



Communication Technology: Tool for Changing the Face of Worship in Christian Religion in Nigeria

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Abstract. Information and communication technology has come to stay and its influence has percolated into every fiber of the society, religion inclusive. Religion being what it is, is always reluctant to embrace change especially when it comes to what has to do with science and technology. However, it seems religion has made an exception with ICT, religious centers has embraced ICT with a remarkable open arms. Though its potential to further the propagation of religion in the country has greatly been harnessed, also it has led to some religious malady. Therefore this paper examined the introduction of ICT into Religion in Nigeria. This research work further point out the importance of the ICT to religion. This paper also investigates the effects of ICT on Religion in Nigeria. In carrying out the research, qualitative method was used and relevant materials were consulted for text analysis. Few recommendations were made which include; religion should draw a line in religious worship that ICT must not cross, so that it (ICT) may not be tempted to hijack the spiritual essence of worship.

Keywords: Religion, technology, worship and Information

1. Introduction

Before the world became a global village, religious worship, ethics and practices is been propagated through various means. The dynamism of religion and its widespread had and will continue to have an adverse effect on the lifestyle of every human. Technology is a body of knowledge devoted to creating tools, processing actions and extracting of materials. The term ‘Technology’ is wide and everyone has their own way of understanding the meaning of technology. We use technology to accomplish various tasks in our daily lives, in brief; we can describe technology as products, processes or organizations. We use technology to extend our abilities, and that makes people as the most important part of any technological system. (Ramey, 2013).

Information on its own side is that which can be communicated and understood. Therefore information Technology (IT) which is the same with Information Communication Technology

can be defined as the use of Information in order to meet human need or purpose with reference to the use of contemporary devices. Information and communication technology is a term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network, hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICT can be seen in different aspect such as ICT in education, health care, libraries, business and religion. The converging global trend of Information and Communication Technology has created opportunities that even religion is benefitting from. Also, communication technology has been accepted as a tool in this 21st century because it has left no area untouched. (Ilechukwu, 2014).

While religion, on the other hand, is difficult to define, because human belief structures are varied and complicated. Many definitions of religion have been attempted but many fall foul of being too narrow, or too wide. It has proven problematic to come to a reasonable definition which describes the varieties of religion found across the East and West, both old and new. Many people have given up even trying to define religion coherently (Crabtree, 2016). Nevertheless, scholars have attempted to define religion. Two scholarly definitions is considered for this paper. Jemiriye (2006) defined religion as a system of faith, belief and worship. Whitehead also defined religion as what an individual does with his own solitariness. Here, religion is what a man does in his time of meditation or what a man does in his spare time. With these definitions it could clearly be deduced that worship is an imperative ingredient in religion. It is a means to express religious experience.

The introduction of ICT and the vast uses of the internet has led so many churches to using communication technology to enhance and promote worship, fellowship, pastoral care, education, mission and community outreach, evangelism and communications. Its relevant benefits make it appropriate for all the ministries. Religion now finds it difficult in this

age not to be ICT compliant. Ukodie (2004) further acceded to this fact that, information and communication technology has proven itself and it has been accepted as engine of 21st century and beyond. The rapid rate at which ICT have evolved since mid 20th century, the convergence phenomenon in which all existing technology have been harmonized by ICT, in addition to their pervasiveness and intensiveness in all areas of human activities, gives ICT a leading edge in development and globalization. Therefore, since house of worship is part of the information and communication community, it is necessary to investigate how information communication technology is used in the church and its impact on religious worship in Nigeria.

2. Overview OF ICT in Nigeria

The history of ICT originates from humble beginnings, which include the abacus. The abacus is thought to have been originally invented 3000 years before the birth of Christ. But today, it has evolved into a concept that is generally accepted globally. According to Adamkolo (2014), the Federal Executive Council approved the National Information Technology Policy in March 2001 and the implementation started in April with the establishment of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), in charge of the mission to make Nigeria an ICT-capable country in Africa and a key player in the Information Society, while using ICT as a catalyst for sustainable development and global competitiveness (ICT4D Nigeria Annual Report, 2007). In the new policy draft document 2012, the mission statements of the ICT policy is to fully integrate Information and Communication Technology into the socioeconomic development of Nigeria in order to transform the country into a knowledge-based economy. The increasing globalization driven by ICT makes it imperative for Nigeria as an emerging market to irreversibly consider the application and promotion of ICT strategy to facilitate its rapid growth and development. This will involve the development of a vibrant ICT sector to drive and expand the national production frontiers in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. It would also require the application of the new

knowledge to drive other soft sectors: governance, entertainments, public services, media sector, tourism and religion. Communication technology may not be the remedy for hunger, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, and every crisis associated with religion, but the right information at the right time, however, can bring about sustainable development when used appropriately with the maximum participation of everyone. The intrinsic values of ICT lie not in easing communication and information but rather in stimulating growth and development. (Olubamise, 2007).

3. ICT and Christian Religion

One of the unique features of the Christian society is the way in which it combines the immutable and the flexible. It is a society that strictly adheres firmly to its fixed principles, but at the same time encourages its followers adopt those things which are beneficial to the society. The Church's interest in technology is an expression of her longstanding curiosity about the media and communication technology, seeing the media as an outcome of the historical scientific process by which humankind "advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation. Thus the Church has taken a fundamentally positive approach to the media. Religion sees the media as a gift which unites and connects the Christians globally in accordance with the providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with his plan for their salvation (Vatican, 2002).

In an effort to evangelize the word of God and Christian faith to a growing population of Christians both older and younger ones, churches are turning to technology to create the perfect approach while maintaining Christian values.

However, the interplay between religion and technology is not always adversarial. There are many ways in which ICT actually enhances religious practices, mainly through the expansion and creation of religious communities. Technology cheapens religious

practices when it breaks communal bonds. While this dual natured relationship to religion can be seen in many technologies, one of the clearest examples of how technology can both support and erode religious techniques is internet social networking. (Verschoor-Kirss, 2012).

4. Worship in Christian Religion

Worship is an act of religious devotion usually directed towards a deity. An act of worship may be performed individually, in an informal or formal group, or by a designated leader. Christian worship involves praising God in music and speech, readings from scripture, prayers of various sorts, a sermon, and various holy ceremonies (often called sacraments) such as the Eucharist.

While worship is often thought of only as services in which Christians come together in a group, individual Christians can worship God on their own, and in any place (BBC, 2009).

Different churches, even within the same denomination, will use very different styles of worship. Some will be elaborate, with a choir singing difficult music, others will hand the music over to the congregation, who sing simpler hymns or worship songs. Some churches leave much of the action to the minister, while others encourage great congregational participation. (Of course all churches encourage the full participation of the congregation in praising God with their heart, mind, and soul, but some churches give the congregation more physical participation.)

Another picture of Christian worship is showing reverence and gratitude by bowing down before God, as in this passage from Nehemiah:

"Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (*Nehemiah 8:6*).

Both singing and bowing down are acts of worship, but they are only part of the picture. Christian worship is so much more than that!

Christian worship begins with discovering and admitting what we have been worshipping in our lives. All of us worship something, whether we know it or not. We may not physically bow

down to it, or offer it songs of praise and adoration, but whatever we devote most of our time and attention to is often what we worship. Merriam-webster definition of worship: "Reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; also: an act of expressing such reverence; a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual; extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem." (Dictionary, 1999). Seen in that light, it's easy to see that we can worship God, we can worship money, or power, or a rock star, or we can even worship a lifestyle. Worship is more than an act of reverence. It is an attitude of the heart. Christian worship is clearly of interest to God. He knows we have an inner need to worship, so He asks us to worship Him. He, being God, can handle the weight of being worshiped; humans cannot. People who are worshiped by others can often be influenced to think more highly of themselves than they ought.

5. ICT and Worship In Christian Religion in Nigeria

Majority of the worship centers in Nigeria are now being built with technology in mind or have been retrofitted with technology in the past years. There are so many churches employing new technology in worship in this age. The use of Wi-Fi and social media in some form has become an acceptable means to reach out to the congregation. In some churches, people are allowed to tweet the pastor a question and he would read the question and address it as a part of his message. Even in the concerts these churches organize, the performers now use a tablet device to cast the music being performed (Bolu, 2012).

The Apostle Paul wrote long scripts by hand, sent them across hundreds of miles of water or desert, all just to hope that they reached the hands of church elders. But now pastors can simply speak from the comfort of their offices and instantaneously stream the message online to thousands of homes. There's no risk of it getting lost and no possibility that the message will come too late to be helpful.

However, before the advent of projectors, computers, internet and the likes, the most popular devices used in worship are our audio systems, microphones, soundboard, processor and improved monitor systems, though these gadget are provincial and not sophisticated. Nevertheless, they do serve the purpose they are meant to serve. They pose less challenge neither do they distract worshippers during worship. Communication technology now plays an important role in the Sunday worship. Most men of God now have their Scriptures and other religious materials on the phone or tablet. Some often use computer to research and prepare lessons that will be taught on Sundays. Meanwhile some church leaders have been encouraging members to use digital versions of religious materials rather than costly and environmentally impactful paper books and magazines. Most weekends, church members now watch the proceedings in their homes through streaming video on the television. According to Dawson (2015), a key challenge associated with all this is that the same devices that is been used for these religious activities on Sundays are the ones that carry the day-to-day distractions like email, sports scores, social networks and all the rest. This causes distractions when interrupted by notifications and messages from different social media platform. It takes away the attention from the worship, which is the sole purpose of attending the service. Members in most churches now use You Version to look up the Bible texts on their various smart phones. They can check out different translations from what's projected on the screen and from the printed Bibles. Also the idea of tweeting during service has made worship and religion lose its essence. Wi-Fi setup for the congregation is for a purpose which is totally different from worship, even though it is always available during worship. Furthermore, the enhancement of worship experience is through "sound" amplification. The volume, clarity and provision of sound encapsulate a good worship which cannot be done without quality technology device. Technology in churches today allows more people to participate in worship, not fewer people. An example of this is the display of song lyrics which will be projected for all to see, so that the whole

congregation can participate, which is a brilliant idea for increasing participation. This new world of technology where cell phones, Mp3 players, computers and internet are an integral part of our society and are regular attachments, the church can should find a way to use them in positive ways to engage people in ways they understand. Technology has changed the worship experience of the congregation. The integration of multi-media equipment such as projectors, giant LCD screens, High Definition Cameras, Digital Sound Recording systems – powered Sound Speakers, LCD Digital Podiums which dramatize and enhances sermons, etc. The capability of these devices mentioned can manipulate the atmosphere from sombre (spiritual) to excitement or vice versa. It is presumed that “the larger a church intends to grow, the greater it has to invest in the technology that enhances church service to ensure its members have a pleasant experience in every worship service”

Churches are integrating video mainstream, mobile devices and other forms of technology in order to reach out to generations that don't remember a time without modern technology. Churches, like Winners chapel, Gospel faith mission and most of the new generation churches are recreating worship with technology to reach a larger group of young Christians.

The reality is that younger generations and even the older are now comfortable accessing their information through technology, whether it is on a mobile device, video screen or tablet. (Howard, 2016). They prefer this interactive experience because as they grow up, technology evolves. Churches can now reach a greater number of members and relay information or provide support, like prayer, through technology. An example is the Halleluyah challenge which is been done through the social media. Many churches, communities and prayer groups use the free application called Prayer Stream hosted by Christian Care Ministry, to create a personalized prayer feed. Members with a profile can add a prayer request, pledge to pray, and reach out to one another for religious support and guidance.

The traditional way of worship have been focused on auditory processing, reaching the

part of the congregation that is able to retain information and the word of God by hearing it; however, a large portion of the population is now used to accessing information through visual processing. (Care, 2013). Integrating video and visual stimulation to support the Word of God during a worship service which allows a greater number of members of the congregation to fully understand the message. Since the last two decades, a lot of dynamic changes have taken place in the areas of religion, culture, economy and politics. ICT is being envisaged as possessing the potential to transform the society and impact positively on the lives of people in general.

6. The Effect of ICT on Religion

The pulpit has become the focal point of sharing information, so much so that it is inevitable to think around the effects of ICT on religion as a whole. The improvement in technology has changed the strategy of managing church affairs such that more church leaders have joined and are joining social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google Plus etc. These platforms are used to promote the prophetic message that churches have to offer. Frederick Ferre believes that technology stands for all practical implementations of intelligence. He talks about technology as matter and activities, beliefs, and attitudes. In other words, technology can be discussed in terms of tangible things as well as intangible belief systems, attitudes and ways of thinking (Ferre 1991; 1995). According to Dale (2002) Technology has given Christianity a voice to reach a world-wide audience. Historically there have been advances for Christianity when there have been advances in technology. Not all Christian groups have reacted to it as have the Amish. In many cases the Church has been one of the first entities to adopt or profit from technology. The Pax Romana that existed at the time of Christ played a large role in the spread of the gospel. Technology that created good roads for transportation, that bolstered the strongest army in the world to enforce relatively peaceful times, and stabilized governments for common laws, common language, and common culture allowed a small group of Christians to become a large

following in a single generation”. Even in Islam, one of the unique features of the Islamic society is the way in which it combines the immutable and the flexible. It is a society that strictly adheres firmly to its fixed principles, but at the same time encourages its followers adopt those things which are beneficial to the society. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) is reported to have said: “Wisdom is the lost property of the believer, wherever he finds it, he has more right to it.” In Islam all beneficial new developments in the fields of science and cultural achievements should be adopted, if they are not already present, and efforts should be made to bring them to the Muslim society, develop them and perfect them. This is a communal obligation (fard kifaya), as the Muslim scholars stated, and it requires paying attention to scientific research and allocating large sums of money to it. Those who are unfamiliar with the Qur’an might, be questioning themselves about the relationship between the Qur’an, which is a book, revealed in more than 1433 years ago and Information and Communication Technology, which is an invention of this century. Al-Qur’an is the book of knowledge and the first sources of Islamic law, which contains general principles applicable for all times and places (Usman, 2013). Therefore, information and communication technology can have a positive and negative impact on religion. Even though religion can no longer impact successfully without being technologically competent and ICT compliant, is it then acceptable that the essence of religious worship be forgotten due to the rise in technology?

According to Sims (2014), Technology has been good for religion in a number of ways:

- It has greatly magnified the voice of those preaching the gospel. Instead of reaching hundreds or even thousands when preaching a sermon, a pastor now has a possible audience in the millions.
- It has enriched the message of God by providing information to a large number of people in a shorter amount of time.
- It has increased the number of channels of distribution of the gospel.

- It has provided help for the encouragement, the strengthening, and edification of the saints through technology tools and discipleship material.
- It allows religion to administer grace to a world that is distracted and burdened, by using various tools.
- It provides security and safety which has become a major concern for anybody participating in a private or public gathering due to global terrorism threats against human life. Most churches are now been robbed by thieves hence the deployment of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), Hackett metal detectors, electrical fencing and wall fences have been extended from Banks to the Church and mosques. After all, it is a gathering of lost souls seeking the forgiveness of sins.

Churches can use specific software and databases to process and store membership records. Storing membership data, in an electronic and organized manner, can help church leaders become more acquainted with their members and this trend can produce positive relationships between members and the clergy as churches can send customized birthday messages, anniversary wishes, upcoming events, devotion material, tailored prophetic prayers, etc. A church database can also help to easily identify members with special needs such as health & marital, jobs, housing, financial, and educational, relationships issues.

Although, technology has bad as well as good effects, it has also develop a dynamism of its own. It has been observed that technology has displaced the face of religious worship, to our great harm, especially in the way that worship and church work is conducted. Borgmann has described our culture quite well in his book *Power Failure* (Borgmann, 2003) He believes that technology is the defining element of our society. It has produced a culture of self-orientation that is designed to procure a comfortable and individualistic lifestyle. Science and technology are the standards against which all claims are evaluated. Technology, by its very

nature, is value neutral or indifferent toward Christianity. Therefore, many people feel free to dismiss Christianity. ICT also provides a medium for observing and modeling different forms of behavior and a plethora of viewpoints and value systems. In the past, children learn appropriate behavior from those people who were close to them in proximity, such as parents, teachers, pastors, and leaders in the community. But today they learn from the internet, music, movies, and television. Indeed religion has been greatly affected by these cultural change. Most religion evaluates themselves by the same standards as those used by the culture of technology. (Wandner, 2004). Because technology provides immediate information and feedback, religion have begun to operate on a fad or poll basis. Whatever the latest fad is or whatever the latest trend predicted by the polls happens to be, that is where religion is going. Because our technical driven culture requires efficiency, convenience, and entertainment, then the religion must provide that. Because religion has tried to meet the standards of technology in order to remain relevant to society and culture, it has given technology the right to declare it irrelevant. Religion, desperate to succeed by the standards of technology, has become more and more acculturated.

7. Conclusion

ICT is a mere tool for all who use them. It can promote productivity and strengthen the human solidarity. It serves as the common good in innovative ways, and at the same time, it can be the powerful agent of materialism and consumerism which feeds a pragmatic approach to life. Therefore, ICT thrives because the society accepted it and it is our responsibility to make use of it wisely and not allow our vision to be clouded when it comes to spiritual matters.

8. Recommendations

In view of the above conceptual clarifications and discussions, this research work proposes the following recommendations:

- Religion should draw a line in religious worship that ICT must not cross. For

religious activities in worship to still maintain its essence and relevance, there are aspect of worship that should not be influenced by Technology e.g prayer. Tithe and offering. Religion need to quit letting technology define them or set the standards for them.

- Church leaders should make conscious effort to positively harness ICT towards the effective and acceptable worship. Religion should devise a means whereby ICT will not be tempted to hijack the essence of religious worship.
- Religion adherents should be given orientation from time to time on how ICT, if not properly used, could cheapen the spirituality of worship. Churches need to unplug from high and sophisticated technology periodically. It should propagate messages without the use of television or cell phones or computers or radio.
- Worship should be observed without the total aid of technology.

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