this initiative, providing guidelines and resources for parishes and dioceses. As Turkle points out "We have to love our technology enough to describe it accurately. And we have to love ourselves enough to confront technology's true effects on us".<sup>547</sup>

### **Understanding Youth Needs and Trends**

The Church should conduct regular research to understand the needs, preferences, and trends among youth to tailor its evangelization strategies effectively. Being aware of the evolving needs and trends of the youth is vital for effective ministry. The Church should undertake methods and efforts to gather insights into the interests, concerns, and digital habits of young people. This information can inform the development of relevant and appealing content and programs.

Smith and Denton (2005) in "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers" highlight the importance of understanding youth culture and

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<sup>545</sup> Cf. Samuel, Baker, Who's Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-familial Emerging Adults, in: Brill, Journal of Youth and Theology 16 (2017), p. 120.

<sup>546</sup> Cf. Campbell, Heidi, and Stephen Garner, Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

<sup>547</sup> Sherry, Turkle, Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other, Basic Books, New York 2011, p. 243.

needs for effective religious engagement. Regular research can help the Church remain responsive and relevant to the youth.<sup>548</sup>

### **Addressing Social Issues Affecting Youth**

The Church should actively address social issues affecting youth, such as drug abuse and immorality, through digital platforms and community programs. Social issues like drug abuse and immorality are prevalent among youth and can be effectively addressed through targeted interventions. The Church should use digital platforms to raise awareness, provide educational resources, and offer support services. Collaborating with social workers, psychologists, and healthcare professionals can enhance these efforts.

In “Changing Lenses: Restorative Justice for Our Times” (Zehr, 2015), the importance of addressing social issues within communities is emphasized. The Church can play a pivotal role in mitigating these issues by leveraging its influence and digital reach.<sup>549</sup>

### **Strengthening Faith and Hope of Youth in the Digital Age**

The Church should develop programs and content that specifically aim to strengthen the faith and hope of youth in the digital age, addressing the unique challenges they face. The digital environment offers distinct challenges to faith, including exposure to secular ideologies, online bullying, and digital addiction. The Church should create programs that address these issues while fostering a strong, hope-filled faith. This can include online Bible studies, inspirational content, virtual support groups, and digital mentorship programs.

Root (2017) discusses strategies for nurturing faith among youth in a predominantly secular digital environment. Programs designed to strengthen faith and hope can help young people navigate these challenges while maintaining a robust spiritual life.<sup>550</sup>

The Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* notes; “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted,

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<sup>548</sup> Cf. Smith, Christian, and Melina Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

<sup>549</sup> Cf. Zehr, Howard, *Changing Lenses: Restorative Justice for Our Times*, Herald Press, Harrisonburg 2015.

<sup>550</sup> Cf. Root, Andrew, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”.<sup>551</sup>

### **Establishing Social Media Policies and Enhancing Cybersecurity**

Developing clear and comprehensive social media policies or guidelines is essential for guiding acceptable online behavior, respectful dialogue, and the dissemination of religious content. These policies should address critical issues such as privacy protection, respectful communication, and the avoidance of divisive or harmful content. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other privacy laws underscore the importance of safeguarding user data and maintaining trust.

Nicole Perlroth (2021) emphasizes the importance of security consciousness within organisations and governments to better prepare for and respond to cyber threats. This includes investing in security training, threat intelligence and incident response strategies. Perlroth’s work teaches us that cybersecurity is not just a technical challenge but a critical aspect of modern security strategy, requiring vigilance, collaboration and adaptation to a rapidly evolving threat landscape.<sup>552</sup>

As churches increasingly rely on digital systems, they need to implement robust cybersecurity measures to protect members' information is crucial. Protecting personal information and ensuring a safe online environment are paramount considerations, particularly in the context of youth evangelization using digital media. Although these measures may especially be challenging for the Church in Uganda, but prioritizing the protection of its online community is key to effective youth ministry in a digital environment. By establishing stringent social media policies and robust cybersecurity practices, the church can effectively navigate the complexities of the digital landscape, thereby reinforcing its commitment to ethical engagement and the protection of its members’ data.

### **Bridging the Generation Gap**

Initiating programs that facilitate intergenerational dialogue and collaboration on digital literacy and social media usage is essential for fostering unity and mutual understanding across diverse age groups within the church. Encouraging older members to learn from

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<sup>551</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965 no. 1.

<sup>552</sup> Cf. Nicole, Perlroth, *This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race*, Bloomsbury, New York 2021.

younger generations about digital platforms allows for a valuable exchange of skills, while younger members benefit from the wisdom and experience of older adults in applying traditional teachings to digital contexts. This bridging of the generation gap promotes a harmonious integration of knowledge and perspectives, enhancing the church's collective digital proficiency. As Jenkins (2006) suggests, intergenerational dialogue fosters knowledge exchange and innovation in digital environments, making it a crucial component of the church's strategy.<sup>553</sup>

Furthermore, establishing mentorship programs where tech-savvy youth or young adults guide older adults in navigating social media and digital technologies responsibly can create meaningful connections between generations. Such programs empower older members to engage confidently in online activities while upholding the church's values and teachings. According to Nowell, B. and Boyd N.M (2014) mentorship fosters reciprocal learning and builds solidarity within communities.<sup>554</sup> Therefore, these initiatives not only enhance digital literacy but also strengthen intergenerational bonds and promote a unified church community.

### **Emphasizing Authenticity and Transparency**

It is necessary for church leaders and members to prioritize authenticity and transparency in their online interactions and communications, emphasizing the importance of honesty, humility, and genuine engagement with digital audiences. This approach reflects the core values of the church, and by modeling authenticity, the church cultivates trust and credibility in digital spaces. As discussed by Hargittai (2015), authenticity enhances user engagement and fosters meaningful connections online.<sup>555</sup>

In addition to authenticity, addressing controversies promptly is crucial. Developing protocols for addressing controversies or misinformation that arise online promptly and transparently is essential. This may include establishing channels for responding to inquiries, and correcting false information. Transparent communication demonstrates accountability and reinforces the church's commitment to truth and integrity in all

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<sup>553</sup> Cf. Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York 2006.

<sup>554</sup> Cf. Branda, Nowell and Neil M. Boyd, Sense of Community Responsibility in Community Collaboratives: Advancing a Theory of Community as Resource and Responsibility, in: *American Journal of Community Psychology* 54, no. 3–4 (2014): 229–242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9667-x> (Accessed July 3, 2023).

<sup>555</sup> Cf. Eszter Hargittai and Christian Sandvig, eds., *Digital Research Confidential: The Secrets of Studying Behavior Online* MA: MIT Press, Cambridge, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9386.001.0001> (Accessed February 3, 2024).

communications. According to Jiang et al., (2017), proactive crisis management minimizes reputational damage and maintains stakeholder trust.<sup>556</sup> By emphasizing both authenticity and prompt, transparent responses to controversies, churches can strengthen their online presence.

In May 2023, the Dicastery for Communication emphasized that while sharing Christian content on social media is important, it is not sufficient on its own. Christians are encouraged to go beyond merely promoting information and focus on embodying core Christian values such as listening, discernment, respect, and humility. The key idea is that social media engagement should reflect a genuine witness to the Christian faith, rather than simply attempting to sell or proselytize.<sup>557</sup> Therefore, the Church's social media presence should reflect these values to foster a more inclusive, respectful, and discerning online community.

### **Promoting Digital Detoxes**

This can be promoted through encouraging balanced media consumption and organizing retreats and workshops. The church or specific youth ministry can advocate for periods of digital detox among members, encouraging individuals to voluntarily disconnect from social media and digital devices to focus on spiritual reflection, prayer, and face-to-face interactions. They can provide resources and support for those seeking to reduce their digital consumption and prioritize offline experiences. Digital detoxes promote mindfulness and strengthen interpersonal relationships, as highlighted by Turkle (2015). Turkle advocates for revitalizing conversation through self-reflection and solitude as a way to counteract the negative trends of social media so that we have resilience and ability to revive meaningful dialogue.<sup>558</sup>

In the Harvard Business Review article “Conquering Digital Distraction,” Larry Rosen and Alexandra Samuel (2015) provide practical strategies for managing digital overload. Larry Rosen emphasizes the importance of understanding one’s digital habits. This self-awareness is crucial for setting boundaries, such as designating tech-free times and

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<sup>556</sup> Cf. Hua Jiang, Yi Luo, and Owen Kulemeka, Strategic Social Media Use in Public Relations: Professionals’ Perceived Social Media Impact, Leadership Behaviors, and Work-Life Conflict, in: *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 11, no. 1 (2016): 18–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1226842> (Accessed June, 26 2023).

<sup>557</sup> Cf. Dicastery of Communication, *Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*, May 29, 2023.

<sup>558</sup> Cf. Turkle, Sherry. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Penguin Press, New York 2015.

spaces, which can mitigate unnecessary screen time and enhance focused, meaningful interactions.

Alexandra Samuel adds that creating tech-free zones and practicing mindful technology use are essential steps in controlling digital overload. By being intentional about digital activities and periodically disconnecting through digital detoxes, individuals can reset their relationship with technology, reduce stress, and improve their overall well-being<sup>559</sup>. These strategies collectively help individuals regain control over their digital lives, promoting a healthier balance between online and offline worlds. Additionally, organizing retreats and workshops focused on digital mindfulness and the spiritual benefits of disconnecting from constant digital connectivity can be beneficial.

### **Fostering Collaboration with Digital Influencers**

Fostering collaboration with digital influencers who share the church's values and mission is a strategic recommendation for enhancing the church's visibility and impact in digital communities. Carefully chosen influencers can effectively communicate positive messages of faith and social justice, the church can leverage their platforms to reach diverse audiences. This collaboration not only amplifies the church's voice on social media but also engages followers in meaningful conversations about spirituality and social issues, thereby enhancing the church's relevance in the digital age.

One of the prominent authors who discuss the use of digital influencers for effective marketing is Philip Kotler. Kotler (2017) explores the role of digital influencers in modern marketing strategies. The authors highlight how influencers can enhance brand credibility, reach targeted audiences, and drive consumer engagement through digital channels.<sup>560</sup> Their work provides insights into leveraging digital influencers for successful product marketing in the digital age

Furthermore, prioritizing authenticity and alignment with the church's mission when selecting influencers is crucial. Ensuring that these influencers uphold ethical standards and promote messages consistent with the church's teachings reinforces credibility and trust among online audiences. This transparent collaboration is essential as it underscores the church's commitment to integrity and ethical engagement. According to

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<sup>559</sup> Cf. Rosen, Larry, & Alexandra Samuel, Conquering Digital Distraction, Harvard Business Review 93, no.3 (May-June 2015): 60-68.

<sup>560</sup> Cf. Kotler, Philip, Hermawan Kartajaya, and Iwan Setiawan, Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Marketing+4.0%3A+Moving+from+Traditional+to+Digital-p-9781119341208> (Accessed August 16, 2024).

Culnan and Armstrong (1999), such ethical partnerships not only enhance brand reputation but also support sustainable growth in digital environments.<sup>561</sup> Thus, through carefully selected influencer partnerships, the church can effectively navigate the digital landscape, fostering trust and engagement while promoting its core values.

### **Emphasizing the Amoral Nature of Technology**

The study underscores that technology itself is not inherently evil; it is the application and intention behind its use that determine its moral value. As Will Sorrell (2018) articulates, technology, like money, holds the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, depending on how it is utilized. Technology does not produce immoral content, incite public outbursts, or shape political opinions independently; these actions originate from human intentions and behaviors.<sup>562</sup> As Jesus stated, “what comes from the heart... those make the man unclean” (Matthew 15:11). While technology can facilitate wrongdoing, it does not compel individuals to act immorally. Equating technology with inherent good or evil is akin to superstition, which attributes moral power to inanimate objects. Media and technology are neutral tools that function according to human choices. This perspective calls for a reflective approach to technological progress, focusing on whether it contributes to human betterment.<sup>563</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has made significant strides in utilizing new media for youth evangelization, but further steps are necessary to overcome existing challenges and fully harness the potential of digital technology. To effectively integrate new media into youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda requires a balanced and multifaceted approach. Both strengths of traditional and new media, can make the Church create a comprehensive strategy that resonates with the youth. Embracing the digital environment and culture, investing in digital infrastructure, and training personnel in ICT and AI are foundational steps. Additionally, fostering creativity in

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<sup>561</sup> Cf. M. Culnan and Pam Armstrong, Information Privacy Concerns, Procedural Fairness, and Impersonal Trust: An Empirical Investigation, in: *Organization Science* 10, no. 1 (1999): 104–115. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.10.1.104> (Accessed July 4, 2023).

<sup>562</sup> Cf. Will, Sorrell, We need a Theology of Technology, in: *Faith and Work, Journal*, November 19, 2018. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/need-theology-technology/> (Accessed December 12, 2023).

<sup>563</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *Ethics in Communication*, 2000, no.4.

digital content, enhancing online outreach, and promoting digital literacy and awareness are crucial for engaging and empowering young people.

Addressing social issues, encouraging peer-to-peer evangelization, and understanding youth needs and trends further strengthen the Church's connection with the younger generation. Establishing clear social media policies, promoting authenticity, and fostering intergenerational dialogue ensure a safe and inclusive digital environment. By emphasizing the amoral nature of technology and fostering a positive online presence, the Church can navigate the digital landscape effectively, supporting the spiritual growth and well-being of youth in the digital age. Through these efforts, the Church can build a dynamic, inclusive, and spiritually enriching community that aligns with its core mission and values.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This research set out to explore the integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda. The primary objectives were to assess the Church's current use of new media, identify the benefits and opportunities, examine the challenges and barriers, and provide practical recommendations for improvement. Each objective has been thoroughly analyzed and achieved, offering valuable insights into the evolving landscape of digital evangelization in Uganda. This chapter presents the Summary of the Findings in line with the objectives of the study, Contributions to the Field, Implications or suggestions for the Church in Uganda, Limitations of study, Possible Future Research Directions and General Conclusion.

#### **6.1 Summary of the Findings**

##### **6.1.1 Assessment on How the Church Has Used New Media in Uganda: Successes and Failures**

###### **Successes in Integration of New Media**

The Church in Uganda has made significant strides in integrating new media into its youth evangelization efforts. Below is the summary of several key areas in which the Church in Uganda has achieved as regards evangelization in a digital environment.

###### **Embracing Social Media and Digital Platforms**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has increasingly embraced various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to connect with young people. These social networks offer a space for young people to engage with the Church's teachings, participate in discussions, and share their faith experiences, thus enhancing their sense of community and belonging.

###### **Positive Attitudes Toward Digital Evangelization**

Many church leaders, pastoral agents, youth pastors and other youth ministries are beginning to adopt a more positive attitude toward digital evangelization, recognizing its potential to reach younger audiences. This shift reflects an understanding of the importance of modern communication trends in the Church, fostering a more welcoming environment for youth engagement.

### **Youth Involvement and Empowerment in Digital Media**

The Church has initiated programs that empower young people to take active roles in managing digital media content. By involving youth, the Church fosters a sense of ownership and relevance among younger congregants, encouraging them to contribute to the Church's digital narrative.

### **Innovative Approaches to Catechism and Evangelization**

The Catholic Church in Uganda has adopted innovative digital tools, including YouTube channels, podcasts, and interactive catechism sessions, to make her teachings accessible for youth. By offering sermons, educational content, and online discussions, the Church reaches a wider, younger audience and promotes a deeper understanding of faith. These digital platforms cater to youth preferences, fostering spiritual growth.

### **Media creation and UCTV**

The establishment of Uganda Catholic Television (UCTV) has marked a meaningful step in integrating new media into the Catholic Church's outreach efforts in Uganda. By capturing and broadcasting church events online, UCTV extends the Church's reach to a broader audience, including youth who engage primarily on digital platforms. This initiative provides both real-time and archived spiritual content, fostering ongoing connection and accessibility, and helping the Church remain relevant in an increasingly digital age.

### **Promotion of Church Events Through Social Media**

The Church has effectively utilized social media to promote various events, including retreats, youth gatherings, and religious festivals. By leveraging these platforms for event marketing, the Church enhances participation and excitement among youth, helping to create a vibrant community atmosphere.

### **Promoting the Church Music Industry Through Social Media**

The Church has recognized the role of music in youth culture and has actively promoted its music industry through social media. By sharing recordings, performances, and music videos, the Church not only engages young people but also supports local artists, creating a dynamic cultural expression of faith.

### **Online Bible Study Groups: Fostering Community and Shared Learning**

The formation of online Bible study groups has emerged as a successful initiative to foster community among youth. Such groups enable young adults to discuss scripture, share insights, and deepen their faith in a supportive environment, bridging the gap between physical and digital communities.

### **Online Fundraising and Volunteering Platforms**

The Church has begun to utilize digital platforms for fundraising and volunteering, enabling youth to participate in charitable initiatives and community service more easily. These online avenues create opportunities for young people to contribute to charitable causes, and the Church's mission.

### **Online Communities and Forums**

The Church has also fostered online communities and forums where young people can discuss their faith, share experiences, and seek advice. These forums provide a supportive environment for youth to explore and deepen their religious understanding collaboratively

### **Virtual Prayer Groups**

Some Churches or youth ministries have initiated virtual prayer groups using digital platforms where youth can share prayer requests and receive spiritual support. These groups facilitate a sense of continuous spiritual engagement. Virtual prayer groups have become an essential part of maintaining spiritual connections among youth, offering a platform for constant prayer support.

### **Church's Digital Outreach During the Pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church adapted by enhancing its digital outreach efforts, conducting virtual services, and engaging youth through online platforms. This pivot demonstrated the Church's commitment to maintaining connections and providing spiritual support, even in challenging circumstances, showcasing the importance of digital integration in contemporary evangelization.

## **Conclusion**

These findings suggest that while challenges remain, Uganda's Catholic Church is making significant strides in integrating new media for youth evangelization. The use of social media and digital technology, openness to digital tools, and active youth involvement contribute positively to the Church's mission of reaching and inspiring young Catholics in Uganda.

## **Integration Failures of New Media for Youth Evangelization in the Catholic Church in Uganda**

The Catholic Church in Uganda faces significant failures in integrating new media for youth evangelization, highlighting a multifaceted inability to adapt to the digital age. These integration failures include:

### **Over-reliance on Traditional Media**

The Catholic Church in Uganda continues to rely on traditional channels like radio, TV, and printed materials, which often lack the appeal for younger audiences immersed in social media and interactive digital platforms. While effective for older congregants, these channels are not meeting the needs of youth who prefer real-time engagement and the vibrant discussions offered by online platforms.

### **Slow Response to Digital Media**

The Church's hesitant adaptation to digital media has resulted in delayed efforts to utilize platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram as central tools for outreach. Compared to other organizations, the Church lags behind, missing opportunities to connect with tech-savvy youth who expect rapid, responsive digital interaction. This gap restricts the Church's influence among young people who frequent social networking sites for community and information.

### **Ignorance Among Church Leaders**

Many Church leaders remain unaware of the potential of digital evangelization or the ways it could bridge gaps with younger generations. This limited understanding has prevented the Church from implementing a clear social media strategy, reducing the impact of online messages and hindering deeper engagement with Uganda's youth, who are highly active online and expect digital inclusivity.

### **Digital Literacy Gaps**

Digital literacy remains a challenge, especially among older congregants, who often struggle with even basic online skills, like accessing social media or navigating websites. The Church has not actively addressed these literacy gaps within its community, creating barriers for the youth who are looking to engage their faith digitally but are limited by generational divides in online proficiency.

### **Rigidity to Adjust to the Latest Trends**

The Church has been slow to embrace and adapt to emerging digital trends, failing to craft content that reflects the language, style, and interests of youth today. This rigidity results in content that feels outdated, which limits its effectiveness and reduces youth interest in engaging with Church messages that do not resonate with their lifestyles or communication preferences.

### **Limited Innovative Approaches**

The Church has shown a lack of creativity in developing engaging content, often relying on repetitive or static messaging. Youth, who are accustomed to interactive and visually appealing digital experiences, find such content uninteresting, diminishing the Church's ability to reach young audiences who seek relevance and dynamism in online spaces.

### **Insufficient Investment in Media**

Financial limitations and a reliance on volunteerism mean that the Church has not invested sufficiently in high-quality digital production or content development. This lack of investment results in low-quality media that struggles to compete with other high-impact social media content, leaving the Church's digital presence less compelling for Uganda's youth.

### **Absence of Dedicated Social Media Management**

Without dedicated social media personnel, Church accounts often go inactive or are updated inconsistently, failing to create a stable online presence. This absence of regular management undermines outreach, as the youth expect constant, relevant updates that reflect a deep commitment to digital engagement from the Church.

### **Lack of Youth Engagement in Church Media**

The Church has not made substantial efforts to involve youth in managing or creating its media content, missing the chance to develop messaging that resonates with younger audiences. Youth involvement in Church media could bring fresh perspectives and a more relatable tone, aligning the content more closely with their interests and concerns.

### **Ignoring Contemporary Youth Issues**

Topics such as mental health, relationships, social justice, environmental issues, and career development engage youth but are often overlooked in Church communications. This oversight creates a gap between the Church's messaging and the real-world issues that young Ugandans care deeply about, making the Church appear disconnected from their lives and priorities.

### **Perception of Social Media as Harmful**

Some Church leaders hold a skeptical view of social media, seeing it as a morally dangerous influence rather than a tool for outreach. This perception hinders the Church's willingness to engage fully on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, limiting its ability to leverage social media for positive evangelization and youth engagement.

### **Disconnect from Youth Culture**

The Church's communication style and content do not align with the cultural references or communication methods that appeal to the youth, making outreach efforts less relevant. The lack of connection with youth culture reduces engagement, as messages may seem out of touch or unrelatable to young Ugandans who value authenticity and cultural relevance.

### **Gaps in Youth Interaction and Feedback Channels**

There is a lack of platforms and mechanisms within the Church for youth to express their thoughts or give feedback on Church activities and content. Without these channels, the Church misses out on opportunities for meaningful dialogue, leaving youth feeling unheard and unengaged in discussions about their faith.

### **Poor Marketing Strategies and Lack of Influencer Engagement**

The Church has not effectively marketed its digital content on platforms that youth frequently use, nor has it engaged with local influencers who resonate with young audiences. Collaborating with influencers or prominent local figures could boost visibility and make Church messages more appealing to youth, bridging the gap between faith and youth culture.

### **Failure to Address the Digital Divide**

The Church has not made efforts to address the digital divide that limits access to online content for youth in regions with low connectivity or limited digital resources. By not actively providing solutions or alternative access options, many young Ugandans are left out of the Church's digital evangelization efforts, perpetuating exclusion in an era where inclusivity is key.

### **Inconsistent Online Presence**

The Church's online presence lacks consistency, with irregular posting and engagement that limit its effectiveness in connecting with youth. Without a structured approach to content and interaction, the sporadic online activity weakens ongoing engagement and reduces the Church's influence among younger audiences.

### **Limited understanding of Youth Trends**

Church communication often falls short in appealing to younger audiences due to a limited understanding of current youth trends. Messages frequently lack alignment with the interests, language, and cultural references that resonate with today's youth, resulting in content that fails to engage this demographic effectively.

In summary, several areas underscore the Catholic Church in Uganda's challenges in fully integrating new media. First, a lack of dedicated social media management and limited digital literacy among leaders has led to inconsistent online presence and messaging. Second, the absence of innovative, youth-friendly content and reluctance to address contemporary issues such as mental health and social justice make the Church's outreach feel disconnected. Finally, insufficient investment in digital media quality and a failure to involve youth in content creation have hindered its ability to resonate with tech-savvy young Ugandans.

### **6.1.2 Benefits and Opportunities of Using New Media in Evangelizing Youth in Uganda**

The use of new media in evangelizing youth in Uganda presents significant benefits and opportunities that the Catholic Church can leverage to enhance its mission.

Here a concise summary highlighting the benefits and opportunities for the Catholic Church in Uganda in integrating new media for youth evangelization:

#### **Vehicles for Evangelization and Catechesis**

New media platforms serve as effective vehicles for evangelization and catechesis, providing engaging and accessible methods to teach faith. They enable the Church to reach youth beyond traditional boundaries, creating opportunities for deeper understanding and connection with spiritual teachings.

#### **Source of Inspiration and Encouragement**

New media, particularly social networking sites, acts as a crucial source of inspiration and encouragement for youth by providing accessible and relatable content. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube offer spiritual resources such as videos, podcasts, and articles that resonate with young believers. This engaging content motivates and uplifts, reinforcing their faith and addressing contemporary issues relevant to their lives. By integrating modern themes, new media fosters a sense of belonging and supports youth in their spiritual journeys.

#### **Cost-Effective Evangelization**

Utilizing digital platforms significantly reduces the financial barriers associated with physical outreach efforts. This cost-effective approach allows the Church to sustain its evangelization initiatives, maximizing resource allocation while still reaching a broad audience.

#### **Encouraging Creativity**

New media empowers youth to express their faith creatively through various social networking channels and digital tools. This innovative content creation fosters a sense of ownership and engagement among young people, making their faith more personal and relatable.

### **Timely Communication and Updates**

Social media and digital platforms facilitate instant communication, enabling the Church to share important announcements and spiritual resources quickly. This timely dissemination of information ensures that the community remains informed and engaged with ongoing church activities.

### **Building and Strengthening Church Communities**

Digital platforms foster a sense of belonging among youth, enhancing connections within the Church regardless of geographical distances. These online interactions build and strengthen faith-based communities, creating a supportive environment for spiritual growth.

### **Connecting with Younger Generations**

Engaging youth in their preferred digital spaces makes the Church more relatable and appealing. By using familiar platforms and modern formats, the Church can effectively connect with younger generations.

### **Overcoming Geographical Barriers**

New media platforms, such as social media, blogs, and streaming services, are accessible from virtually anywhere in the world. Through these tools, evangelistic messages can reach people in remote or geographically distant locations without requiring physical travel.

### **Global Connections and Inclusivity**

Digital platforms open avenues for interfaith dialogue and exposure to global Catholic communities. This global engagement fosters inclusivity within the Church, allowing Christians from different continents to connect and share diverse faith experiences.

### **Promoting Religious Vocations Online**

Digital media highlights various religious vocations, inspiring youth to explore different paths within the Church. By showcasing opportunities and stories of commitment, the Church can encourage young people to consider their own potential roles in religious life.

### **Encouraging Peer-to-Peer Evangelization**

Empowering youth to share their faith with peers leads to organic growth in spiritual engagement. Peer-to-peer evangelization initiatives create a sense of camaraderie and accountability, fostering a vibrant community of young believers actively sharing their faith journeys.

### **Enhanced Interactivity**

New media facilitates enhanced interactivity between the Church and its youth, promoting two-way communication. Platforms such as social media enable real-time discussions, allowing young people to engage with clergy and church leaders, which promotes the Church community.

### **Immediate Feedback and Dialogue**

Digital platforms provide youth with opportunities for immediate feedback and dialogue regarding their faith experiences. This responsive engagement enables the Church to adapt its messaging and outreach strategies to better meet the needs and preferences of young congregants, thereby strengthening the Church's relevance in their lives.

### **Flexibility and Convenience**

The convenience of accessing faith-related content on demand allows youth to engage with spiritual resources at their own pace and on their own schedule. This flexibility encourages participation, as young people can fit their spiritual exploration into busy lives, making faith more accessible and integrated into their daily routines.

### **Addressing Social Issues**

New media can play a role in addressing social issues affecting youth, such as mental health, drug abuse, and social justice. By framing these discussions within a faith context, the Church can effectively address contemporary challenges and resonate more deeply with young people's lived experiences.

### **Non-Verbal Communication**

Utilizing visual storytelling through images, videos, and graphics enhances the Church's ability to convey messages of faith. This non-verbal communication approach

appeals to the visual preferences of youth, making spiritual content more engaging and impactful while capturing their attention in a dynamic way.

### **Crisis Support and Solidarity**

During difficult times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, new media has proven essential for providing spiritual support and maintaining community connections. Digital platforms enable the Church to offer virtual services, resources, and fellowship opportunities, ensuring that congregants feel supported and connected even in challenging circumstances.

### **Building Digital Literacy**

Engagement with new media encourages youth to develop crucial digital skills and literacy. By interacting with various online platforms and content creation tools, young people enhance their confidence and competence in digital communication, equipping them for future challenges in a technology-driven world.

### **Youth Demographic as an Opportunity**

Uganda's youthful population, which includes a substantial number of believers, represents a significant opportunity for the Catholic Church to nurture and expand its faith community. By actively engaging this demographic, the Church can foster spiritual development and build a vibrant community of young believers. Targeted outreach and tailored programs can help address the unique needs and interests of youth, promoting deeper connections to faith and encouraging their active participation in church activities. Leveraging this demographic advantage will not only enhance the Church's influence but also ensure its relevance in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

In conclusion, integrating new media into youth evangelization presents the Catholic Church in Uganda with significant opportunities and benefits. The Church can effectively reach, engage, and nurture the faith of young believers using social media and digital tools. This approach fosters spiritual growth and community, ensuring a vibrant and dynamic future for the Church in an increasingly digital world. Embracing new media allows the Church to connect with youth in meaningful ways, ultimately strengthening their faith and commitment to the community.

### **6.1.3 Challenges and Barriers in Integration of New Media to Youth Evangelization in Ugandan Context**

There are several challenges and barriers specific to the Church in Uganda when it comes to integrating new media for youth evangelization. Here is a summary of potential challenges and barriers that might be faced according to this study.

#### **Reduction of Physical Engagement**

The rise of online interaction may lead to decreased attendance at physical church services and sacraments, weakening community bonds among congregants. This shift can undermine personal connection that traditional worship offers, potentially impacting spiritual growth and community cohesion.

#### **Digital Divide**

In Uganda, not everyone has the resources to access new media, as many people, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, lack reliable internet connections, smartphones, computers, or electricity to power these devices. This digital divide limits the reach of new media initiatives, as many youths are unable to participate in online church activities due to infrastructural constraints and poverty.

#### **Misinformation and Fake News**

The widespread presence of misinformation and fake news online poses a substantial barrier to effective communication within the Church. This challenge complicates efforts to disseminate accurate spiritual teachings and may lead to confusion or distrust among young believers seeking guidance in their faith.

#### **Addiction and Overuse of Social Media**

Overusing social media for evangelism can result in addiction. This overuse can also lead to negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression. The potential for addiction and overuse of social media can distract youth from their spiritual and personal development.

#### **No Sacraments Received Online**

Digital platforms cannot replicate the physical experience of Sacraments which require in-person participation. This limitation underscores the importance of maintaining

traditional worship practices while integrating new media, as the sacraments are vital to the faith experience.

### **Generational Gaps**

Generational differences in attitudes toward new media can create barriers within the Church, particularly between older leaders and younger congregants. Differences in digital literacy and media consumption preferences between younger and older generations can hinder effective communication and understanding.

### **Cultural Resistance**

Cultural resistance to change within the Church can pose challenges to integrating new media into evangelization efforts. Traditional mindsets may view digital tools as incompatible with faith practices, making it difficult for the Church to adapt and connect with younger generations effectively.

### **Limited Digital Literacy**

Many congregants, especially older individuals, face limited digital literacy, which can hinder their engagement with new media. This gap creates barriers to accessing online resources and participating in digital evangelization, further separating them from the Church's outreach efforts.

### **Privacy and Security Concerns**

The use of new media for evangelism may lead to privacy and security risks, including the misuse of personal information or unauthorized access to shared data. This can undermine trust and discourage participation, particularly among young people, making online safety a critical priority.

### **Digital Fatigue**

Digital fatigue is another significant negative impact of using new media. This can cause disengagement from both online and offline spiritual activities. Digital interactions can enhance the faith experience when managed wisely, but without careful balance, they risk contributing to digital fatigue, which can undermine spiritual engagement.

### **Political Interference**

Political interference presents a considerable challenge to the Church's digital evangelization efforts in Uganda. Government restrictions or surveillance can hinder freedom of expression and limit the Church's ability to communicate openly and effectively with its congregation, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.

### **Technological Distractions**

The pervasive nature of digital tools can lead to distractions that divert attention from religious devotion and reflection. Constant notifications and updates may fragment focus, making it difficult for young believers to engage meaningfully with their faith in an increasingly busy online environment.

### **Language Barriers**

Language barriers is still a challenge in the evangelization of Uganda and can limit the accessibility of digital content, preventing diverse linguistic groups within Uganda from engaging fully with the Church's online resources. The lack of content available in local languages can create exclusion, diminishing the potential for effective communication and community building.

### **Economic Constraints**

Economic constraints significantly impact youth access to necessary technology for digital engagement. They can prevent many young people from participating in digital evangelization initiatives, thereby limiting their connection to the Church and its teachings.

### **Inclusivity Issues**

Issues of inclusivity, such as gender disparities and unequal access to technology, may prevent certain groups from fully participating in digital evangelization efforts. The Church must address these disparities to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, can engage meaningfully with their faith online.

### **Polarization within the Faith Community**

The online environment can amplify divisions within the Church, leading to polarization and conflict among congregants. Misunderstandings and negative interactions on digital platforms can undermine unity.

### **Lack of Depth in Interactions**

Online engagement often lacks the depth and intimacy of face-to-face spiritual conversations or guidance. This limitation can result in superficial connections that fail to meet the spiritual needs of youth.

### **Negative Interactions**

Exposure to negative interactions, such as harassment or exploitation, is a risk for vulnerable youth in online spaces. These harmful experiences can discourage participation in digital faith communities, potentially alienating young believers from the Church and its teachings.

### **Limited Feedback Mechanisms**

The absence of effective feedback mechanisms within digital evangelization efforts can hinder the Church's ability to understand and address the needs of its youth. In the absence of platforms for young people to voice their thoughts and concerns, the Church may struggle to adapt its outreach strategies effectively.

## **6.1.4 Practical Recommendations for Integrating New Media in Youth**

### **Evangelization in the Catholic Church in Uganda**

The effective integration of new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda necessitates a multifaceted approach, one that balances traditional and contemporary methods. Here outlined are the practical recommendations essential for this integration, which span technological, educational, and pastoral dimensions.

### **Balance Traditional and New Media Approaches**

Combining traditional media like radio and print with digital platforms ensures a wide reach and engagement. Traditional media maintains credibility and stability, while new media attracts tech-savvy youth, creating a holistic evangelization strategy.

### **Embracing the Digital Environment and Culture**

Adopting platforms and communication styles popular among the youth makes the Church's message more relatable. This involves understanding social media trends and digital culture of young people.

### **Enhancing and Investing in Digital Infrastructure and Accessibility**

Advocating for better internet services and technological infrastructure is essential. This can be done through partnering with government and private sector entities to improve connectivity. Providing high-speed internet and digital tools ensures that both the Church and its followers can engage in online activities. This investment is essential for conducting virtual meetings, streaming services, and creating digital content.

### **Training in ICT and Artificial Intelligence**

Investing in the training of church personnel in ICT and AI is crucial. This includes equipping clergy and lay leaders with digital skills needed to ensure that the Church's online presence is professional and engaging.

### **Prudent and Wise Use of New Media**

Creating ethical and respectful content aligns with the Church's values, avoiding the spread of misinformation. This responsible use of media builds trust and ensures the integrity of the Church's message.

### **Foster Creativity and Innovation in Digital Content**

The Church should encourage and support creative and innovative expressions of faith through digital media. Encouraging the creation of interactive media, podcasts, and visual storytelling makes the Church's message more engaging. Innovative content captures the attention of young audiences and makes faith-based messages more appealing.

### **Enhance Online Outreach and Community Building**

Using social media to create interactive spaces fosters a sense of community among youth. These platforms can facilitate discussions, support groups, and faith-based activities, strengthening the Church's online presence.

### **Promoting Digital Literacy and Awareness**

Teaching digital skills to both creators and consumers ensures safe and effective navigation of the online world. This education helps the youth critically evaluate digital content and use technology responsibly.

### **Encourage Peer-to-Peer Evangelization**

Leveraging existing relationships among youth for evangelization makes the message more personal and impactful. Peer influence is powerful, and encouraging youth to share their faith with friends can enhance outreach efforts.

### **Developing a Theology of New Media**

Creating a theological framework for digital engagement grounds online activities in faith. The Episcopal Conference, youth pastors and local theologians should develop a theology of new media, contextualizing digital evangelization within the Church's mission and values. This theological framework would guide the ethical and effective use of digital tools for evangelization. This ensures that the use of new media is aligned with spiritual and ethical guidelines.

### **Understanding Youth Needs and Trends**

Conducting regular surveys and consultations with young people will help the Church understand their needs, preferences, and digital behaviors. This data-driven approach will enable the Church to tailor its digital outreach to be more relevant and impactful.

### **Addressing Social Issues Affecting Youth**

The Church should use its digital platforms to address pressing social issues affecting youth, such as drug abuse, immorality, poverty and mental health. Providing educational and support resources on these topics can make the Church a vital source of guidance and support for young people.

### **Strengthening Faith and Hope of Youth in the Digital Age**

Programs that address the spiritual and psychological well-being of youth in the digital age should be developed. This includes creating online resources that promote faith, hope, and resilience, helping young people navigate the challenges of the digital world. Sharing messages of encouragement and spiritual guidance online helps nurture faith

and hope. Digital platforms can disseminate uplifting content that supports the spiritual growth of young people.

### **Establishing Social Media Policies and Enhancing Cybersecurity**

Clear policies on social media use and robust cybersecurity measures protect the Church and its followers. These efforts promote a safe digital environment.

### **Bridging the Generation Gap**

Programs promoting intergenerational dialogue on digital literacy foster mutual understanding. Older and younger generations can learn from each other, enhancing overall digital competency within the community.

### **Encouraging Discernment and Critical Thinking**

Teaching youth to critically assess digital content fosters discernment. This skill is vital for navigating misinformation and making informed decisions online.

### **Emphasizing Authenticity and Transparency**

Authentic communication builds trust. The Church should be genuine in its online presence, ensuring that its activities reflect its core mission and values.

### **Promoting Digital Detoxes**

Evangelists or youth pastors should guide to ensure that new media serves as a tool for connection and inspiration rather than a source of burnout. They should advocate for digital detoxes and retreats from digital devices. This practice supports a balanced lifestyle for youth.

### **Fostering Collaboration with Digital Influencers**

Partnering with influencers who align with the Church's values can amplify its reach. Influencers can help communicate the Church's message in a relatable and engaging manner.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Ensuring that digital evangelization efforts are respectful and inclusive of diverse backgrounds makes the Church's message more accessible and relatable to all youth.

### **Building Inclusive Online Communities**

Creating inclusive online communities that respect and celebrate the diversity of Uganda's youth is vital. These communities should provide a safe and supportive environment for young people to encounter the spiritual realm with confidence.

### **Emphasizing the Amoral Nature of Technology**

Recognizing that technology itself is sometimes neutral, but its use determines its impact, helps the Church and youth make informed choices about digital tools and platforms.

### **Fostering a Positive and Constructive Online Presence**

Creating meaningful dialogue, offering support, and providing valuable content online aligns with the Church's mission. A positive online presence strengthens the Church's influence and outreach.

By implementing these practical recommendations, the Catholic Church in Uganda can effectively integrate new media into its youth evangelization efforts, creating a dynamic and spiritually enriching environment that resonates with young people in the digital age.

### **Conclusion**

Integrating new media into youth evangelization in Uganda presents a complex mix of successes, challenges, and opportunities. Although the Church has made notable progress in leveraging digital platforms to engage with young people, several barriers hinder the full realization of digital evangelization's potential. However, by addressing these challenges through practical recommendations, the Church can enhance its digital outreach and better engage with the youth. Embracing new media offers a transformative opportunity to connect with Uganda's young population, fostering a vibrant and dynamic faith community equipped to navigate the digital age. By investing in digital infrastructure, training, and innovative evangelization strategies, the Catholic Church in Uganda can evangelize and support the spiritual development of its youth.

## **6.2 Contributions to the Field**

This study significantly contributes to the field of digital religion, virtual evangelism and youth ministry by providing an in-depth analysis of the integration of new media within the Catholic Church in Uganda. It explores both the successes and challenges, opportunities and obstacles, as well as offering practical recommendations to enhance the Church's engagement with youth through digital platforms, providing a thorough understanding of the current dynamics in this area.

### **Empirical Data on Digital Evangelization**

The study offers empirical data on how the Catholic Church in Uganda has utilized new media for youth evangelization. By examining specific case studies and collecting firsthand accounts from respondents, the research fills a gap in the literature regarding digital evangelization practices in a developing country context.

### **Identification of Barriers and Challenges**

It identifies and categorizes the barriers and challenges faced by the Church, such as lack of investment in digital tools, insufficient training, and the digital divide etc.

This framework provides a clear structure for understanding the complexities of digital evangelization in Uganda.

### **Highlighting Opportunities and Benefits**

The study outlines the benefits and opportunities of using new media, such as enhanced interactivity, global connectivity, and cost-effectiveness etc. These insights are valuable for Church leaders and policymakers looking to leverage digital tools for evangelization.

### **Theological and Practical Framework**

By discussing the need for developing a theology of new media in the context of Ugandan Church and providing practical recommendations, the study bridges the gap between theoretical concepts and practical implementation. This framework can guide future initiatives and strategies within the Church.

## **Contribution to Digital Literacy**

The emphasis on digital literacy and training for Church personnel contributes to broader discussions on digital inclusion and capacity building within religious institutions.

## **6.3 Further Implications or Suggestions for the Church in Uganda**

### **Reading the Signs of the Times**

The concept of “reading the signs of the times” underscores the Church's responsibility to discern contemporary cultural and societal contexts, guided by the Spirit, in order to fulfill its mission effectively. As highlighted in *Aetatis Novae* (n. 22), just as the prophets were empowered to recognize and respond to the divine plan in their era, the Church today is called to interpret the current “signs of the times” and engage prophetically.<sup>564</sup> The church in Uganda needs to read signs of the time and use the new media to carry out her mission outreach to young people.

St. Augustine’s statement: “God speaks to his people in the way that people speak to themselves” emphasizes that everything should run as smoothly as possible and that the media used should be understandable for both parties. The text or statements captures the fact that God communicates to people only in words that they can hear, that is, through human words (verbal media) or human actions (nonverbal media).<sup>565</sup> Saint Paul implemented the same principle: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law” (1 Corinthians 9:20).

### **Promoting Ugandan Catholic Identity**

New media can be used to celebrate and promote Ugandan Catholic traditions and practices. Highlighting local saints, feast days, and church events can foster a sense of pride and belonging among young Catholics. Additionally, content should be tailored to reflect the realities and experiences of Ugandan youth. This includes using local languages and addressing relevant social issues. Campbell (2013) emphasizes the need for contextualization in digital religion, noting that culturally relevant content resonates more deeply with audiences.

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<sup>564</sup> Cf. *Aetatis Novae*, n. 22.

<sup>565</sup> Cf. Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Communication in the Church and Society*, volume 3, Paulines Publications Africa, 1999, p.40.

### **Encouraging Digital Missionaries**

The study recommends encouraging and supporting digital missionaries who are already making significant efforts to reach out to others online. These online pastoral workers, including priests, religious, and lay people, should be recognized, formed, and accompanied in their mission. The 48th Synod Assembly on Synodality emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for these digital missionaries and facilitating networking among them. According to John Edmiston (2015), the role of the missionary is evolving from simply being a proclaimer or communicator to becoming a mentor or discipler, as the Internet increasingly meets purely informational needs. He asserts that the missionary of the future will need to be both high-tech and high-touch. This shift is already evident, as many individuals are reluctant to be approached physically and non-Christians often find it difficult to walk into a church even when invited. Traditional methods such as distributing gospel tracts in public places are no longer as effective. Edmiston argues that to reach the unsaved, it is necessary to engage with them through cyber evangelism, utilizing computers, mobile phones, and iPads.<sup>566</sup>

### **Media Education for Priests and Pastoral Agents**

The study recommends that the Church open its doors, institutions, and structures to media literacy formation, as many authors argue this step is crucial for pastoral agents to understand and effectively communicate within contemporary media culture. Education and training are vital areas of opportunity and need.<sup>567</sup> According to the Pontifical Council on Social Communications, everyone today requires some form of continuing media education, whether through personal study or organized programs. More than just teaching techniques, media education helps individuals form standards of good taste and truthful moral judgment, contributing to conscience formation.<sup>568</sup>

Specifically, the Pontifical Council recommends that Church personnel directly involved in media receive professional training as well as doctrinal and spiritual formation. This is essential because witnessing to Christ requires encountering Him personally and fostering a relationship through prayer, the Eucharist, sacramental

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<sup>566</sup> Edmiston, *Methodist Journal of Theology* (MEJOTH), vol. 2, issue 1, (May, 2015): 160-179. Methodist Theological Institute, Sagamu, Nigeria. [www.mtisagamu.org/journal](http://www.mtisagamu.org/journal) (Accessed July 21, 2024).

<sup>567</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council on Social Communications, *The Ethics of Communications*, no. 25.

<sup>568</sup> Cf. *ibid*

reconciliation, reading and reflecting on God's word, studying Christian doctrine, and serving others.<sup>569</sup>

To achieve this, Church leaders should implement education and training programs to enhance digital literacy among clergy, staff, and parishioners. These programs can include workshops on responsibly navigating social media, discerning reliable sources of information, and understanding the ethical implications of online interactions. The effectiveness of new media strategies also depends on the digital literacy levels of the target audience.

### **Online Presence of the Church**

The presence of the church in new media is not just beneficial but essential. The mission to reach young people and spread the gospel of Christ necessitates a strong presence on social media platforms. The Apostle Paul's encouragement of mission work emphasizes the importance of preaching so that many may come to know Christ. As Paul beautifully articulated in Romans 10:11, 13-15:

“The Scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame ... everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?”

Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, reinforces this approach: “The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect” (*E N*, 45). This highlights the critical importance of leveraging modern communication tools to fulfill the Church's mission of evangelization. In today's digital age, establishing a strong online presence is essential for any church aiming to provide pastoral care and support effectively.

### **Digital Engagement for In-Person Connection**

It is recommended that the church adopt a strategy of “Digital Engagement for In-Person Connection,” focusing on leveraging digital platforms to foster relationships with young people and encourage their return to physical church attendance. This strategy should include transitioning from online to offline interactions by creating pathways for young individuals to move from digital engagement to physical

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<sup>569</sup> Cf. *ibid*

participation. This can be achieved by inviting them to in-person events, emphasizing the community aspects of worship, and highlighting the unique experiences that arise from gathering together. Additionally, the church should create engaging content that resonates with young audiences, promote physical events through social media, and empower young members to invite their peers, ultimately cultivating a welcoming community that enhances spiritual growth and connection.

### **Developing Youth-Focused Faith Apps**

The Catholic Church in Uganda could develop its own mobile applications aimed at connecting with youth in the digital age. These apps could provide a platform for sharing spiritual resources, promoting church events, facilitating discussions on faith, and offering interactive features such as prayer requests and virtual Bible studies. By utilizing mobile technology, the church can engage young people more effectively, fostering a sense of community and belonging that resonates with their digital lifestyles. This initiative would modernize the church's outreach and create new opportunities for youth to explore and deepen their faith in a convenient and accessible manner.

## **6.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study on the integration of new media in evangelization of young people in Uganda using online survey methods may include the following limitations:

### **Sample Selection and Response Bias**

The size and representativeness of the sample population, along with any biases inherent in the selection of participants, may affect the findings of the study. Additionally, the perspectives shared may not fully capture the views of all stakeholders or young people within the Catholic Church in Uganda. Furthermore, participants who choose to respond to the survey may have distinct characteristics or interests compared to non-responders, thereby impacting the study's external validity. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported data collected through surveys, which may be subject to response biases, such as social desirability effects or inaccuracies in recall. As a result, participants may have provided socially desirable responses or may not have fully engaged with the survey, thus affecting the validity of the data collected.

### **Temporal Factors**

The rapidly changing nature of online media may render survey responses time-

sensitive, meaning that conclusions drawn may not be applicable to future developments. Furthermore, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. As a result, it may provide a snapshot of the current state of new media integration in youth evangelization but may not capture long-term trends or changes over time.

### **Technical Issues**

Issues such as poor internet connectivity, device compatibility, or survey platform glitches could affect data collection and lead to incomplete or unreliable responses.

Online surveys may have excluded individuals without internet access, potentially skewing results and limiting the generalizability of findings.

### **Contextual Limitations of Findings**

The online survey method may not allow for an in-depth exploration of the local context, missing crucial insights into the dynamics of evangelization specific to Uganda.

Additionally, the findings of the study may be specific to the context of the Catholic Church in Uganda and may not be generalizable to other religious or cultural contexts.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Online surveys may not capture nuanced cultural aspects relevant to evangelization in Uganda, as certain expressions and beliefs may be better conveyed in face-to-face interactions.

## **6.5 Possible Future Research Directions**

### **A. Longitudinal Studies on Digital Evangelization:**

Longitudinal studies to provide valuable insights into how digital evangelization efforts impact youth engagement and faith development over time. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of these efforts.

### **B. Comparative Studies:**

Conduct comparative studies between different regions or countries to identify best practices and lessons learned in digital evangelization. Comparing Uganda's

experiences with those of other developing and developed countries could highlight innovative approaches and strategies.

**C. Impact of Digital Literacy Programs:**

Investigate the impact of digital literacy programs on the effectiveness of digital evangelization. This research could assess how increased digital literacy among Church personnel and youth influences engagement and participation in online faith activities.

**D. Role of AI and Emerging Technologies:**

Explore the potential of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies in enhancing digital evangelization efforts. Researching how AI can be used for personalized content delivery, chatbots for pastoral care, and data analytics for strategic planning could be an exciting study.

**E. Youth Perspectives on Digital Evangelization:**

Conduct in-depth qualitative studies to understand youth perspectives on digital evangelization. This research could involve interviews, focus groups, and case studies to capture the nuanced experiences and expectations of young people.

**F. Digital Media and Cultural Context:**

Examine the interplay between digital media and cultural context in evangelization efforts. Future research could delve into how cultural values, norms, and practices influence the reception and effectiveness of digital evangelization in Uganda.

**G. Evaluation of Online Faith Communities:**

Evaluate the role and impact of online faith communities in supporting youth spiritual development. This research could assess how these communities complement physical gatherings and contribute to a sense of belonging and support.

## General Conclusion

The research titled *Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization: The Case Study of the Catholic Church in Uganda* presents a comprehensive examination of how the Catholic Church in Uganda is adapting to the digital age in its mission to engage, evangelize young people. Rapid technological advancements and the increasing influence of digital platforms on various facets of life, including communication, education, and personal interaction make it crucial for religious institutions like the Catholic Church to explore how these emerging tools can be harnessed to foster more effective youth evangelization. This research, therefore, addresses a significant void by investigating the current state of digital evangelization, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and offering practical recommendations to improve outreach efforts.

The findings of this research underscore the Catholic Church's recognition of the potential of new media as an effective tool for youth engagement. Through online platforms such as social media, websites, blogs, and video-sharing platforms, the Church in Uganda has made significant strides in reaching young people who are increasingly consuming information through digital channels. The benefits of these efforts are manifold, as new media offers the Church the opportunity to deliver its message in a format that is accessible, relatable, and engaging to the youth. These platforms allow for interactive communication, real-time feedback, and community building, enabling a dynamic and participatory form of evangelization that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of physical church spaces.

The study has revealed several key benefits of integrating new media into youth evangelization. First, it provides the Church with an expanded reach, enabling it to engage young people who may be geographically distant or otherwise unable to participate in conventional parish activities. Second, the use of digital platforms allows the Church to tailor its message to the specific needs, preferences, and contexts of young people, ensuring that the faith remains part of their lives. Third, new media offers an avenue for continuous engagement, allowing the Church to maintain a presence in the lives of youth through social media interactions, online forums, and digital faith-based content. These advantages demonstrate how the digital world can complement and enhance the Church's traditional methods of evangelization, ultimately deepening the faith and participation of Uganda's youth.

However, while the Catholic Church in Uganda has made commendable progress in utilizing digital platforms, significant barriers remain that must be addressed to fully realize the potential of digital evangelization. One of the primary obstacles is the limited digital literacy and capacity among some church leaders and pastoral teams, which hinders effective use of new media platforms. Additionally, the digital divide remains a persistent challenge in Uganda, with many young people in rural areas facing limitations, thereby restricting the reach of online evangelization efforts. The Church also faces challenges related to maintaining the authenticity and doctrinal integrity of its message in a digital landscape often characterized by misinformation, superficial engagement, and the rapid spread of content without sufficient reflection or depth.

Another significant challenge highlighted by this research is the need for more consistent and cohesive digital strategies across different dioceses and parishes. While some local churches have embraced digital tools and strategies enthusiastically, others fall short due to lack of resources, training, or leadership support. This inconsistency results in uneven engagement levels among the youth, with some regions enjoying robust digital evangelization efforts while others remain largely disconnected from the Church's online presence. To overcome this challenge, there is a need for the development of a unified, Church-wide digital strategy that ensures all dioceses and parishes are equipped with the necessary tools, training, and resources to implement effective digital evangelization initiatives.

The research also identifies a tension between the traditional forms of evangelization and the demands of new media. While new media provides numerous opportunities for engagement, there is still a need to strike a balance between digital platforms and in-person spiritual experiences. The Church must ensure that its online activities complement, rather than replace, traditional forms of evangelization, such as liturgical worship, community service, and personal relationships. The human aspect of faith, which involves personal interaction, mentorship, and spiritual guidance, remains irreplaceable. Therefore, new media should be seen as an enhancement, rather than a substitute, for the Church's conventional pastoral approaches.

Based on these insights, this research offers several practical recommendations for enhancing the Catholic Church's digital evangelization efforts. First, there is a need for continuous training and capacity-building for church leaders, priests, and youth ministers in digital literacy and media engagement. By equipping personnel with the necessary skills to navigate and utilize new media effectively, the Church can enhance

its digital presence and ensure that its message resonates with the youth. Second, the Church should invest in infrastructure and resources to reduce the digital divide, so that young people in rural and underserved areas are not left behind in its evangelization efforts. This may include partnerships with telecom providers, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to expand internet access and digital literacy programs in marginalized communities.

Additionally, the Church must develop a coherent and sustainable digital strategy that aligns with its broader mission of evangelization. This plan or approach should focus on creating standardized frameworks for content creation, fostering online engagement, and ensuring effective collaboration between parishes, dioceses, and national Catholic bodies. It is also recommended that the Church prioritizes the creation of high-quality, culturally relevant digital content that speaks to the lived realities of Uganda's youth, addressing their spiritual, emotional, and social needs. By producing content that is both doctrinally sound and engaging, the Church can foster a deeper engagement with young people and help them to live out their faith in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, this study also underlines the importance of collaboration between the Church and young people in the creation and dissemination of digital content. Youth should not only be the target audience but also active participants in the evangelization process. By empowering and promoting them to take leadership roles in digital evangelization initiatives, the Church can tap into their creativity, energy, and understanding of the digital world, creating a more vibrant and dynamic faith community.

In summary, this research has successfully met its objectives providing a comprehensive assessment of the Catholic Church's use of new media in youth evangelization in Uganda. The integration of new media into youth evangelization in Uganda presents a multifaceted landscape of opportunities, challenges, and necessary strategic actions. While the Church has made notable progress in embracing digital platforms, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the Church fully harnesses the potential of new media to engage the younger generation effectively. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, such as digital literacy gaps, the digital divide, and the need for a cohesive digital strategy etc, the Church can enhance its digital outreach and continue to inspire the spiritual development of Uganda's youth. The findings of this research offer valuable guidance not only for the Catholic Church in

Uganda but also for other religious institutions worldwide as they navigate the complexities of evangelization in the digital age.

By embracing new media with creativity, authenticity, and strategic foresight, the Church can continue to fulfill its mission of evangelization in a rapidly evolving world, fostering a vibrant and engaged faith community for generations to come.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the integration of new media into youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda, examining how digital technologies can be effectively harnessed to engage young people in a rapidly digitalizing society. Given Uganda's predominantly youthful population and the global shift toward digital communication, the research addresses the urgent need for the Church to adapt its evangelization strategies. Employing a mixed-methods approach—comprising an online survey targeting youth and church leaders, alongside a critical review of relevant literature—the study explores implementation strategies, identifies successes and failures, highlights emerging opportunities, uncovers key challenges, and proposes practical recommendations for enhancing digital engagement.

Findings reveal significant progress in the Church's digital adoption, including increased use of social media, a growing positive attitude toward digital media among clergy and pastoral agents, active youth involvement in digital ministry, virtual Bible study and prayer groups, online catechesis, promotion of Church music and events, and a robust digital response during the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts have expanded the Church's reach and fostered interactive, community-centered evangelization.

Nevertheless, notable failures persist, including over-reliance on traditional methods, slow adaptation to digital tools, digital illiteracy among some leaders, limited content innovation, poor marketing strategies, lack of influencer collaboration, inconsistent online presence, and minimal youth involvement in digital decision-making. A disconnect from youth culture and insufficient investment in media infrastructure further hinder effective integration.

Despite these setbacks, the potential of new media remains vast. It enables broader accessibility, peer-led evangelization, digital catechesis, creative expression, cost-effective outreach, support during crises, global connectivity, flexibility, immediacy, and opportunities for inspirational, educational content and the promotion of vocations. However, significant challenges remain, such as reduced physical engagement, misinformation, digital divide, cultural resistance, digital addiction and fatigue, privacy concerns, generational gaps, political censorship, language barriers, economic constraints, and infrastructural deficiencies.

To advance digital evangelization, the study recommends a balanced integration of traditional and digital approaches, comprehensive digital training for Church leaders, increased investment in infrastructure, robust cybersecurity measures, culturally relevant and innovative content creation, collaboration with influencers and youth content creators, and deeper understanding of youth trends and needs. It further calls for the development of a contextual theology of new media and strategic youth engagement.

In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive framework for digital evangelization, offering valuable guidance for the Catholic Church in Uganda—and beyond—as it seeks to cultivate a dynamic, inclusive, and spiritually enriching digital faith community. It contributes meaningfully to the broader discourse on religion and technology, presenting insights and frameworks that can inform similar initiatives across global religious landscapes.

## ABSTRAKT

Diese Studie untersucht die Integration neuer Medien in die Jugend-Evangelisierung innerhalb der katholischen Kirche in Uganda und analysiert, wie digitale Technologien wirksam genutzt werden können, um junge Menschen in einer zunehmend digitalisierten Gesellschaft zu erreichen. Angesichts der überwiegend jungen Bevölkerung Ugandas und des weltweiten Trends zur digitalen Kommunikation reagiert die Forschung auf die dringende Notwendigkeit, dass die Kirche ihre Evangelisierungsstrategien anpasst. Mithilfe eines Mixed-Methods-Ansatzes – bestehend aus einer Online-Umfrage unter Jugendlichen und kirchlichen Führungspersonen sowie einer kritischen Literaturrecherche – werden Umsetzungsstrategien analysiert, Erfolge und Misserfolge identifiziert, Chancen aufgezeigt, Herausforderungen offengelegt und praxisnahe Empfehlungen zur Verbesserung des digitalen Engagements formuliert.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen bedeutende Fortschritte bei der digitalen Adaption der Kirche, einschließlich der verstärkten Nutzung sozialer Medien, einer zunehmend positiven Haltung gegenüber digitalen Medien unter Klerikern und pastoralen Mitarbeitenden, aktiver Jugendbeteiligung an digitalen Projekten, virtuellen Bibel- und Gebetsgruppen, digitaler Katechese, der Förderung von Kirchenmusik und -veranstaltungen sowie einer starken digitalen Präsenz während der COVID-19-Pandemie. Diese Initiativen haben die Reichweite der Kirche erweitert und interaktive, gemeinschaftsorientierte Formen der Evangelisierung gefördert.

Gleichzeitig bestehen erhebliche Defizite, darunter eine Überbetonung traditioneller Methoden, langsame Anpassung an digitale Werkzeuge, digitale Unwissenheit unter Führungskräften, mangelnde Innovationskraft bei der Inhaltserstellung, schwache Marketingstrategien, fehlende Zusammenarbeit mit Influencern, inkonsistente Online-Präsenz sowie eine geringe Einbindung Jugendlicher in digitale Entscheidungsprozesse. Ein Mangel an Bezug zur Jugendkultur und unzureichende Investitionen in Medieninfrastruktur erschweren die wirksame Integration zusätzlich.

Trotz dieser Schwächen bieten neue Medien ein enormes Potenzial: Sie ermöglichen eine breitere Zugänglichkeit, jugendgeleitete Evangelisierung, digitale Katechese, kreative Ausdrucksformen, kostengünstige Kommunikation, Unterstützung in

Krisenzeiten, globale Vernetzung, Flexibilität, Unmittelbarkeit sowie inspirierende und bildende Inhalte und die Förderung geistlicher Berufungen. Dennoch bestehen zentrale Herausforderungen, wie die Abnahme physischer Begegnung, Fehlinformationen, digitale Spaltung, kultureller Widerstand, Suchtgefahren und digitale Erschöpfung, Datenschutzprobleme, Generationsunterschiede, politische Zensur, Sprachbarrieren, wirtschaftliche Einschränkungen und infrastrukturelle Defizite.

Zur Stärkung der digitalen Evangelisierung empfiehlt die Studie eine ausgewogene Kombination traditioneller und digitaler Ansätze, umfassende digitale Schulungen für kirchliche Führungspersonen, Investitionen in Infrastruktur, Maßnahmen zur Cybersicherheit, die Entwicklung kulturell relevanter und innovativer Inhalte, die Zusammenarbeit mit Influencern und jugendlichen Content Creators sowie ein vertieftes Verständnis für die Bedürfnisse und Trends junger Menschen. Zudem wird eine kontextualisierte Theologie der neuen Medien und eine strategische Einbindung der Jugend vorgeschlagen.

Abschließend bietet diese Forschung einen umfassenden Rahmen für digitale Evangelisierung und liefert wertvolle Impulse für die katholische Kirche in Uganda – und darüber hinaus – auf dem Weg zu einer dynamischen, inklusiven und geistlich bereichernden digitalen Glaubensgemeinschaft. Die Studie leistet einen bedeutenden Beitrag zum breiteren Diskurs über Religion und Technologie und bietet Erkenntnisse und Ansätze, die auch für ähnliche Initiativen weltweit von Nutzen sein können.