



The benefits and opportunities of New Media in Youth Evangelization: A Catholic Church perspective from Uganda

Bernard Rabwoni¹ 

¹ University of Vienna, Austria.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the benefits and opportunities that new media offers to promote youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda. In an age of rapid digital transformation, understanding how social media, websites, and online streaming can enhance youth participation in faith-based activities is vital for the Church's mission of evangelization. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating an online survey of Catholic youth and church leaders with a review of relevant scholarly and ecclesial literature on digital evangelization and pastoral communication. The findings indicate that new media significantly enhance youth engagement by providing accessible, interactive, and creative avenues for spiritual formation and community building. It empowers young people to take leadership roles in evangelization, supports digital catechesis, strengthens peer-to-peer faith sharing, and facilitates pastoral care and advocacy. The discussions reveal that successful adoption of new media in evangelization depends on the Church's openness to technology, digital literacy among youth ministers, and the production of culturally relevant and faith-centered content. The study recommends that the Catholic Church institutionalize digital evangelization strategies, train pastoral agents in media communication, and invest in sustainable digital infrastructure to reach more young people effectively. This research contributes to scholarship by expanding understanding of digital faith communication in an African context, providing empirical evidence on the transformative potential of new media in youth ministry, and enriching global discourse on the intersection between technology and evangelization.

Keywords: New Media, Youth Evangelization, Catholic Church, Digital Catechesis, Faith Communication, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between media and religion has garnered increasing academic interest in recent years, driven by the rapid evolution of digital technology and its global reach. As McLuhan famously observed, the world has become a “global village,” where mass media enables unprecedented levels of interaction across

CORRESPONDENCE - Bernard Rabwoni Email: rabwonibernard@gmail.com

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distances.¹ In the 21st century, religious institutions, including the Catholic Church, have embraced new media to engage with their followers, significantly influencing how religious practices and beliefs are communicated and experienced. Religious institutions can now navigate a digital landscape in which much of their influence and authority is shaped through media platforms.² This shift reflects broader theories of the mediatization of religion, with scholars like Hjarvard arguing that the media plays a key role in transforming spiritual practices and understandings.³

In this context, this paper explores the integration of new media into youth evangelization efforts, focusing specifically on the Catholic Church in Uganda. Uganda's youth make up a large portion of the population, and platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become crucial tools for fostering spiritual growth and engagement among younger generations. As religious practices adapt to digital environments, the Catholic Church in Uganda leverages these platforms to sustain its mission and reach new audiences, especially the youth.

The rise of digital and social media has transformed how people communicate, connect, and access information. This digital revolution has reshaped communication across all sectors, including religion. For the Catholic Church, evangelization has always been central to its mission,⁴ and adopting new media technologies offers new opportunities to spread its message effectively. In Uganda—a country with a youthful population and a rich Catholic heritage—this integration of digital tools into evangelization practices presents both benefits and challenges.

Despite dominant assumptions, social media usage is widespread even in regions marked by extreme poverty, as many people in these areas rely on affordable mobile phones that support modern social networking platforms. The accessibility and low cost of these devices have made social media a crucial tool for connecting a significant portion of the global population, transcending economic barriers.⁵ As young people increasingly turn to digital platforms for information and social interaction, traditional methods of evangelization may no longer be sufficient to capture their attention. Pope Benedict XVI described social networks as a “new agora,” drawing a parallel to the ancient Greek public spaces where people gathered for artistic, spiritual, and political engagement. This concept highlights how digital platforms now serve as modern forums for cultural exchange and spiritual dialogue.⁶

Recognizing this shift, the Catholic Church in Uganda has adopted various digital strategies to connect with the youth. These include social media, video sermons, mobile apps, live streaming events, and interactive online communities. Such initiatives aim to make faith-based content more accessible and relatable to younger audiences. Church leaders understand that effective evangelization requires aligning their communication methods with the digital habits of today's youth.⁷

This paper draws on data from an online survey and literature reviews to present the benefits and opportunities of using new media in youth evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda. It examines how digital platforms enhance participation, foster community, and create innovative pathways for spiritual growth. Although acknowledging the challenges posed by this digital shift, the paper highlights the Church's proactive efforts to meet young people where they are—at the intersection of faith and technology. Ultimately, it argues that integrating new media into youth evangelization is not only an opportunity but a necessary strategy for the Church to remain relevant and impactful in an increasingly digital world.

¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

² Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (Routledge, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203503201>.

³ Stig Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change,” *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9/1>.

⁴ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Apostolic Exhortation), December 8, 1975, no. 14.

⁵ Miriam Westen, “Social Media in the New Evangelization,” Conference paper, Barry's Bay, Ontario, Canada, November 2013.

⁶ Vasilis Evangelidis, “Agoras and Fora: Developments in the Central Public Space of the Cities of Greece during the Roman Period,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 109 (2014): 335–56.

⁷ Jacob Dankasa, *New Media as Tools for Evangelization: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church* (Saint Cloud State University, 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was primarily guided by Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which explains how new ideas, practices, and technologies are adopted and disseminated within a social system. The theory outlines four key elements that influence the diffusion process: innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system.⁸ In the context of this study, the "innovation" refers to the integration of new media and digital tools in evangelization; "communication channels" represent the digital platforms—such as social media, websites, and streaming services—through which religious messages are shared; "time" reflects the gradual process through which both Church leaders and youth adopt and adapt to these technologies; and the "social system" encompasses the Catholic Church community in Uganda, including its clergy, youth groups, and lay faithful.

The theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing how digital evangelization practices emerge, spread, and become normalized within the Church's communication culture. It helps explain why certain innovations—such as livestreamed Masses, online catechesis, and social media ministries—gain faster acceptance among younger Catholics, while others face resistance due to institutional, cultural, or technological barriers.

To enrich the analysis, two supplementary theoretical perspectives were incorporated: Digital Religion and Mediatization Theory. The concept of Digital Religion, advanced by Heidi Campbell, explores how religious beliefs, practices, and identities are expressed, negotiated, and redefined in online spaces.⁹ This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding how Catholic youth in Uganda engage with faith communities on digital platforms and how their spiritual practices are shaped by online interaction and digital media culture.

Similarly, Mediatization Theory, as articulated by Stig Hjarvard, explains how media have become integrated into the very fabric of social and cultural life, influencing how institutions such as religion communicate and operate.¹⁰ From this viewpoint, the media are not merely tools for disseminating information but active agents that reshape the nature of religious experience and authority. In the Ugandan context, this theory illuminates how the Catholic Church adapts its evangelization strategies to a media-saturated environment, in which digital communication increasingly defines how faith is practiced, shared, and sustained.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional lens in examining the adoption, adaptation, and transformative impact of new media in Catholic youth evangelization. Collectively, they underscore that the Church's engagement with digital technologies is both a process of innovation dissemination and a reflection of broader cultural and communicative changes within modern religious life.

Integration of New Media in Youth Evangelization

The integration of new media into evangelization has become an increasingly important area of inquiry in contemporary religious communication. Scholars in the interdisciplinary study of religion and the Internet recognize that digital media have become deeply embedded in everyday life, serving as common platforms for social interaction and spiritual engagement.¹¹ The media today act as one of the primary informers of the human soul, shaping people's identities, values, and worldviews in profound ways.¹²

Despite the risks associated with digitalization, the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) presents the Church with unprecedented opportunities to proclaim the Gospel and sustain

⁸ Clay Halton, "Understanding the Diffusion of Innovations Theory with Examples," Investopedia, January 23, 2023, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/diffusion-of-innovations-theory.asp>.

⁹ Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰ Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change."

¹¹ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, 10.

¹² Pauline Media Studies, "Media Mindfulness for a Digital Culture: A Media Literacy Course," 2025, <https://media.pauline.org/Resources/Blog/ArticleID/553>.

its mission in the modern world.¹³ As the global Church increasingly operates within a digital society, understanding how these technologies can be harnessed for evangelization—particularly among young people—has become a pastoral necessity.

The Youth and the Digital Culture

Young people represent a vital demographic for the Church, as the future of Christianity depends on their faith, creativity, and active participation. It is necessary for the Church to develop communication strategies that resonate with young audiences, who are often underrepresented in traditional evangelization initiatives.¹⁴

Today, young people are immersed in a digital environment characterized by constant visual and auditory stimulation that competes with the Church's traditional communication methods. Although the youth may lose interest in long sermons or liturgical celebrations, they can remain online for hours, fully engaged with digital content.¹⁵ This reality underscores the need for the Church to meet young people in the digital spaces they inhabit, using innovative and interactive approaches that align with their communication preferences.

The “New Agora” and Digital Evangelization

Pope Benedict XVI's notion of the “new agora” aptly describes this transformation. In ancient Greece, the agora was a public space for cultural, political, and spiritual interaction. Today, social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube serve as modern “marketplaces of ideas,” where young people exchange values, opinions, and beliefs.¹⁶

These digital “agoras” offer the Church an immense missionary field. By entering these spaces with authenticity and creativity, the Church can communicate the Gospel in accessible and culturally relevant ways. In Uganda and across Africa, where youth constitute a majority of the population, this digital approach provides an invaluable avenue for evangelization and catechesis.

Theological and Cultural Contexts

Heidi Campbell argues that digital media have become a vital locus for religious practice, shaping contemporary expressions of spirituality. Similarly, Bernard Lonergan, in *Method in Theology*, asserts that evangelization must be contextually rooted in the cultural frameworks in which faith is proclaimed. He emphasizes that integrating the Christian message into prevailing cultural contexts enhances its relevance and acceptance—an insight that is particularly applicable in today's digital culture.¹⁷

This theological vision calls for pastoral creativity in the digital era. Church leaders are therefore challenged to adopt digital communication strategies that align with the habits and linguistic codes of online communities. The new media and digital technology are not merely tools but essential channels for evangelization, capable of transforming how faith is communicated and lived.¹⁸

The Church's Response: A New Digital Mission

Recognizing this reality, Church leaders globally—including in Uganda—have begun to adopt social media, live-streamed liturgies, video homilies, and interactive digital communities as part of their evangelization strategies. Cardinal Michael Czerny in 2024 described the digital environment not merely as a tool but as a “new territory” for the Church's mission. He likened the emergence of digital evangelization to seeds

¹³ Justine John Dyikuk, “Christianity and the Digital Age: Sustaining the Online Church,” *International Journal of Journalism and Mass Communication* 3, no. 1 (2017): 43–49.

¹⁴ Dankasa, *New Media as Tools for Evangelization: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church*.

¹⁵ A Zukowski, “Communicating Faith in a Digital Culture,” *Momentum* 43, no. 3 (2012).

¹⁶ Evangelidis, “Agoras and Fora: Developments in the Central Public Space of the Cities of Greece during the Roman Period.”

¹⁷ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 362.

¹⁸ Dankasa, *New Media as Tools for Evangelization: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church*.

scattered across virtual soil—quietly germinating and transforming the faith experience of countless believers online.¹⁹

Challenges of New Media in Youth Evangelization

While promising, digital evangelization presents notable challenges. The Church often faces resource constraints, especially in regions with limited technological infrastructure. Additionally, gaps in digital literacy among clergy and laity hinder effective use of online tools.²⁰ Resistance from traditional members—who may perceive digital engagement as secular or distracting—also impedes progress.

Zukowski cautions that the vast array of digital stimuli can easily outcompete the Church’s message, suggesting that evangelizers must employ creative, visually engaging, and interactive methods to capture the attention of youth.²¹ Similarly, Bishop Gerard Musa described digital media as a “double-edged sword”: while it facilitates global evangelization and connectivity, it also exposes believers to misinformation, moral relativism, and the risk of substituting virtual worship for sacramental life.²²

Opportunities for Evangelization

Despite these challenges, digital media provide immense opportunities for faith formation and engagement. Social media platforms enable two-way, real-time communication, allowing young people to become active participants in faith conversations rather than passive recipients. ICT innovations have made evangelization more interactive, participatory, and global in scope, transcending denominational and geographic boundaries.²³

Bishop Musa highlights how dioceses can leverage digital platforms to reach audiences beyond their local parishes, while Jude Ilo encourages young Africans to become “digital influencers for Christ.” Ilo argues that platforms such as TikTok and YouTube allow youth not only to consume content but to share their faith creatively, transforming Africa’s so-called “information poverty” into a digital mission field.²⁴

Synthesis

Empirical studies affirm that the Internet has become a “second home” for many young people, who spend more time online than in any other activity except sleep.²⁵ Therefore, the Church must extend its presence into these online spaces, providing authentic encounters with Christ through digital dialogue, catechesis, and storytelling. As highlighted in the ongoing Synod on Synodality, many youth have migrated from physical Church spaces to online communities in their search for meaning, belonging, and beauty. This shift demands a pastoral reimagining of evangelization that meets the youth at the intersection of faith and technology. In summary, the integration of new media into youth evangelization represents both a pastoral necessity and a missionary opportunity. By embracing digital communication with creativity, discernment, and theological depth, the Catholic Church in Uganda—and the wider global Church—can continue to fulfill its evangelizing mission in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to have a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and opportunities of new media in youth

¹⁹ 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>.

²⁰ Dyikuk, “Christianity and the Digital Age: Sustaining the Online Church.”

²¹ Zukowski, “Communicating Faith in a Digital Culture.”

²² Gerard Musa, *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).

²³ Dyikuk, “Christianity and the Digital Age: Sustaining the Online Church.”

²⁴ Jude Ilo, “How Young People Can Use the Digital Space to Become Digital Influencers and Missionaries,” *Proceedings of the African Palaver Series on the Future of the Church in Africa (Synod on Synodality)* (PACTPAN, 2024).

²⁵ Dankasa, *New Media as Tools for Evangelization: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church*.

evangelization within the Catholic Church in Uganda. The qualitative component focused on content analysis and a critical literature review, while the quantitative component relied on an online survey administered to Catholic youth. The integration of both approaches enabled data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

Study Sample

The target population comprised Catholic youth aged 20 to 40 years from different dioceses across Uganda. Using a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques, a total of 356 respondents participated in the study. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of young people actively involved in Church-related activities and digital evangelization initiatives, while random sampling broadened representation by including respondents from diverse backgrounds and regions. This sampling strategy provided a balanced view of youth experiences and perceptions regarding new media and evangelization.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two main sources: A critical content analysis of relevant literature, church documents, and previous research on media, religion, and youth ministry was performed to identify key concepts, theoretical insights, and best practices. An online survey was designed and distributed using digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, email, and Facebook groups associated with Catholic youth movements. The survey contained a mix of open-ended and closed-ended items—designed to capture demographic information, levels of digital engagement, perceptions of media use in evangelization, and challenges encountered.

Data Analysis

The analysis process combined both thematic and statistical techniques. Qualitative data from literature and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring ideas, emerging themes, and patterns related to new media’s role in evangelization. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations (such as charts and tables), to illustrate trends and distributions. The results of both analyses were integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to established ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To protect privacy, all responses were treated with confidentiality and anonymity, and data were used solely for academic purposes. The researcher ensured that the study upheld principles of integrity, respect, and transparency throughout the research process.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 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
Total	100	305

The study revealed that 79.34% of respondents recall encountering the Church on social media, highlighting the strong digital presence of religious content in Uganda. This suggests that social media platforms are effective tools for reaching people and engaging them in faith-based discussions. However,

20.66% of respondents do not remember such encounters, indicating that a significant portion of the population either has not been reached or does not find the content memorable enough to recall.

These findings underscore both the benefits and opportunities of digital youth evangelization in Uganda. The high recall rate suggests that social media can effectively spread religious messages, fostering spiritual growth among young people. However, the percentage of those who do not remember meeting the Church online signals a need for more targeted engagement strategies, improved content relevance, and diversification of digital outreach methods. Strengthening these efforts can enhance the Church’s ability to connect with and impact a wider audience in the digital space.

Understanding the Absence of Church Encounters on Social Media

The survey did not directly ask respondents why they had not encountered the Church on social media. However, the negative responses could be influenced by different interpretations of what it means to "meet the Church through social media." Some individuals may engage with religious content passively—such as seeing posts, watching livestreams, or reading Christian messages—without perceiving it as an actual "meeting" with the Church. This suggests that a lack of awareness or different expectations of religious engagement online may have contributed to the reported responses.

Additionally, the discrepancy between some respondents' answers and their actual engagement with religious content highlights potential ambiguities in how digital evangelization is perceived. Although some may consider following a Church-affiliated page or watching a sermon as meeting the Church, others might define it as direct interaction, such as participating in discussions or joining virtual prayer groups. These varied understandings emphasize the importance of clarity in framing digital evangelization efforts and ensuring that individuals recognize their encounters with faith-based content as meaningful engagements with the Church.

Table 2: Online Survey Results: Responses to “Do You Wish to Meet the Church on Social Media?”

Response	Percentage	No.
YES	91.35%	243
NO	8.65%	23
Total	100%	266

The survey findings show a strong willingness among participants to engage with the Church on social media, with 91.35% expressing a desire for such an interaction. This overwhelming interest highlights the potential of digital platforms as effective spaces for faith-based engagement, spiritual growth, and community building. The high percentage suggests that social media offers an accessible and appealing avenue for youth evangelization, allowing the Church to reach and connect with a broad audience.

However, the 8.65% who prefer not to engage with the Church on social media indicate that some individuals may have reservations about digital religious interactions. This reluctance could stem from factors such as privacy concerns, content preferences, or differing perceptions of online faith engagement. Understanding these reasons can help shape more inclusive and effective digital evangelization strategies, ensuring that the Church’s online presence resonates with diverse audiences while addressing potential barriers to engagement.

Preferred Ways to Engage with the Church on Social Media

The study probed the respondents with the question: “How would you wish to meet the Church in social media?” It highlights the evolving expectations of congregants regarding Church engagement through social media. Respondents expressed a strong preference for diverse online activities, including prayers, masses, reflections, catechism, evangelism, and educational programs. They also emphasized the importance of virtual retreats, praise and worship sessions, healing services, and interactive discussions. Additionally, participants valued multimedia approaches such as videos, livestreams, podcasts, and pictorial

representations of Church events, which enhance connectivity and engagement. The need for timely notifications and accessible religious content, including daily readings, Bible stories, and motivational messages, was also emphasized.

The findings reveal a growing inclination towards interactive and welcoming digital engagement, in which content is clear, friendly, and engaging. Many respondents sought personalized inspirational messages, group discussions, and increased broadcasting of religious services to make faith-based content more accessible. However, the degree to which churches implement these strategies varies, with some fully embracing digital evangelization while others lag. This underscores the importance of churches adapting to these evolving expectations by using new media to enhance faith-based interactions, foster community engagement, and ensure spiritual accessibility for a wider audience.

Table 3: Online Survey Results: Responses to “Do You Use New Media or Social Media for Your Faith or Spirituality Matters?”

Response	Percentage	No.
Yes	91.29%	241
No	8.71%	23
Total	100%	264

The survey results indicate that an overwhelming majority (91.29%) of respondents actively use social media for faith and spirituality, demonstrating the growing role of digital platforms in religious engagement. This suggests that new media serves as a valuable resource for spiritual enrichment, offering access to sermons, devotional content, and faith-based discussions. The high level of engagement underscores the effectiveness of social media in fostering religious connections, discipleship, and faith-based learning among individuals, particularly the youth.

However, the 8.71% who do not use social media for faith-related matters highlight the existence of alternative spiritual practices or a preference for offline religious engagement. Their reluctance may stem from concerns about the authenticity of online religious content, digital distractions, or a stronger inclination toward traditional worship settings. Understanding these preferences can help religious institutions create more inclusive and adaptable evangelization strategies that cater to digital and non-digital audiences, ensuring that faith remains accessible across various engagement preferences.

How Do You Use New Media or Social Media to Enrich or Share Your Faith and Spirituality?

The survey reveals that many respondents actively use new media and social media platforms to deepen and share their faith and spirituality. Participants engage in practices such as daily contemplation, meditation on religious texts, and sharing spiritual content such as Bible quotes, daily scriptures, saints' reflections, and homilies. They also participate in live-streamed prayers, Masses, and spiritual retreats, often sharing links to church activities via platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom. These digital activities provide avenues for regular engagement with faith and foster a sense of community among believers.

Additionally, respondents use social media to share personal testimonies, recount life experiences, and organize church gatherings and retreats virtually. This digital engagement extends to the distribution of religious content, such as church songs, novenas, and church programs across multiple platforms, making faith more accessible and interactive. The widespread use of new media for spiritual purposes highlights its significant role in youth evangelization, offering opportunities for ongoing faith development and community-building in the digital age.

Benefits and Opportunities of Integrating New Media in Youth Evangelization

The adoption of new media for youth evangelization offers numerous benefits and opportunities for the Catholic Church in Uganda. In today’s fast-paced digital age, these innovative platforms open new avenues for sharing the Gospel, building community, and connecting with young people in impactful ways.

The Role of Media in Evangelization and Catechesis

The Catholic Church has long recognized the significant role of media in advancing its mission of evangelization and catechesis. One of the foundational documents addressing this perspective 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” can advance the Kingdom of God and contribute to the salvation of souls if utilized properly.²⁶

Digital media platforms, such as social networking sites, offer effective tools for evangelization and catechesis. These platforms provide accessible, engaging ways to share religious teachings and foster spiritual growth. The Vatican's *Communio et Progressio* (1971) underscores the importance of media in spreading the Gospel, highlighting the Church's duty to harness modern communication channels to reach wider audiences.²⁷

Further building on this, the Pontifical Council on Social Communications released *The Church and Internet* in 2002, which elaborates on how the internet serves various Church activities. It highlights the internet's capacity to facilitate evangelization, catechesis, and apologetics, offering a global reach and engaging with youth through multimedia content such as videos and podcasts.²⁸ This dynamic approach aligns with the Church's call for both re-evangelization—targeting those who may have drifted away from the faith—and new evangelization, which presents core Catholic teachings in fresh and innovative formats.

New Media as a Source of Inspiration and Encouragement

The new media also serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement for young people. According to Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*, modern means of communication are crucial for spreading faith and hope. Social media campaigns and online communities provide the support young people need in their faith journey. Platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, allow religious communities to engage with youth on a personal level, sharing inspirational messages, quotes, and images that resonate with their daily experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual connection.²⁹

Furthermore, digital media create opportunities for young Christians to interact with content tailored to their spiritual needs and interests. Testimonies and real-life stories shared online offer relatable role models and practical insights into living a faith-filled life. Research highlights that personal stories in digital spaces can have a profound impact on others' spiritual journeys.³⁰ The Pontifical Council for Social Communications emphasizes that social media platforms provide continuous inspiration and support, especially for those unable to attend physical gatherings, reinforcing the Church's mission to build a vibrant, inclusive faith community.³¹

Encouraging Creativity

The integration of new media into evangelization offers significant opportunities to enhance creative expression and community engagement. Digital platforms enable young individuals to share their faith through videos, graphics, and blogs, fostering an interactive and relatable form of evangelization. Digital creativity can strengthen faith formation by making religious experiences more dynamic and engaging.³² This approach allows faith communities to connect with a wider audience and encourages participation in innovative ways.

²⁶ Cf. Vatican II, *Inter Mirifica*: Decree on the Means of Social Communication, December 4, 1963.

²⁷ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae: Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications on the Twentieth Anniversary of Communio et Progressio*, 1992.

²⁸ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, 2002.

²⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Apostolic Exhortation), November 24, 2013.

³⁰ Heidi A Campbell, “Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology: How Churches Are Being Informed by Digital Media and Cultures,” *Ecclesial Practices* 7, no. 1 (April 28, 2020): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144417-bja10001>.

³¹ Cf. *The Church and Internet*, 2002.

³² Julie Anne Lytle, *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age* (Church Publishing, Inc., 2013).

Furthermore, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Vine provide cost-effective tools for outreach and connection. Churches can present community events, share visual content, and even use interactive methods such as geocaching to attract visitors. The only limit to these new communication possibilities may be the scope of one's imagination.³³ By embracing digital tools, religious organizations can inspire creativity and build stronger, more connected faith communities.

Education and Guidance

The integration of digital media into education and guidance presents significant opportunities to expand knowledge and to foster intercultural dialogue. Digital platforms serve as powerful tools for education, cultural enrichment, commercial activity, and political participation, while also supporting religious engagement.³⁴ These platforms provide direct access to valuable religious and spiritual resources, including sacred texts, theological writings, and virtual communities of faith. As highlighted by the Pontifical Council on Social Communications, digital media can overcome physical distance and isolation, allowing believers to connect, support, and encourage one another in their faith journey.³⁵

Moreover, digital media plays a crucial role in religious education by presenting information, stimulating discussion, and promoting interactive learning experiences. Through various multimedia formats such as videos, online forums, and interactive applications, religious organizations can engage individuals in meaningful faith-based education.³⁶ The Church recognizes the importance of media in fostering reconciliation, justice, and peace, particularly in Africa, where digital communication can promote truth and social harmony.³⁷ Using digital tools, faith communities³⁷ can improve evangelization efforts and contribute to societal development.

Leveraging social media for Church communication and engagement

The use of social media for information, updates, and event promotion provides the Church with an effective means to maintain connection and engagement with its community. Digital platforms facilitate the dissemination of announcements, event details, and important news, ensuring that members remain informed and involved. The use of social networks is a powerful way to promote events and spread information, as regular updates and transparent communication build trust and foster a sense of belonging.³⁸ By integrating social media into its outreach efforts, the Church can extend its activities to the online world, reflecting the reality that faith is a full-time commitment and naturally intersects with daily digital interactions.

Furthermore, social media offer an opportunity for real-time communication and feedback, enhancing the Church's capacity for dialogue and engagement. As highlighted by John Paul II, immediate access to information enables the Church to share its beliefs, explain its positions, and actively participate in discussions about global and local issues.³⁹ Platforms like Twitter and Facebook not only help promote upcoming events, such as youth conferences and retreats, but also provide spaces for live streaming religious services and discussions. This fosters a more interactive faith experience, allowing the Church to listen to public opinion, address concerns, and participate in the collective search for solutions to pressing societal challenges.

³³ The Conversation, "How Social Media Is Changing the Church," <https://theconversation.com/africa>, May 5, 2016.

³⁴ Cf. The Church and Internet, 2002.

³⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Communications*, 2000.

³⁶ Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Basic Human Communication*, vol. 1 (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1999).

³⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, November 19, 2011.

³⁸ Scott C. Stevenson, *76 Ways to Increase Special Event Attendance*, ed. Scott C. Stevenson (Wiley, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118703892>.

³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 24th World Communications Day (January 24, 1990).

Positive Attitude Towards Media by Some Youth Pastors and Ministries

The positive attitude of youth chaplains, pastors, and lay ministries towards digital media presents a significant opportunity for effective youth engagement in the Church. Many youth pastors recognize the potential of media to foster meaningful connections with young people, enhancing both communication and spiritual growth. Their enthusiasm for using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has transformed youth ministry, making religious content more accessible and relatable.

According to Booker Gideon, digital technology not only streamlines outreach but also inspires and motivates youth by delivering messages of hope and faith directly into their daily online spaces.⁴⁰ In Uganda, where many priests are young and tech-savvy, this proactive embrace of media boosts youth participation and confidence. When religious leaders model positive engagement with digital tools, they create a dynamic, interactive faith community that resonates with young congregants. This shift from traditional methods to modern platforms reflects a broader trend of adopting contemporary strategies to strengthen spiritual bonds and foster a sense of belonging among the youth.

Encouraging Involvement and Participation

Online platforms play a crucial role in encouraging youth involvement and participation in Church activities by providing spaces for discussions, volunteering, and collaboration. This digital engagement fosters a sense of belonging and ownership, as young people actively contribute to the life of the Church. Campbell highlights that online religious communities not only support traditional practices but also enhance participation, allowing individuals to engage with their faith in new and dynamic ways.⁴¹ Through digital platforms, young people can join virtual Bible studies, share reflections, and discuss faith-related topics, extending religious participation beyond physical boundaries.

Moreover, social media transforms the traditional, top-down model of preaching by creating opportunities for one-on-one conversations about faith. Rev. Pam Smith, author of *Online Mission and Ministry*, emphasizes that social media enables a more authentic representation of the Church — not as a distant institution but as a collective of believers sharing their faith in personal and relatable ways. This “every-member ministry” empowers ordinary Christians to engage directly with others, much like Jesus' individual encounters with people. Congregations can also actively participate during sermons by tweeting insights, asking questions, and sharing moments from Church events, keeping discussions alive throughout the week, not just on Sundays.⁴²

Encourages Peer-to-Peer Evangelization

Integrating new media into youth evangelization offers a significant advantage by facilitating peer-to-peer evangelism, which has proven to be highly effective in influencing young people. Digital platforms, especially social media, provide a powerful space where youth can share their personal faith experiences and engage in meaningful conversations with their peers. This method is particularly impactful because messages shared by peers are often more relatable and engaging, fostering a sense of connection and trust.

The Youthscape Research Report, “Influencers: Peer To Peer Evangelism Amongst Young People in the UK” (2022), highlights that 38% of Christian youth attribute their faith journey to peers of the same age. Moreover, the influence of peers is even more pronounced among unchurched youth, with 85% acknowledging the impact of their peers.⁴³ This indicates a great opportunity for churches and youth ministries to harness digital platforms for evangelism. Social media allows for the organic sharing of faith stories, spiritual journeys, and invitations to church events, all in a way that feels personal and relatable.

⁴⁰ 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/>.

⁴¹ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁴² The Conversation, “How Social Media Is Changing the Church.”

⁴³ Youthscape Research, “INFLUENCERS: Peer to Peer Evangelism Amongst Young People in the UK,” 2022, <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/published-research/influencers>.

Given that social media is the primary communication tool for today's youth, it presents a unique opportunity for evangelization, enabling young people to share their faith authentically with their immediate social circles. This peer-to-peer approach is more likely to resonate with young people, making them more receptive to exploring faith and attending church activities. In this way, digital media not only support the spread of the Christian message but also strengthen community bonds, making it an invaluable tool in modern youth evangelization.

Connecting With Younger Generations

Digital media offers the Church a vital opportunity to connect with younger generations on platforms they frequently use, such as social media and messaging apps. These platforms are essential to maintain relevance and engagement, especially among youth who have grown up surrounded by technology. Detweiler emphasizes that today's youth, often termed digital natives, rely heavily on technology in their daily lives.⁴⁴ To effectively engage with them, youth ministry must adapt and meet them where they are—online. The Synod of Bishops also highlights the central role of the internet in young people's lives, noting that it serves as their primary source of information and communication, making it an essential space for dialogue and engagement.

Furthermore, digital media allows young people to connect globally, fostering a sense of belonging to a broader community. Digital networks have transformed society by facilitating unprecedented levels of cross-cultural exchange.⁴⁵ This global connectivity allows youth, such as those in Uganda, to connect with fellow Catholics worldwide, enriching their faith and providing diverse perspectives. As the digital world serves as a forum for both socio-political engagement and spiritual exchange, it offers a unique opportunity for young people to participate in global conversations and deepen their understanding of faith.

Online platforms offer a powerful means of building and strengthening Church communities by providing spaces for interaction, support, and fellowship. Virtual prayer groups, discussion forums, and social media pages help create a sense of connection among young people, particularly those who may feel isolated. Anderson, in his work, *The Digital Cathedral* discusses how digital social media and mobile technologies have transformed the way people communicate, interact, and form communities. He introduces the concept of a “Digital Cathedral,” which extends beyond physical church buildings to encompass virtual spaces where people can gather, share experiences, and engage in ministry, highlighting the importance of online spaces in modern Church life.⁴⁶

Pope Francis, in his message for the World Day of Social Communications 2019, emphasized the role of social networks in fostering connection and support within communities. He noted that the Internet and social media, when used effectively, can help families and Church communities stay connected, coordinate activities, and strengthen bonds. Social networks, Pope Francis argued, are valuable resources when they help people engage with one another and come together for shared spiritual practices, such as attending Mass or participating in church activities online.⁴⁷ Additionally, digital platforms encourage fraternity by bringing together individuals with similar interests, even from distant locations, fostering a sense of belonging for those who might otherwise feel marginalized or isolated, such as Catholic youth pastors or homeschooling mothers.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Craig Detweiler, “IGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives,” *Choice Reviews Online* 51, no. 08 (April 1, 2014): 51, <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.51-4381>.

⁴⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444319514>.

⁴⁶ Keith Anderson, *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World* (Church Publishing, Inc., 2015).

⁴⁷ Lydia O’Kane, “Pope Highlights Pros and Cons of Internet and Social Media Use,” *Vatican News*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019->

⁴⁸ Matthew P. Schneider, “Applying Six Offline Models to Online Evangelization,” 2017, <https://www.hprweb.com/2017/06/applying-six-offline-models-to-online-evangelization/>.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Youth Advocacy in Evangelisation

Integrating new media into youth evangelism presents a significant opportunity to empower young people to become advocates for their faith and social justice. Social media platforms serve not only as channels of communication but also as powerful tools for inspiring action and fostering positive societal change.

Through social media, young individuals can share narratives of faith, acts of kindness, and initiatives aimed at improving their communities. This active participation motivates others to engage in similar actions, creating a ripple effect of compassion and responsibility.⁴⁹ Unlike traditional forms of communication, social media allows immediate interaction and broad outreach, enabling youth to form online communities rooted in shared values and beliefs.

Furthermore, these platforms provide a space where young people can authentically express their faith, share personal stories, and highlight social injustices. This open exchange not only strengthens their spiritual journey but also fosters empathy and solidarity among their peers. By amplifying their voices, youth are empowered to challenge social norms, advocate for justice, and inspire meaningful change within their communities.

Ultimately, the integration of new media into youth evangelization transforms social media from a mere platform for self-expression into a dynamic force for collective action. It encourages young believers to live out their faith boldly, build supportive networks, and actively contribute to shaping a more just and compassionate society.

Non-verbal Communication via New Media

Non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of communication, particularly in digital media. Studies show that a significant portion of communication is non-verbal, with over 50% of the message conveyed through body language, images, and sounds.⁵⁰ This highlights the importance of visual elements in communication, as they can make messages more impactful and easier to understand. Visual media such as images, videos, and gestures can strengthen evangelization by providing a deeper connection to the message. Visual art, in particular, plays a significant role in religious practice, enriching worship and theological reflection, and offering a profound way to experience and express faith.⁵¹

Psychologically, humans process visual information much faster than text, making non-verbal cues especially effective for communication. Research indicates that the brain processes visual data 60,000 times faster than text, which helps improve comprehension and retention.⁵² This suggests that incorporating visual elements into digital communication, such as in evangelisation, can lead to more engaging and impactful messaging, improving both understanding and emotional connection. Therefore, visuals play an essential role in ensuring that the message is effectively received and retained.

Ugandan Youth Demographic and the Opportunity for Digital Evangelization

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 70% of its citizens under the age of 30,⁵³ presenting a significant opportunity for the Church to harness digital media for evangelization. This youthful demographic is not only central to the nation's social, economic, and cultural development but is also highly connected to digital platforms and global trends. Many young Ugandans actively use social media, mobile applications, and online forums to seek information, form communities, and express their beliefs and aspirations. As they navigate challenges such as unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and complex social pressures, they often turn to digital spaces for support, inspiration, and a sense of belonging.

⁴⁹ Musa, *Proc. African Palaver Ser. Futur. Church Africa (Synod Synodality)*.

⁵⁰ Giuseppe Caramazza, *News Reporting and Broadcasting* (Nairobi: Don Bosco Printing Press, 2002).

⁵¹ William A Dymess, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Baker Academic, 2001).

⁵² International Forum of Visual Practitioners, "Why Our Brain Loves Pictures," 2023.

⁵³Cf. Uganda Census Report 2024.

Supporting Evangelisation in Difficult Times

During times of crisis, such as political instability or natural disasters, digital media plays a critical role in supporting evangelization and maintaining community connections. The resilience of digital platforms ensures that spiritual support remains accessible, even when physical gatherings are not possible. Digital media is vital in sustaining religious practices during challenging times, allowing communities to remain engaged despite external disruptions. Digital platforms offer a vital space for continuing evangelization efforts, ensuring that faith practices and community bonds can be maintained in difficult circumstances.⁵⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the transformative power of digital media in maintaining religious practices during crises. As religious communities faced restrictions on physical gatherings, many quickly adapted by shifting to online platforms for worship and community engagement. Campbell discusses how this shift required religious groups to rethink how they foster connections and support among members without in-person interaction.⁵⁵ Online churches, virtual meetings, and social media became essential tools for maintaining community bonds, offering a space for prayer, spiritual guidance, and emotional support. Through these digital platforms, faith communities were able to provide a sense of continuity, even in the midst of unprecedented challenges.

Promoting Religious Vocations

Digital platforms offer an effective means of promoting religious vocations by sharing inspiring stories of priests, nuns, and other religious figures. This visibility can encourage young people to explore religious life as a viable and fulfilling vocation. Pope John Paul II in his Message for the 36th World Communications Day, highlighted that advancements in communication technologies provide the Church with unprecedented opportunities for evangelization. He recognized that the internet, as a powerful communication tool, could facilitate the sharing of the Gospel and inspire potential candidates to consider a life dedicated to faith.⁵⁶

Kevin Banet, in his eBook *How to Attract and Nurture Top Vocation Candidates with Social Media*, emphasizes the importance of using digital media to promote religious vocations. Banet advocates for leveraging social media platforms, such as Facebook, and using tools like newsletters and paid advertisements to reach a broader audience of potential vocational candidates.⁵⁷ His approach highlights how modern digital marketing tools can be effectively integrated into religious contexts, making it easier to connect with young people and nurture their interest in religious life.

Promoting Inclusivity

The new media plays a crucial role in promoting inclusivity, especially for young people with disabilities, by making religious content more accessible. Features such as audio, video, and text-to-speech options ensure that individuals with various physical abilities can participate in faith-related activities. In 2011, the World Health Organization emphasized that digital technologies can significantly enhance accessibility, offering opportunities for greater participation among those with disabilities. Young people with disabilities can use digital and social media to engage in society, underscoring the benefits of these platforms in fostering inclusion and participation.⁵⁸

However, while new media offer significant accessibility advantages, they also present challenges. Certain technologies, such as video and animation, can sometimes hinder accessibility by reducing user control and embedding ableist assumptions. The Web 2.0 platforms, such as social networking sites and virtual worlds, provide a more inclusive space, allowing people with disabilities to connect and participate in new ways.⁵⁹ To truly make the internet to be truly accessible, disability must be recognized as a cultural

⁵⁴ Ryan P Burge and Miles D Williams, "Is Social Media a Digital Pulpit? How Evangelical Leaders Use Twitter to Encourage the Faithful and Publicize Their Work," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 3 (2019): 309–39.

⁵⁵ Campbell, "Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology: How Churches Are Being Informed by Digital Media and Cultures."

⁵⁶ John Paul II, Message for the 36th World Communications Day, May 12, 2002.

⁵⁷ Kevin Banet, "How to Attract and Nurture Top Vocation Candidates with Social Media," 2013.

⁵⁸ Katie Ellis and Mike Kent, *Disability and New Media* (Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

identity, on par with other aspects like gender and class. This perspective highlights both the challenges and the potential of digital media to support inclusion and accessibility.

Cost-Effective Evangelisation

The use of digital media for evangelization offers significant cost advantages over traditional methods. The creation and distribution of digital content require fewer resources than printing materials or organizing large in-person events. This cost-effectiveness is particularly important for churches in regions like Uganda, where financial resources may be limited. Digital media provide a cost-effective means of outreach, enabling religious groups to engage with global audiences without substantial financial investment. The scalability and sustainability of digital platforms further enhance this efficiency, making digital evangelization a viable option for reaching large audiences with minimal costs.

Social media platforms offer inexpensive and accessible tools for evangelization. No expertise is needed to join social networks, and participation is open to anyone with access to a smartphone or other digital devices. The accessibility of social media makes it a grassroots tool, promoting deeper interaction and participation in evangelization efforts.⁶⁰ Many digital tools, such as smartphones and video cameras, provide ample opportunities to create content that can be easily shared online, often at little or no cost. Pope John Paul II encouraged the Church to embrace these technologies, recognizing their potential to spread the Gospel without fear or hesitation.⁶¹

Overcoming Geographical Barriers

Social media has proven to be an effective tool for overcoming geographical barriers, providing broad access to spiritual content from anywhere. Churches and religious leaders increasingly use digital platforms to share sermons, podcasts, and other teachings, making it easier for youth to engage in faith-based discussions. Social media helps overcome challenges faced by church members in maintaining relationships, such as limited transportation and the lack of accessible, safe public spaces.⁶² Unlike physical church gatherings, social media is accessible 24/7 from various devices, making it possible to stay connected even in remote locations, thus bridging gaps for individuals who might otherwise be excluded from in-person services.

Social media fosters community by enabling youth to connect and socialize without physical presence. Social media platforms create "cool spaces" where teens can gather informally, enhancing their sense of belonging without the need to meet in physical locations such as malls or sports events.⁶³ In regions such as Uganda, where rural and remote areas may have limited access to church services, social media provides a vital way to access spiritual resources and maintain community connections. Digital media facilitates religious practices and forms communities that transcend physical boundaries, showing the profound impact of online platforms on fostering church communities in areas with limited physical infrastructure.⁶⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS

Responding to the Signs of the Times

The concept of "reading the signs of the times" highlights the Church's duty to interpret and respond to contemporary cultural and societal contexts, guided by the Spirit, to carry out its mission effectively. According to *Aetatis Novae*, just as prophets in biblical times discerned and acted upon God's plan for their era, the Church today must also recognize and engage with the present "signs of the times" in a prophetic manner.⁶⁵ This aligns with the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, which affirms the Church's

⁶⁰ Antonio Spadaro, *Web 2.0 Relationships in the Internet Age* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014).

⁶¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *The Rapid Development*, January 24, 2005.

⁶² Kunle Badmos, "Effect of Social Media on the Church," in *Paper Presented at the 2014 Annual Conference of Theological Friends and Fellows* (Lagos: The Redeemed Christian Bible College, 2014).

⁶³ Badmos, "Effect of Social Media on the Church."

⁶⁴ Tim Hutchings, *Creating Church Online* (Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203111093>.

⁶⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1992, no.22.

enduring responsibility to “scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel”⁶⁶ The document emphasizes that the Church must communicate in ways that resonate with each generation, addressing profound human questions about life, the afterlife, and the interconnectedness of both.

In the modern era, technology has revolutionized global communication and social interaction, offering both challenges and opportunities for the Church’s mission. Rapid advancements in digital media have created unprecedented access to information, allowing ideas to spread almost instantaneously and shaping global opinions and sentiments. As *Gaudium et Spes* notes, this has led to a “chain reaction,” in which the reach and speed of communication now transcend anything previously imaginable.⁶⁷ Recognizing the transformative power of these tools, the Church is called to thoughtfully engage with new media to ensure the Gospel message remains relevant and impactful, fostering meaningful dialogue with today’s society.

Furthermore, Saint Augustine's insight is that "God speaks to His people in the way that people speak to themselves"⁶⁸ underscores the need for clear and relatable communication. God’s message is conveyed through both verbal and nonverbal means in ways that people can comprehend. Saint Paul similarly embraced this adaptive approach, stating, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law... that I might win those under the law” (1 Cor 9:20). These examples reinforce the importance of context-sensitive communication, urging the Church to harness modern technology and media to bring the light of the Gospel to contemporary issues and engage with humanity's current hopes, struggles, and aspirations.

Online Presence of the Church

The integration of new media into evangelization efforts is not merely an option—it is essential for reaching today’s youth. The digital age demands that the Church maintain a robust online presence, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The Apostle Paul underscores the importance of active preaching in his epistle to the Romans: “How can they hear without someone to preach?” (Romans 10:11, 13-15). This call to mission reminds us that communication is fundamental to spreading the Gospel message.

Pope Paul VI reinforces this perspective in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stating that “The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not use these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect” (EN, 45). This directive emphasizes that embracing modern communication tools is not simply beneficial—it is a moral imperative for effective evangelization.

Furthermore, research on the integration of new media in youth evangelization in Uganda highlights that engaging in digital environments can strengthen community ties and enrich in-person interactions. A strategically effective online ministry has the potential to increase the desire for face-to-face engagement rather than replace it. This suggests that by actively participating in digital spaces, the Church can extend its pastoral care and support, ensuring that its mission remains vibrant and accessible to young people in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

Embracing the Missionary Field of Social Media

Social media has emerged as a modern missionary field where ideas, beliefs, and values are shared—and often contested—on a global scale. In this dynamic digital landscape, the Church has a unique opportunity to interact with young people in their native online environments. By creating meaningful, relevant content that resonates with youth, the Church can present messages of faith in accessible and relatable ways, effectively countering secular narratives while fostering a sense of purpose and community.⁶⁹

Recent statistics underscore the immense potential of this medium. As of April 2024, approximately 4.9 billion people worldwide use social media, with platforms like Facebook (3.065 billion MAUs), YouTube

⁶⁶ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, December 12, 1965, no. 4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 5.

⁶⁸ Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Basic Human Communication*, 40.

⁶⁹ Campbell, “Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology: How Churches Are Being Informed by Digital Media and Cultures.”

(2.504 billion MAUs), Instagram and WhatsApp (each with 2 billion MAUs), and TikTok (approximately 1.582 billion MAUs) leading the way.⁷⁰ These figures not only reflect widespread engagement but also illustrate the unparalleled influence these platforms have in shaping public discourse and fostering community connections.

The significance of these numbers goes beyond mere user engagement; they highlight a critical opportunity for evangelization. With digital communities now rivaling the populations of entire nations, the Church must view social media not just as a communication tool, but as a vibrant, expansive mission field.⁷¹ This perspective is further reinforced by the need for the Great Commission. Jesus' command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20) calls for an adaptive approach in which traditional methods of evangelization are seamlessly integrated with modern digital strategies. This mission extends across all digital platforms—from Twitter and Instagram to YouTube and beyond—underscoring the need for an offensive rather than defensive strategy in online engagement.⁷²

Moreover, embracing the digital environment enhances the Church's role in providing pastoral care and nurturing community relationships. Hogue discusses how integrating technology into spiritual care is essential to reach congregants in today's interconnected world.⁷³ By actively engaging on social media, the Church not only disseminates the Gospel but also cultivates spaces where individuals can explore faith, ethics, and their purpose in life—ensuring that its mission remains relevant and transformative.

In summary, the digital arena represents a vital missionary field where the Church can build enduring relationships, share the Gospel effectively, and support spiritual growth. With billions of users engaged across various platforms, an assertive, innovative online strategy is essential for the Church to remain a guiding light in an increasingly digital world.

Supporting and Empowering Digital Missionaries

The study recommends actively supporting and empowering digital missionaries—priests, religious, and lay people who are making significant efforts to reach out online. These digital missionaries should be recognized, trained, and accompanied in their mission, as emphasized by the 48th Synod Assembly on Synodality, which highlighted the need to create opportunities and facilitate networking among those engaged in digital evangelization.

John Edmiston argues that the role of the missionary is evolving. Rather than solely being communicators of the Gospel, future missionaries must serve as mentors and disciples—a blend of high-tech proficiency and high-touch engagement. With many individuals today hesitant to engage in traditional, face-to-face encounters, and non-Christians often reluctant to enter a church setting, innovative strategies such as cyber evangelism become essential. Using digital tools such as computers, mobile phones, and tablets is the key to effectively reaching the young people in our increasingly digital society.⁷⁴

By providing targeted support and empowerment for digital missionaries, the Church can ensure that its message resonates in contemporary digital environments, ultimately enhancing its outreach and impact in today's rapidly evolving communication landscape.

PACTPAN's Digital Faith Influencers Initiative: An Opportunity for Digital Evangelization

As the Church navigates the complexities of the digital era, the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) has responded by training African youth to use online platforms for evangelization

⁷⁰ Statista, “Global Social Networks Ranked by Number of Users,” 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>.

⁷¹ Jane C. Hu, “Social Networks Make the World's Largest Nations Seem Small,” *Quartz*, September 12, 2018.

⁷² Caroline F. Shell, “Ministry in the Digital Age: The Use of the New Media to Promote Fruitful Youth Ministry in the 21st Century” (Walsh University, 2019).

⁷³ David Hogue, “Pastoral and Spiritual Care in a Digital Age: The Future Is Now,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 30, no. 2 (May 3, 2020): 150–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2020.1712870>.

⁷⁴ Ministry Answers, “Youth Ministry in the Digital Age: Tips for Leveraging Social Media to Engage and Inspire,” Ministry Answers, May 4, 2023.

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.⁷⁵ 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. By empowering youth with both theological knowledge and digital literacy, ASDYFI improves the Church's ability to connect with younger audiences and extend its evangelization efforts across digital platforms.⁷⁶

This initiative presents a significant opportunity for the Catholic Church of Uganda to adopt a similar approach. By integrating digital training programs tailored to local contexts, the Church can strengthen youth involvement in evangelization, ensuring that faith-based content resonates with the digital habits of young Ugandans. Establishing partnerships with organizations such as PACTPAN could further enrich Uganda's digital evangelization strategies, fostering a more engaged and technologically-savvy faith community.

Prudent and Wise Use of New Media

The prudent and wise use of new media is essential for the Church's mission in the digital age. The digital landscape presents vast opportunities for evangelization, but it also requires careful navigation to ensure that the Church's online presence aligns with its core values of truth, community, and spiritual growth.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message for World Youth Day 2013, urged young people to harness the power of digital media for evangelization while exercising caution against its potential dangers. He emphasized the importance of using new media responsibly, warning against the risks of addiction and the blurring of boundaries between virtual and real-life interactions. Benedict XVI stated, "Dear young people, the first area of missionary commitment is the field of social communications, particularly the world of the internet. Learn how to use these media wisely. Be aware of the hidden dangers they contain, especially the risk of addiction, of confusing the real world with the virtual, and of replacing direct and personal encounters and dialogue with internet contacts"⁷⁷ This call highlights the need for intentional and thoughtful engagement with digital platforms, ensuring that technology serves as a tool for fostering authentic relationships and spiritual dialogue rather than a means of isolation or distraction.

Similarly, Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, underscores the importance of prudence in communication, advocating for digital interactions that promote genuine encounters, the pursuit of truth, and the common good.⁷⁸ He cautions against the superficiality often associated with online platforms, urging believers to use technology as a bridge for meaningful dialogue and community building. By doing so, the Church can create a digital presence rooted in compassion, service, and solidarity.

Scriptural guidance further reinforces the need for wisdom in using technology. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus instructs his disciples to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," a principle that remains relevant in the digital era. Bryan Barrineau interprets this passage as a reminder for youth ministers to approach technology with Spirit-given wisdom, balancing a shrewd understanding of digital tools with unwavering integrity. He emphasizes that the Holy Spirit's guidance (John 14:18; Matthew 28:20) is vital in ensuring that the Church's technological engagement reflects gospel values, promoting peace, truth, and authentic community.⁷⁹

Incorporating the "see, judge, act" methodology, as advocated in *Aetatis Novae*, further enhances the Church's approach to new media. This principle calls for careful observation of the digital landscape (see), critical reflection guided by faith (judge), and deliberate, impactful actions that foster evangelization and

⁷⁵ Cf. Vatican News, 2024.

⁷⁶ O.M.I. Nnaemeka Ali, "Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network: Believing That a Better Church and Society Is Possible in Africa," n.d., <https://pactpan.org/press-releases/pan-african-catholic-theology-and-pastoral-network-believing-that-a-better-church-and-society-is-possible-in-africa/>.

⁷⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message on the 47th World Communications Day (May 12, 2013).

⁷⁸ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), no.205.

⁷⁹ Bryan Barrineau, "Can Theology and Technology Co-Exist?," Youth Pastor Theologian, n.d., <https://www.youthpastortheologian.com/blog/can-theology-and-technology-coexist>.

social justice (act).⁸⁰ Additionally, it is vital to recognize the power of images, videos, and interactive content in conveying spiritual messages and nurturing faith.

Ultimately, the Church's prudent use of new media involves striking a balance between leveraging technology for mission work and safeguarding against its potential harms. By fostering digital literacy, encouraging ethical online behavior, and promoting genuine human connections, the Church can effectively evangelize in the modern world while remaining anchored in its timeless spiritual mission.

Developing a Theology of New Media

The Church needs to develop a suitable technology theology to provide holistic guidance to young people, particularly millennials. Samuel Baker argues that "an integrative approach to a theology of technology should demonstrate thoughtful interaction with Scripture and theological ideologies against the backdrop of pressing cultural concerns."⁸¹ This suggests that a theology of new media must not only embrace technological advancements but also critically reflect on their spiritual and moral implications.

Developing a theology of new media involves creating a framework that aligns digital technology with the teachings and evangelistic goals of the Church. Such a framework would offer a coherent and spiritually enriching approach to using digital tools for ministry. It would guide the Church in using technology for faith formation while ensuring that these tools do not compromise core Christian values. By fostering a theological perspective on digital media, the Church can thoughtfully navigate the complexities of the digital age.

For the Church in Uganda, developing a contextual theology of new media is essential. This initiative could be spearheaded by the Episcopal Conference, involving youth pastors, local theologians, and digital media experts. The goal would be to craft guidelines that address the unique digital landscape of Uganda, ensuring that technology serves as a tool for evangelization, community building, and spiritual growth.

CONCLUSION

The integration of new media into youth evangelization presents numerous opportunities and benefits for enhancing faith formation and engagement. As a cost-effective and flexible tool, new media facilitate peer-to-peer evangelization and provide essential access to spiritual resources. Social media, in particular, serves as a powerful platform for inspiration, educational guidance, and creative expression, making it especially appealing to young people. Additionally, it fosters meaningful connections across geographical boundaries, supports the Church during crises, promotes vocations, and encourages inclusivity.

Despite the challenges associated with digital evangelization, this study recommends that the Catholic Church in Uganda actively incorporate new media and digital technologies into its pastoral strategies. A hybrid model—combining traditional and digital approaches has been shown to be effective in engaging youth while preserving the core values of faith. However, prudence and wisdom are essential to navigate the digital space, necessitating the development of a suitable theology of technology that aligns with the mission and teachings of the church.

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⁸⁰ Aetatis Novae, 1992, no.11.

⁸¹ Samuel Baker, "Who's Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-Familial Emerging Adults," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 16, no. 2 (2017): 117–43.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Bernard Rabwoni is a Catholic Priest of the Diocese of Fort Portal in Uganda. He holds a Doctorate in Theology from the University of Vienna in Austria. He is working as a Fidei Donum Priest or Missionary in Switzerland.