

Integration of Information and Communication Technology in Church Worship

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Abstract

Churches form an essential part of the contemporary society. The church has a critical mandate to evangelize the world. There is a growing desire to spread the Gospel to reach the world. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been embraced in various institutions of the modern society such as banks in form of e-banking, schools in e-learning modes among others. There is need to evaluate the level of ICT integration in churches with a view to establish its role in fulfilling the great commission. The present paper presents an in-depth discussion on churches' attitude, impact and uses of ICT. Additionally, the forms of ICT used in churches in terms of tools and platforms will be discussed as well. It was found that there is low uptake of ICT platforms and tools in most church worship. ICT tools and platforms have higher acceptability in Pentecostal churches than in mainstream churches.

Keywords: Communication technology • Platforms • Tools • Worship

Introduction

A church is commonly defined as a building used for public worship. It is a building used for Christian religious activities, particularly for Christian worship services. The term is often used by Christians to refer to the physical buildings where they worship. The word church in the Bible comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which means a called out company or assembly. Wherever it is used in the Bible it refers to people. It can be a mob the children of Israel and the body of Christ. The word church is used in three different ways: as the body of Christ the body of individual living believers and the universal group of all people who have trusted Christ through the ages. According to the New Testament, Jesus was the first person to mention the Church.

The New Testament church is a body of believers that has been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the church is three-fold. The church comes together for the purpose of bringing each member into spiritual maturity. The church reaches out to spread the love of Christ and the Gospel message to non-believers in the world. This is the great commission to go out into the world and make disciples. Therefore, the purpose of the church is to minister to believers and non-believers.

The Christian Church has been a major source of social services like schooling, medical care, culture and philosophy; and influential player in politics and religion. In various ways it has sought to affect the attitudes to vice and virtue in diverse fields. It has promulgated the teachings of Jesus within the world. Festivals like Easter and Christmas are marked as public holidays. The cultural influence of the Church has been vast.

Many of the universities were founded by the church. The Bible and Christian theology have also strongly influenced philosophers and politicians. The teachings of Jesus are important sources for modern notions of Human Rights and the welfare measures commonly provided by governments. Long held Christian teachings on sexuality and marriage and family life have also been influential.

We are living in the digital age and we can hardly carry out any aspect of human endeavor effectively without Information communication technology (ICT) including church activities. Majority of new converts are influenced by ICTs to join a church. Technologies also improve efficiency in evangelism. The church is expected to invest in modern ICT infrastructure and employ technology experts. The government should cooperate with the church and invest in ICT education to create jobs for the youth for economic growth [1].

Literature Review

Information and communication technology

Information and Communication Technology (ICT), is the application of computers and telecommunications equipment to store, retrieve, transmit and manipulate data. The term is commonly used as a synonym for computers and computer networks. However, it also encompasses other information distribution technologies such as television and telephones. ICT is a powerful collection of elements which include computer hardware, software, telecommunication networks, workstations, robotics and smart chips.

Since we live in information society, everyone is expected to be ICT literate. The ICT literacy entails: awareness, knowledge and interaction. This implies that in the study of computers, one will become aware of their importance and good in our society. Additionally one will learn what computers are and how they work and learning to use a computer to perform some basic tasks or applications [2].

Factors that lead to choosing of ICT in church

ICT is preferred for use in many churches due to its speed. This is because through ICT information can reach the audience within a short duration of time. In addition, ICT platforms are accessible to everyone who is on the web. Due to its accessibility Christians consider it against the traditional methods of evangelization. Further, ICT tools have the ability to store and retrieve information. They are convenient, easy to use, affordable and enjoyable to use and finally the help reduce use of papers.

ICT platforms used in church

Today, social networking websites have emerged and can be tapped to provide fast, powerful and interactive communication. In order to capture the potential of ICT in fulfilling great commission, there is need for Christians and the church to embrace and use ICT. The popular examples of ICT platforms used in the church today includes: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Email, Blog, Skype, Zoom, Google Plus and WhatsApp. These platforms are majorly used to Bullet announcements, post sermons, Hymns, Bible studies, Sunday school lessons, counseling lessons among others. The main purpose of the ICT platforms is to establish and maintain relationships, connect and stay connected to the congregants and attract new converts. However, churches that have embraced the aforementioned platforms are underutilizing them. Majority are only using them to post church's location and brochures.

ICT tools used in the Church

ICT tools include any communication device like radio, television, phones, computer, microphones, speakers, radios, projectors and televisions, CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) among others. Different ICT tools are used in various contexts including: education, health care, business sectors, churches among others. ICT tools have great potential to enhancing transmission of the Gospel and creation of Christian wisdom in the new information age. The advent of the internet has led congregations using computer technologies to enhance and promote their ministries such as worship, fellowship, pastoral care, education, mission evangelism. Technology has played a significant role in the spread of Christianity throughout history. According to there is a changing worshipping experience with the emergence of ICT. Various ICT tools are used in church during worship to provide visual sermon outlines, display songs and music and show illustrative video clips. The preacher can make teaching and preaching easy by providing visual sermon outlines on a projector through a computer. This may help the people to follow and internalize the message being delivered and it helps to connect with the congregation wherever they may be. In addition, ICT is used in Sunday school classes to enable children to take part in an interactive encounter within realities of Biblical teachings and play games that enhance biblical literacy. ICT is majorly used during worship to make the ministry more effective, attractive and applicable to the lives of the congregants, especially the young who are quiet familiar with ICT.

It is through the web that people find personal, social and religious information. As a result of these, religious institutions have devoted more resources in order to improve their presence in the web. Pastors use ICT for sermon preparation, worship and running of teaching materials during service. Ministries utilize intranet for internal communication and the internet to reach wider audience. Majority of the Christians use WhatsApp when communicating with other church members. In addition, most of the respondents use soft copy Bible when ministering in their churches.

ICT has filtered through the society. It has become a tool to aid humans in almost any task in the contemporary church. There are three main uses for ICT in the Church currently: presentation, multimedia and communication. Presentation involves displaying songs, sermon or notices in church service. In addition, multimedia refers to all other uses of audio, video, or other media that is produced through ICT. These may be used to add to the worship experience, to show video clips or to record parts of meetings. ICT is used by some churches and other Christian institutions to resource other churches.

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Discussion

Outside evangelism

Christians have embraced ICT as method of evangelizing the world. This links to the divine mandate to evangelize the world as they wait for the day of the lord (Matthew 28: 19-20). Majority of churches are committed to active participation towards its realization. Members of the church have a greater role to play by inviting and encouraging their friends and relatives to visit and read messages, comment and share the messages in their ICT platforms. This will help reach more people with the Gospel of Christ. Today, many churches are devoting more resources to improve their presence on the internet because this is where many people are found. This has helped reach out to many both inside and outside the church.

Training new converts before baptism is necessary. Study should be given using the best methods in order for the trainees to understand the

doctrines of the church into which they are joining. According to the goal of every church is to offer Christian education in order to develop disciples. The church is expected to help its congregants grow in the Christian faith to function like mature Christians in all aspects of life. The main purpose of Christian mentorship program is to fulfill the great commission as given by Jesus Christ to the apostles in (Matthew 28:18-19). All churches are expected to continue mentoring their members regardless of the materials and technology used.

Attitude towards ICT

Some arguments are made for and against the use of ICT in churches. However, ICT must be applied in wisdom to solve problems in the church. According to there is a worrying trend amongst some churches, where ICT is seen as a necessity for successful ministry. Jewell claims that digital technologies have nothing to do with the explosive growth or decline of churches in Latin America. There is a strong lesson that growth of the church is based on something more than adding technology. On the other hand, there are still churches that see ICT as being inherently bad. This can come from confusion over the role of technology [3].

Technology tends to create human hearts & minds bent on control when worship should instead place the focus on the divine. However, ICT can be made to serve humans in their worship in a similar way that music technology has aided corporate worship in many religions.

As observed by there is fear of ICT in some churches. ICT is over analyzed so that excuses are found not to use it. Although some very good questions are raised, it appears that presentations in worship have improved worship in many churches. Balance is needed in the arguments about the use of ICT in churches. Additionally, there is lack of awareness of the possibilities of using ICT in some churches. Many books are still being written to persuade churches of the benefits of using ICT. Churches now have access to much greater experience of the benefits and practical problems of using ICT, but not all are giving proper thought to how ICT could be used. This may be due to a lack of resources or commitment to ICT [4].

Positive impact of ICT

According to ICT play a role in church globalization. The internet has proved to be one of the most efficient and reliable means of communication globally with little or no restrictions, which Christians cannot ignore. According to ICT enhances communication speed. Through ICT, messages are sent through e-mail to the congregants, new converts or to anyone efficiently. With internet connections, any information can travel fast and it saves time and is cheap. Using the Internet is cheaper than the other modes of communication such as telephone, mailing or courier service. Computers are also reliable such that information can be accessed and retrieved from anywhere and at any time. This makes it a reliable mode of communication. With the advancement of ICT, information can be shared by people all around the world. People can share and exchange opinions, news and information through discussion groups and forums on the internet. This enable knowledge sharing which will contribute to the development of knowledge based society. ICT technology has also created the term paperless environment. This term means information can be stored and retrieved through the digital medium instead of paper. Internet offers fast information accessibility and versatility. It has become a borderless source for services and information. Through the internet, jobs have been created. This happens through having IT Technicians. These helps maintain the computers. Fix hardware and install software among others. Computer Programmers are also needed to create software [5].

Negative impact of ICT

ICT has made people individualistic and introvert where people tend to choose online communication rather than having real time conversations. Additionally it has led to moral decedent and threats to the society. Some ICT users use ICT tools for fraud, Pornography, Hacking among other vices. Health Problems have also resulted from ICT. For instance a computer may harm users if they use it for long hours frequently.

Computer users are also exposed to bad posture, eyestrain, physical and mental stress. Further, some jobs have been lost as a result of computers being used to do the same work that people used to do, for examples many factories now have fully automated production lines. Instead of using people to build things, computer-controlled robots are used.

There have been negative critics of Christian doctrines, teachings and values in ICT. This has led to manipulation of those who use ICT platforms for spiritual growth. Additionally, huge network of people from diverse backgrounds expose users to negative behavior. The use of inappropriate images, pornographic literature and videos brings harassment of users. This has made some Christian leaders to avoid ICT platforms.

ICT tools and platforms are very expensive to purchase and maintain. This has discouraged many churches into embracing ICT for use in their churches. In addition, full time workers in a church may be made redundant because the church may not afford to pay them after buying a high end presentation system. The church must endeavor to clearly understand the role of ICT in order to make good use of it and even those using it should strive understand its role and priority. In view of the above, the church should avoid making the technology a higher priority than its leadership.

According to there has been inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited ICT skills and training, limited access to technical support, lack of ICT policies in church and budget constraints hinder the integration of ICT in church activities. Lack of internet connectivity contributes to the slow use of ICT. In addition, lack of regular access to the computers in churches makes it harder to prepare ICT based sermons. Further, there is irregular power supply in the churches and high cost hardware and software. This makes it challenging for the church leaders to acquire appropriate ICT facilities in churches.

Conclusion

Churches are expected to familiarize themselves with the national ICT policy so that they can develop church ICT policies of how to efficiently

integrate ICT in church activities. Training programs for the church leaders are also expected to factor in ICT to enhance skills in its use. Additionally, Churches should promote computer literacy programs to their members to enhance their use of ICT as outreach to many who need to hear about the Gospel of our lord Jesus Christ. Much as the Gospel is eternal and never changes, it will be difficult for Christians to influence the 21st century if they are not knowledgeable enough about modern tools for influencing world opinion like the website. Christians need to sufficiently saturate the website with the Gospel.

Churches should invest in modern ICT infrastructure and employ technology experts. Further, the government should invest in Information and Communication Technologies education to create jobs for the youth for economic growth. However, developing countries like Kenya are greatly investing in ICT despite the other challenges they face for instance drought and famine. Despite these efforts, the countries still have low internet connectivity, inadequate power supply especially in the rural areas where most churches are located coupled with regular interruptions of power supply. This has resulted into negative attitude towards use of ICT in churches, hence low uptake of ICT in churches.

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