The Use of Smartphones to Communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ

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Abstract

There have been many changes in the organisational structure, leadership style, and divisional groups of the Christian Church that form their own identity and brand. For each group, sect and denomination, the methods used differ widely. Musical instruments were also introduced into church worship over time. While many of these organisations have maintained the foundational message of Christ, many have begun to adopt newer technology to communicate both internally and externally about their ministry. Smartphones are ubiquitous, and they are an advancement in new media technology, particularly with the introduction of the Internet. The internet and WEB 2.0 applications made it possible for smartphones to emerge. As internet speeds increased, the experience of accessing information became more seamless. Making the gospel message visual and sharing it over social media through the use of smartphones allows the gospel message to reach a wider audience in a shorter period of time. When God spoke to Moses, he communicated with him visually. Through his prophets like Hosea 12:10, Numbers 12:6 and Isaiah 1:1 he also used visions, dreams, and the spoken word. The Bible also mentions an increase in knowledge, and new media innovations are part of that process. As a result, this paper investigated the use of smartphones to share messages during church services and whether such usage is a digital distraction. This paper employed a qualitative secondary data analysis as well as focus groups with pastors and congregational members. This paper was conceptualised using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) which is essentially an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication. According to the findings, appropriate smartphone use can be a very effective communication device; however, not everyone uses them correctly. It is clear that new media is constantly evolving, and it would be advantageous for the local church to intentionally use smartphones to engage in ministry and share the gospel message. As a further study, it would be interesting to conduct comparative research on the use of smartphones and social media among other religious groups.

Keywords: Digital communication, Smartphones, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital content, Social Media, Digital Distractions.

Introduction

Communicating any message means that one is revealing something to another person. In 1 Timothy 6:18, (New King James Version) we read "Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share". This characterizes that we need to be *koinonikoi*, and signifies a sharing with others. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is indeed the key medium and message of God's communication. We find in John 1:1 that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". Ephesians 4:29 urges us to speak to each another in "…psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" using our words for "building up" in order it "might give grace to those who hear" (5:19). To communicate thus means that we impart something to another, so that it becomes mutual to giver and to the receiver (Jørgensen,

1976). In 1 Timothy 6:18, "willing to communicate" (the Revised Version, margin "sympathize"), represents a single word *koinonikoi,* and refers to the habit of sharing with others either sympathy or property. The Biblical message confirms that we need excellence of communication that is strongly personal-communal and we need to note intercultural contexts as well (Ayee, 2007). Intercultural communication provides the opportunity to understand the different groups of people that live in different parts of the world. Knowing their culture will indeed make the gospel more meaningful to them. God wants believers to have a hearty and interactive communication with others which is why He often communicates in an ongoing manner in a range of ways such as through angels, dreams, visions, and numerous other forms of divine revelation.

For over 2000 years, scripture mentions example Mathew 5:1 and Acts 17:22-31 the gospel message was presented in open areas where people gathered in fields, and the preacher relied on his ability to use his voice. Also, when congregations met in buildings, the preacher relied on his ability to be audible when preaching the sermon, while members of the congregation used their printed bibles to follow the sermon by turning to the various scriptures. When the Reverend Pete Phillips first came to the city of Durham in 2008, the cathedral evicted him after seeing him reading the Bible on his smartphone. He was confronted by a person who refused to believe that he was using his phone for devotion and told him to go because it was forbidden to use it in the sacred space (Stokel-Walker, 2017). According to Francis (2011), no technology was used for a long time. Stokel-Walker (2017) mentioned that Durham Cathedral is over a millennium old, realised the importance of smartphone technology, and updated its policy. Now, congregants from Durham Cathedral take photos and use their phones for devotional purposes. According to Christianity Today (2023), since the printing of Bibles in 1445 CE to the modern day, much has changed in the way scriptures are displayed through the use of overhead projectors (Daitips, n.d.), especially in churches that had electricity. This may appear to be a significant leap with the use of technology, but this innovation has advanced human communication. Communication technology is dynamic, and the advancement of the gospel message and Christ's teachings were soon communicated via radio and television. Over the centuries, we have been using various technologies, some simple and others complex.

To spread the gospel, the Apostle Paul used transportation technology in the form of ships. He also used the technology of writing letters on parchments, and likewise, Christians in the past would use whatever was available to advance the gospel (Kirkpatrick, 2017). In the modern world, technology like radio and television changed the way information was transmitted. The invention of the television was progressive, and more than one person contributed to its invention (Bellis, 2020). In the 1920s, a television in its mechanical form became a consumer product (Magnetic Storm, 2016), and two decades later, ministries in the United States of America started to look towards the television as a suitable medium to use. This medium has had a significant cultural impact, and it has the potential to be used for religious outreach programmes (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). According to Techpatio (2017), television evangelicals have made major headlines in the second half of the last century. The use of big screens allowed members of the congregation in large auditoriums to see what was happening up front on the altar, and the service was also broadcast globally (Rogers, 2010). The use of digital communication through smartphones, apps, YouTube, and social media to advance ministry offerings to a larger audience. The use of smartphones by congregational members during the service could be embraced as a means of communicating the gospel, or its use may be viewed as a distraction. Figure 1 depicts a scene where multiple members were using their phones to capture both stills and video during a worship service. This will no doubt be seen as a distraction (Christianity Today, 2023). However, this will not always be the case. What can be a more frequent distraction is when people use their phones to play games or chat with friends while the worship service continues.

Figure 1: How smartphones and social media are changing Christian worship   Adapted from Stokel-Walker (2017)

Aim of the Research

The research aimed to determine whether the use of smartphones in the church is a distraction.

Conceptualisation Significance of the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

According to Learning Theories (2022), UGT focuses on an audience-centred approach, focusing on how people respond to media as opposed to what media does to people. This theory was initially developed by Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail in 1969. The UGT in this paper looked at the significance of the use of smartphones by members of the congregation as well as the purpose of using their smartphones while in church or during the sermon being preached. Furthermore, how congregational members use their smartphones to engage on social media and share their faith and other Christian content. The perspective of theorising information and communication crosses a multi-disciplinary field, which allows for knowledge from different fields of scientific study. Moreover, with this multi-disciplinary perspective, communication provides a variety of applications, which allows for horizontal links where theories from different disciplines can be incorporated with communication theories and vice versa. Moreover, with this multi-disciplinary perspective, communication provides a variety of applications, which allows for horizontal links where theories from different disciplines can be incorporated with communication theories and vice versa (Mehrad and Pegah, 2016). Congregational members using their smartphones may respond differently depending on their needs, and this often leads to their being gratified, especially their objectives of using their devices to engage in media.

Literature Review

The technological advancements have changed the way humankind functions in every aspect of life. Many inventions have either directly or indirectly affected human communication, and sharing the gospel has also been affected by the advancements in technology over time (Francis, 2011). According to Nwachukwu (2019), Pope Paul VI, in 1967, commented on the phenomenon of the modern means of human communication for social interactions as seen in journalism, movies, radio, and television. This is considered God's providence, as it provides new ways for humanity to interact with one another (Nwachukwu, 2019). Furthermore, Nwachukwu (2019) states that Pope Francis commented on the use of social media and stated, "It is important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses, and encourages." Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment. "A church that follows this path learns how to walk with everybody" (Nwachukwu, 2019). Christians use the written word, symbols, and pictures to convey their story. The use of smartphones allows Christians to share their faith digitally with their contacts through their desired social networking sites.

According to Banks (2012), the use of imagery such as the anchor is used to symbolize faith, and the fish to represent Jesus Chris by the church was a means to express the message of the kingdom of God. Images are part of the media; this is used to influence and promote

understanding and meaning of the truth of the gospel, and this must be presented when considering how God is working in the world today (Banks, 2012). Messaging today has changed, and with digital communication, the process has become seamless, and great multitudes can be reached in a matter of seconds. Digital communication has brought about a wider range of communication mediums through which churches can advance the preaching of God's word around the world seamlessly. Live streaming of services through social media has become a popular way of sharing ministry content publicly or with the church's private network. Moreover, digital devices such as data projectors and high-definition digital displays have also been installed in large church venues, which helps enhance the projection of the activities that are taking place in the pulpit area. These technologies include the use of data projectors, video cameras, and musical instruments. Digital communication is dynamic, and new applications are being developed rapidly to meet users' needs during the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) (Knott-Craig, 2018). Moreover, these new technologies are enabling ever-higher levels of production efficiencies. They also have the potential to dramatically influence social and environmentally sustainable development. Organizations need to consider "Industry 4.0" technologies, which contribute toward sustainability (Bai et al., 2020). The 4IR phenomenon has disrupted communication protocols, and the church must start to embrace this, bringing about further possibilities and opportunities for the church as well. Social media applications have made it easier to communicate with congregants and promote church activities. As artificial intelligence (AI) develops further AI tools are increasingly being used in many churches. Filadelfia church in Stockholm, began live streaming its services during the COVID-19 pandemic but began to broadcast automatic subtitles in over fifty languages. The tool used was able to create subtitles and as the preacher gave his sermon it created subtitles (CNE, 2023). A renowned German Protestant theologian, Rainer Bayreuther, has suggested that ChatGPT could aid pastors in writing their sermons or even provide templates for pastoral discussion (CNE, 2023).

Today, social networking sites have also emerged and can provide fast, powerful, and interactive communication. To capture the potential of social media in fulfilling the great commission, there is a need for Christians and the church to embrace and use social media. The popular examples of ICT platforms used in the church today include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, email, blogging, Skype, Zoom, Google Plus, and WhatsApp. These platforms are primarily used for bulletin announcements, post-sermon discussions, Bible studies, Sunday school lessons, and counselling lessons, among others. These applications have steadily grown in popularity over time as more people use them to communicate. With the rapid advances in fast Internet speeds, new communication devices also brought about the convergence of technologies, which provided greater usage by one device than other stand-alone devices. According to Tiwari et al. (2006), technology convergence is essential in everyday life. The convergence of the computer and the mobile phone provides new opportunities for businesses by allowing people to engage in e-commerce applications. Having one device, such as a mobile smartphone, also provides the user with a mini-computer to interact through note-taking, recording audio and video, and communicating through emails and social media. Moreover, it also allows for the Bible and other resources one may need for a Bible school class.

The innovation of technology continues to evolve, and digital communication has increased in popularity as the number of users has increased. Communication between users is now much faster thanks to social media. Wasiak (2010) agrees that "social media has changed the way people interact amongst themselves and with their media." People play multiple, sometimes simultaneous, roles as "receivers, creators, critics, advocates, transformers, and transmitters of messages." This has become a preferred means of communication. The sharing of information has become instant, and diverse types such as text, video, and voice notes can be sent to multiple users. Recording worship and sermons has become easy, and a variety of Bible apps have made it easier for people to access the scriptures. While this steadily increasing number (Barna Group, 2018) indicates that 9 out of 10 bible users (89%) indicated

the appeal of the printed version of the holy bible remains their preference, Barna indicated further that for the past 80 years, the tracking revealed that little has changed. Smartphones have also increased steadily, which provides more users with a vast capability to access information. Furthermore (Barna Group, 2018), digital platforms providing the Bible have seen steady growth since 2011.

According to McWhorter (2021), YouVersion Bible app users worldwide read 55.8 billion chapters, listened to 8.2 billion chapters, and created 2.4 billion highlights, bookmarks, and notes. Moreover, 500 million videos are played, 1.4 billion Bible plan days are completed, and 5.6 million young users have completed Kids Bible Experience stories. According to Degenhard (2021), South Africa's smartphone users from 2010 to 2025 are projected to reach 41.89 million, which includes users of any age using a smartphone. Smartphones provide a variety of functions, and since the Bible is accessible through these devices, their use will increase. The study examined the adoption of smartphones and social media usage by congregants in Durban.

Human communication has been altered by technology, with the interpersonal aspect of face-to-face communication diminishing and becoming more screen-to-face (Drago, 2015). Moreover, there has been a dilemma with confessions in the Roman Catholic Church, and the development of a Roman Catholic app may be seen as an alternative that could accommodate confessions. However, the app developers have not included such an option but indicate that the app is not a substitute for confessions (Stanford, 2011). In hindsight, concerning data breaches, it is best that confessions be kept off-line at this stage. Although there is interaction, personal contact is somewhat eroded and replaced by a digitally enhanced visual. This is supported by Eastman, who states that "new technology and social media sites are constantly changing, evolving, and developing, which means the face of personal communication is also changing." These changes often mean people are having less and less face-to-face interaction (Eastman, 2013).

While using smartphones and accessing social media may be acceptable in most spaces, is it acceptable for one to use them during a church service? The use of smartphones in the church could be considered a digital distraction. The brightness of the screen and sounds from notifications could become annoying. Using phone apps could divert one's attention while the service is ongoing. However, not all smartphone users are bad when it comes to using them. Electronic devices can be a functional tool for enhancing the service by allowing people to share their experiences and also promote the service on online platforms. This means the content can reach more people using digital devices and media.

The Christian church has embraced various forms of technology through which the message of Christ is propagated to a greater audience. Today, we see that the Christian faith has embraced new media technology. The use of social media through their smartphones allows them to share their messages by uploading and sharing them with their contacts, and at the same time, they are also shared for public consumption. This is supported by Omotayo (2017), who says that a large number of Pentecostal churches in Ibadan propagate the gospel through the use of ICTs. New media technology and the 4IR have disrupted traditional communication protocols. The disruption brought about by new technology has made communication seamless, allowing for new applications to transform the way we communicate. The convergence of several stand-alone applications into smartphones has brought about further possibilities and opportunities, which the churches have embraced. According to Nwachukwu (2019), promoting church events among their congregants using social media applications makes it easier to communicate. This paper examined the reason and purpose behind the congregation's use of smartphones and social media during church services.

Smartphones in Church

The Bible has been digitalized, making it accessible through app stores for smartphones. The cost of smartphones drastically dropped as they became increasingly popular. The smartphone's affordability and diverse functionality became very attractive, and to many, it became easy to use the device. The Bible can appear on smartphones, making it more convenient for members of the congregation to use their smartphones and then use their printed Bibles for church. Smartphone usage in the church may differ from one congregation to another, and as time passes, it becomes an increasingly important tool for evangelism. Smartphones have unprecedented abilities, and they can be helpful tools that can reach greater audiences. It can also make a meaningful personal connection with an individual (Bich, 2017). Many have access to smartphones and social media accounts. Smartphones have become an essential tool in keeping most people connected to such an extent that many have become inseparable from their devices; this view is also supported by (UKEssays, 2018).

Research Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative approach using focus groups. According to Nyumba et al. (2018), focus group discussions are conducted where the researchers facilitate the group discussion between participants. The focus group was made up of 20 members of the congregation. One-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 pastors. Both sets of respondents were drawn from various participating Pentecostal denominational churches. This was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time if they wished to. The use of small groups allows each respondent to share their views while being large enough to promote discourse, adding value to this research. According to Carey and Asbury (2012), focus groups are appropriate when members have knowledge of the research topic and are willing to participate. All participants used a common language, which added value and was important to the group's experience. Individual interviews had to be conducted due to the tight schedules of the pastors, all of whom could not meet together. The same set of questions was used for both groups (Harridge-March et al., 2010), except for two additional questions posed by the pastors that focused on their observations of parents and their children concerning smartphones and the use of smartphone bible apps rather than the printed bible in church.

Findings

The findings are presented from two perspectives: the Christian congregants that participated in the focus group and the individual interviews of pastors. They are presented under general themes in the form of summaries in point form. The respondents' perspectives are supported by the uses and gratifications of smartphones and social media usage.

Smartphones used during church services

Congregants provide the following information concerning smartphone usage during church services:

- Church members use their smartphones so that they can follow and read scripture via their Bible apps, easily take notes for devotions and future bible studies, and record sermons through video and audio apps for reflection and sharing on social media. Using live features on social media makes it easy to share praise, worship, and the sermon with one's contacts. However, they could be requested to ensure that their notifications are turned off and phones switched to silent mode.
- Using smartphones to stream the sermon for evangelism. Post messages to different church social media groups. It also helps to receive and respond to personal messages on social media during the service.

Pastors provided the following:

- All pastors indicated that smartphones provide a multifaceted use for their members of the congregation.
- Pastors 1, 2, and 3 stated that many members like smartphones since they can access the Bible apps.
- Pastor 5 stated that his members have indicated that they want to be relevant to the times, and why should the enemy benefit from the use of modern technology when we have the best message to share?
- Pastors 4 and 6 mentioned that members can use their phones to access information, such as through Google. All pastors have alluded to the fact that the use of social media to share sermons is very economical since traditional media outlets are very expensive.
- Pastor 8 mentioned that some members use their smartphones to keep digital records of sermon notes.
- Pastors 7 and 9 mentioned that some members are on standby for work; therefore, they need to check for calls or messages.
- Pastor 10 indicated that some use smartphones during church time due to nomophobia (Bennett, 2015); they have a fear of missing out. This is especially true for the next generation; they are connected almost 24/7, and many of them come to church out of obligation to please their parents or appease their pastors. Many who use their smartphones for purposes other than accessing the Bible hardly connect to the message being preached.

Both groups' responses reveal that using smartphones is mostly positive. However, it was noted that smartphones were being used for purposes other than connecting to what was going on during the service. Moreover, pastors have indicated they are aware that both adults and youth are using their smartphones to access social media during church services. They have also seen that the younger members of the congregation are consumed with playing games. Discussion among respondents reveals that the use of smartphones during church services is popular among the congregation. Congregants did, however, concede that the use of smartphones and social media during church services does disrupt other members of the congregation.

Smartphones usage for ministry

The use of smartphones for the right purposes in ministry can be very valuable. This should be used to stay in contact when they are not in fellowship with one another and should not replace the personal touch, face-to-face meetings, and fellowship with each other. The Bible is clear about fellowship (Hebrews 10:25). Church members mentioned the following:

- Smartphones are a good channel to use for sending important notices and notifications of forthcoming events to the congregation.
- Smartphones allow church members to connect to social media, which can be used to invite their contacts to church for either normal or special events. It is excellent for group chats; special ministry groups can keep in touch with one another. Social media like WhatsApp is also very cost-effective when communicating with many people.
- Smartphones can be used to capture media content for future use.
- They are a good alternative compared to other techniques, such as very expensive cameras.
- Using smartphones during church services will help in the case of an emergency such as for example when inter alia medical issues arise.

Smartphones are a good channel to be used for sending important notices and notifications of forthcoming events to the congregation example, where the same group meeting is being held, funeral notices, and any special requests that may need to be communicated;this is also

supported by (Hertzenberg, 2023). Smartphones allow church members to connect to social media, which can be used to invite their contacts to church for either normal or special events. It is excellent for group chats; special ministry groups can keep in touch with one another. Social media like WhatsApp is also very cost-effective when communicating with many people. Smartphones can be used to capture media content for future use. Compared to other technologies, such as very expensive cameras, the smartphone is a good alternative. Using smartphones during church services will help in the case of an emergency. The pastors indicated that smartphones do add value, especially when they are used for direct ministry. However, if members of the congregation are not using their Bible apps or taking notes, or if someone mindlessly switches between screens using various social media platforms, it can be disruptive and distracting when people are reading messages on WhatsApp or emails, playing games, taking pictures, and using social media apps during the service. All respondents agreed that while phones are being used as tools, one can become easily distracted by message alerts, pop-up messages, and other apps. They also indicated the following:

- Pastors 4, 5, and 6 indicated that live streaming or audio recording of the service is a positive use of technology that provides a great way to communicate.
- All pastors agreed that using smartphones to share sermons could reach people who do not attend church and help them come to know the Christian faith.
- Pastors 1, 3, and 7 stated that coming to church is where we connect, get to know our church community, and come together to be part of something larger than ourselves. Sharing ministry content through smartphones allows those to connect remotely since they may be at work or could be in the hospital.
- Pastors 6, 8, and 9 stated that smartphones are very economical for recording video footage and taking photographs; various aspects of the service are captured and can quickly be uploaded on social media, which reaches a great audience that is actually in church physically.

Both congregants and pastors agree that smartphones and using social media add value to ministry. This technology provides the ministry with innovative ways to communicate ministry content to its members and, at the same time, create a digital footprint with other social media users. The use of smartphones and social media is seen as an effective medium for ministry communication. With such engagement, it is clear that smartphone and social media usage in the church will increase in the future. While there may be concerns, users do indeed feel a sense of gratification when they can share and receive ministry information from and about others.

Smartphones distractions

Congregants indicated the following concerning smartphones causing a distraction in ministry:

- All congregants agreed that the sounds from the keystrokes of smartphones cause disturbances since not everyone places their phones in silent mode or mutes their sound settings.
- It is also mentioned that taking pictures with a flash is also very distracting, especially to people who are closely seated around the one who is taking pictures.
- Accessing social media during the church service also distracts when songs or videos start to play and one's volume is not muted. This same thing could happen while reading the Bible since messages can pop up on the screen and distract you from the text.
- Receiving phone calls during service is very annoying, especially when the phone volume is loud and the person then has to pass by other congregants to take the call.
- The playing of games during a church service is not appropriate, and this is usually done by younger members of the congregation.

- Smartphones could cause one to waste time, especially when used aimlessly.

Pastors mentioned the following:

- Others around you may get distracted by your attempts to take a video. especially when you have your phone lifted while recording.
- Church members who are not disciplined in using social media correctly and purposefully can easily distract others.
- Addiction to social media causes people to continually look for updates on their social media status, and they want to know what their contacts are doing.
- Some like to take selfies and post them while in church as a form of bragging. This is revealed in their status as "last seen" or "posted time," and it becomes clear that they were not using it for ministry.
- Both groups of respondents indicated that men tend to use their phones more than women during church services. They are either on social media, taking incoming calls, or making calls during church services.

While smartphones and social media may be used by many during church service, it is important to note that they do cause distractions for other members of the congregation. All respondents concur that using smartphones and social media during church other than for ministry purposes is incorrect and does cause distractions in the church. Many forget to place their phones on silent, and this can be very annoying, especially when one's phone rings a few times and the notification sound is loaded. Recording the service also causes a distraction, especially for the people seated behind.

Social media use during a church service is a reality, and both men and women have indicated the reasons for its use. However, considering the responses given by the respondents, it is clear that the use of social media is not only for ministry but is also used for personal purposes. Moreover, men are seen to frequently use their phones and be on social media. The use of smartphones and social media is an important part of the church member's daily interaction with their contacts, and it is clear that there is a growing dependency on their smartphones; this is also mentioned by (Hertzenberg, 2023). Smartphones provide a variety of uses, and to the user, these are purposeful and meaningful, while this may not be the case for others. Their frequency of using their smartphones demonstrates that smartphones and social media are gratifying.

Pastors' responses to the two additional questions about parents' attitudes toward their children's use of smartphones during church services and smartphone Bible apps versus physical Bibles are below:

Smartphones are used as a pacifier by parents during church

Pastors further mentioned that it is clear that children are attracted to smartphones and that they are a generation that loves technology. Parents tend to freely allow their younger children to use their phones during the service. Often, this is done as a way of occupying their children so that they can focus on the service. All pastors indicated that more often than not, fathers tend to give their children their phones to prevent them from disrupting the service, as the phones will keep them quiet or occupied. However, not all parents do this, and those who do vary from church to church since some mothers tend to give their children their phones while some fathers refuse. Smartphones are being used as pacifiers. Children are busy playing games and going onto Facebook or WhatsApp. Most children are seen taking selfies in church. Moreover (Hertzenberg, 2023), a lot of people in the parish play with their kids on their phones. No one wants to hear the gospel when a two-year-old boy in the back row is throwing a severe tantrum and the parents are unwilling to leave the service to calm the small child. Many parents give their young children their phones when a toddler yells that he would rather play outside than listen to the pastor. Children who are given the phone tend to play games, which attracts children who do not have phones, and at times this could lead to fights among the children.

Teenagers are possibly more discrete when using the phone and engaging their social media accounts.

The use of Bible apps on smartphones and the printed version of the Bible in church

The increase in Bible applications and online sermons makes it more acceptable for Christians to look at their phones during church (Hertzenberg, 2023). Pastors aver that many people have smartphones, and they have become very dependent on their smartphones. They use it for many daily activities. It is unanimous among pastors that the use of smartphones has increased in churches since most people use their phones to read the Bible instead of using the actual printed Bible. Pastors indicated that although technology has influenced us, it is important to have a disciplined spiritual life and not become overly dependent on it. Using the actual printed Bible and taking notes will be more beneficial, as it eliminates any social media interference. The Bible app is very popular and allows users to interact with contacts and share their thoughts about scripture. Stokel-Walker (2017) concurs and mentions that the YouVersion app has been downloaded and installed 260 million times. Therefore, more people are using their phones in church. Technology is a large part of one's life; however, pastors must create awareness of both the positive and negative influences of technology. They can achieve this by having discussions in small group meetings or arranging for a special event to discuss these issues. Pastors agree that the use of smartphone technology is popular with the church; in a paper (Magezi, 2015), it is mentioned that "many pastors have embraced the use of technology in their religious and ministerial practices." They also agree that members of the congregation should be cautioned about the dangers of becoming too dependent on technology. Smartphones provide a variety of tools that one can use with their Bible apps and allow for quick searches and switching between different books of the Bible seamlessly (Stokel-Walker, 2017). The printed Bible still provides a sense of reverence for God and does not distract anyone as a smartphone could.

Conclusions

The use of smartphones and accessing social media during church services has been an interesting study. Reflecting on the literature review and the findings between the congregational members and pastors. It is clear that while smartphone technology may be an effective tool for communication, in ministry, it adds value to one's spiritual experience if it is used correctly. The use of smartphones and social media is high among respondents, and the usage varies from person to person; however, it is clear that respondents do feel a sense of gratification when they use their smartphones at church. Their gratification may be realised through engaging technology, which they use to connect and share their status and activity via social media. However, it is quite clear that smartphone usage is ubiquitous, and its presence is on the increase in churches. It is also worth noting that some members of the congregation will refrain from using their smartphones during church services, and those who do use their smartphones for recording or taking photos during the service should be careful not to disturb others. It has been observed that when members tend not to look up while the pastor is sharing the sermon, they could very well be busy with their smartphones (Earls, 2016).

Younger members of the congregation see their smartphones as an essential part of daily life, and as more younger people attend church, the use of technology and smartphones will also increase. According to David and Roberts (2022), smartphone usage has no doubt become a part of everyday life. Smartphones are used for different reasons, including communication purposes. However, smartphone usage in certain venues may cause disruptions, and during church services, it could easily cause a distraction when the user may have forgotten his or her surroundings. Phone ringtones and notification beeps can be very distracting, especially when the user has forgotten to mute notifications or ringtones. Therefore, balance in the use

of technology needs to be maintained. Smartphone usage in the church depends on the circumstances and the reasons why one uses it. The main reason for going to church is to hear the preaching of God's word and to fellowship with one another. One suggestion is that cell phones should be turned off if they are going to distract you or if they may also distract others. Therefore, the rule of thumb would be that a smartphone can be placed on vibrate, and should the user have an emergency, they will still be alerted (Slick, 2018). Smartphones, regardless of whether they are good or bad, influence people.

The combination of smartphones and social media connects more people seamlessly, not just with their contacts but with their entire contact list as well. Compared to a generation ago, social media has connected people and allowed them to know what is happening in their lives. The church should use this great opportunity as a means of connecting to those who are referred to as "loose connections," and in doing so, could contribute to church growth (Slick, 2018).

Recommendations

Technology provides great opportunities to advance the ministry and provides an innovative way to connect with a large number of people seamlessly. It is also very cost-effective compared to traditional platforms. However, smartphones and social media must be used responsibly in the church. In general, the incorrect use of smartphones and social media has contributed to behavioural issues that need to be addressed by the leadership of the church. The following recommendations are presented to pastors who could use this look at embracing technology and how to guide smartphone usage during church services and for sharing ministry information. It is recommended that clear guidelines be drawn up regarding the use of smartphones and social media during church services.

- For children, both the church leadership and parents should come together and discuss plausible ways that smartphones can be used in a way that can enhance their children's experience in children's ministry.
- Digital casting or streaming media content should be restricted since the quality may be poor. Members should be coming to church to worship God and listen to the Word, not relying on the preacher's message. As the book of Hebrews tells us, we should not neglect to come together so that we can encourage one another.
- Videoing should be done by a designated person, such as a member of the media ministry. Content can be made available to members after the service or uploaded on the official website or social media sites.
- Pastors must encourage members to use their phones responsibly, and as parents, they should lead by example.
- Members should be disciplined when using their phones during church.
- Ministries must provide clear guidelines for those who want to use their smartphones in church.
- It is also important that when sharing content recorded in church, it is of good quality, and the purpose is to create awareness of the good news.
- Also, when resharing content from your local church or reposting other Christian content, it must be done respectfully and without condemnation.

However, in whatever method we tend to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, it must be done in accordance with John 3:17 (New King James Version), where we read, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

It would be interesting for a future comparative study to be conducted about the behaviour of members of other religious faiths and how the priests or spiritual leaders consider their members' use of smartphones and social media during their diverse range of services.

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