

## TECHNOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHRISTIANITY

---

**Rev'd Canon Omoniyi Olanrewaju FALANA**

Archbishop Vining College of Theology, Akure

08035206829, 08153152093; [paulmercy62@gmail.com](mailto:paulmercy62@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*One of the phenomenological discourses in the scholarly field today is the impact of technology on society, particularly in the religious sector. The underlying motivation on the discourse centered on its impact on religion and the shift technology has brought to the contemporary world. This shift cuts across every aspect of life; economic, political, social, cultural and religion. The approach adopted in writing this paper is descriptive and investigative. A review of the existing body of literature is done to elicit the position of scholars on the subject matter. The concern is if there is any relevance, effect, or impact of this shift in the religion circle. This paper will not waver away from the fact that technology has come to stay and over the time. Therefore, this paper explores the impact of Technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on religious transformation using social media and Christianity as its case study. It examined the relationship between the Church and social media. Findings through this research revealed that there are both positive and negative influences of technology and media on the church at large. The research concludes that the world and the Church inclusive have been interacting with technology from the ages; musical instruments, public address system, computer system, communicating gadget are examples of the technology. Obviously, it is a fact that technology has come to stay in its world, and it develops daily in society and Church activities in the recent times develop more on it. It therefore recommended that on the part of the church, there is need for explicit teaching on the use of media for members of the body of Christ. In like manner, there is need to discourage the abuse of media usage, and this can still be engendered through stern teaching. The work also recommended that efforts must be made to encourage youths today who have vast knowledge of media and technology.*

**Keywords:** Technology, Religion, Social Media, Christianity

### **Introduction**

A bridge has been built on the gap between technology and Christianity from the age of reawakening, when Christianity witnessed leaders and apologists who arose in numbers from the Church for reformation and definition of some issues in the Church. The effect of this and Protestantism played a cardinal role in abridging the gap between technology and Christianity. These Church fathers arose out of their curiosity for knowledge and inventions (such as typewriter, stencils, duplicator etc.) which aided the reformation. Noticeable in 15<sup>th</sup> century was the work of Johannes Guttenberg (1400-1468), a German inventor, printer, publisher and goldsmith who introduced printing to Europe with his mechanical movable-type printing press and William Tyndale (1494-1536) who translated the entire Bible to English, relying on the work of Jerome of Stridon in 4<sup>th</sup> Century called *biblia vulgata*. Very numerous theologians arose from the Church with the aims of reforming and defining the Christological theology of the Church; this is likely the beginning of reformation. Some scholars opined that Christianity has played a considerable role in developing the world, taking technology as her instrument. To argue this is to further do a research on the effect of westernization on the World and Christianity.

However, the modern world is swiftly progressing. We are continually threatened by the novel and world changing technologies from the analogue to digital. We now engage with Microelectronics, cybernetics and artificial intelligence; these technologies bring with them a host of questions that Christians need to wisely and prayerfully consider. This paper is an investigative article to help create a springboard for a larger, more in-depth discussion on the influence of Christianity on the technology vis-a-vis the impact of technology on Christianity. It helps define what technology is, provides a cursory glance at the impact of technology especially social media on Christianity in Nigeria. It argued that proper management of technology is obviously the way out of the malady it causes on religion.

### Definition of Keywords

- a. **Technology:** The English word is derived from two Greek words, *techne* and *λόγος*. *Techne* means art, skill, craft, the way, manner or means by which a thing is gained.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have argued that technology is as old as the Old Testament, during the Israelite sojourn to Egypt. Oxford Dictionary defines technology as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry.<sup>2</sup> This includes application of machinery and equipment developed from the scientific knowledge and applied science of Engineering. Merriam Webster defines technology as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purpose especially in industry.<sup>3</sup> Kolawole agreed with Frederick Ferre that technology implies 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.<sup>4</sup> Technology therefore is an art and scientific method used in achieving a specific purpose.
- b. **Religion:** This is the belief in and worship of a supernatural controlling power, especially a person of God. It is a particular system of faith and worship in relation to that which is regarded as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, and worthy of reverence.<sup>5</sup> Examples of Religion are Christianity, Islam, Traditional, Buddhism, Hellenism etc.
- c. **Social Media:** The term “social media” refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities. Manling, define social media as a new form of media that involve interactive participation.<sup>6</sup> To him the development of media is divided into two different ages, the broadcast age and the interactive age. In the broadcast age, media were almost exclusively centralized where one entity—such as a radio or television station, Newspaper Company, or a movie production studio—distributed messages to many people. Feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed, and impersonal. Mediated communication between individuals typically happened on a much smaller level, usually via personal letters, telephone calls, or sometimes on a slightly larger scale through means such as photocopied family newsletters.<sup>7</sup> Interactive age, media were not centralized. Hundreds of avenues like Facebook, instagram, opera news, twitters etc. distribute messages around and the feedback is usually interactive, immediate, and instant. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of ‘web 2.0’ and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.<sup>8</sup> Badmus explains that Internet services commonly associated with social media which are sometimes referred to as “Web 2.0” include the following: (a). Social network sites - a web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Examples

of these are Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. (b). Social bookmarking - Social bookmarking sites allow users to organize and share links to websites. Examples include Reddit, Stumble Upon and Digg.

(c). Wikis - A wiki is “a collective website where any participant is allowed to modify any page or create a new page using her Web browser.” One well-known example is Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia that makes use of wiki technology.

(d). Blogs - Short for “web log,” a blog is an online journal in which pages are usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs can be hosted for free on websites such as Word Press, Tumblr and Blogger.<sup>9</sup>

**d. Christianity:** This is a religion based on the teaching, practice and beliefs of Jesus Christ. It is Abrahamic monotheistic religion with 2.5million followers. Its adherent known as Christian makes up the majority of 157 countries of the world. They believe that Jesus is the Son of God whose coming as Messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Scripture called Old Testament and are firmly waiting for His second coming as the judge of the last day.

### **The Impact of Technology on Christianity**

The world from ages has been influenced with Technology. The influence of technology cuts across all stages of life. From transportation, farming, cultural living, education, industrialization, religion, etc. The impact is both negative and positive. They are discussed below:

#### **The Positive Impact of Technology**

**a. Wide Publicity:** The Church enjoyed freedom during the reign of Emperor Constantine when he declared Christianity as ‘religio licita.’<sup>10</sup> The “Pax Romana” which was evoked during this period gave Christianity a speedy leg to walk. However, the impact of technology during reformation cannot be underestimated. This paper defines technology as art and scientific method used in achieving a specific purpose. Starting from the translation of the Bible to English by William Tyndale in 1500 and the time reformation of Martin Luther, press was used to print and carry the message wide and right.

Prior to this time was the establishment of printing press by Guttenberg in the mid 1400’s, Guttenberg, set up the printing press and published the first mechanically printed Bible. This printed Bible helped the reformers to read and understand the Scripture and they were able to give a literal interpretation to the text of the Scripture instead of the papacy interpretation, this stands as the beginning of the reformation. Over the time till now, technology from about sixteenth century has the wide spread Christianity around the world, such act as the Bible, printing the tract, the Mobile Hospitals which the missionaries used etc. However, in the contemporary, technology has helped in the wider spread of the Gospel. One may not need to distribute the tract again as before, Facebook, WhatsApp will help in doing such ministry.

**b. Channel to Preach the Gospel in Nigeria:** Bishop David Idahosa was said to be the first Nigeria Gospel Preacher to be on Radio, later today it is a norm all-round the Country, Bill Graham was said to reach millions of people through his radio programme. Today, a lot of preachers have taken advantage of the social media to preach the salvation message to the world. Almost all the broadcasting stations now have mobile broadcast including the Advent Cable Network of Anglican Communion in Abuja that shows a live video of events. Of a fact, technology is a great channel of preaching the word of God.

**c. Communicating Power:** The Bible is now mobile; it is now on small phone or android phone. One can now read the scripture and communicate on it on mobile device. Technology has been a great tool in powering the message of salvation to the 'corners of the world'. Many pastors, instead of going to the altar armed with pages of notes, now take their tablets and iPads. Though, on the negative side, they also really on this rather than digesting the word of God. That is the reason why there are many with shallow understanding of their calling today.

**d. Enhancing the Worship Experience:** There are many advantages that technology has brought to the realm of worship as Christians which have enhanced the worship and makes it easy for both the worshippers and the conductors (leaders of worship). They are classified into two categories: the tangible and the intangible:

**The Tangible:** they are those variables that we can see, handle, and feel such as, projector for hymns and Bible readings, the Public Address system for sound and audibility, the recorder, etc.

**The Intangible:** they are some enhancements that are not seen, not felt and cannot be touched such are those around the preparation for the worship, the beautiful atmosphere for worship which technology has created during service.

## The Negative Impacts of Technology

The overwhelming advantages of technology have been mentioned above, it is pertinent to highlight and briefly discuss its negative effect on the world and the Church.

a. **Addiction:** the uncontrollable addition to technology and its mismanagement is of a great disadvantage to religion and this constitutes a negative impact to Christianity. Another point is attitude of the today youth to their Android phone, the culture of switch off your phone is gradually fading from the Church, today youth hold his/her phone during sermon to do snap chat inside the church. In addition to this is their visit to many of the evil sites such as pornography, makeup etc. all this have constituted to the kind of ungodly nation around us today. The youth now learn very bad behavior from these. Uncontrolled addiction to technology can lead to alienation of some church members from others. It is noteworthy that in the 21st century Nigerian church, if one does not have an iPhone or iPad, such person is not in tune with the current trend. One of the reasons people now come to church is to flaunt their newly upgraded or purchased gadgets. Some of them use it to intimidate, show off and brag to people in the church.

b. **Lethargy:** Arguable but the truth is that one of the demerits of technology is laziness. It is obvious today that Church is at a Lazy end. Of recent, it is becoming more popular to say "my phone is my Bible" even the Pastor of the congregation brings to the pulpit his Phone, iPad, or laptop to preach, apart from the goodness enjoy in this, demerit is highly incurable. As much as technology helps us to be more compact, a lot of books are packed into a mechanism. However, it becomes dangerous when it is abused. Students in university now find it difficult to study. Pastors and members spend more time on gargets than on the study of the word of God. How does one define a Pastor who will not prepare for the Sunday Service sermon until about some minutes to the time of sermon? Such just go on goggle to search for a sermon to preach! It is disheartening.

c. **Source of Immorality:** The human body and mind are fallible, and that leads to errors in the operation of technological objects, often with evil results. We have sensory and perceptual

limitations that cloud awareness. The media has become a subtle platform that promote immorality because it has no control measure.

d. **A Godless Society:** Another realm where modern technology is rapidly growing is biotechnology - the application of technology to medical science. You have probably heard of the use of laser technology in surgery, the gamma knife, which can destroy lesions in the brain as small as the size of a pea and can do it without affecting the surrounding healthy tissues. Medical technology has made such progress. The genetic DNA code is now being decoded. Some scientists even believe that we are close to discovering the secret of immortality - and those who have the means will be able to prolong their own life indefinitely. Soon, parents-to-be may be able to design their own children - to choose the sex of the child that will be born to them, as well as all the physical features such as the colour of their children's hair and eyes. Lately we have been hearing of things like: Genetic screening, Genetic therapy, Eugenics, Genetic engineering, nuclear transplantation, Egg fusion, Cloning of organs and human beings, Prenatal diagnosis, and in-utero fetal surgery. We see of recent babies in their numbers born by one mother through IVF. The implication of this is to create a society that is not concern about God which is common today in the western world.

e. **Technology as Idolatry:** A lot of Christian today are now converting back to Traditional Religion because of their encounter on social media with people of that faith.

### **The Contemporary Church and Social Media**

Social media have greatly influenced religious cycle in various ways today; this includes Christianity. Churches now have Facebook accounts and group WhatsApp where the day-to-day activities of the Churches are relayed to the public. In recent times, especially from 2020 during Covid 19 when Churches were closed because of the pandemic, many Churches now have their programme stream live online and members following. The Church of Nigeria Anglican mission to oversees headed by Bishop Olukayode Adebogun and others now stream even their revival live and invited guest were asked to lead the programmes. Advent Cable Network of Anglican Communion now stream their programs and event live on Facebook. We now have some Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria with their online media and television like Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Omega Ministry, Deeper Life Bible Church, Dunamis Church etc.

In recent times, several social media have been invented and the Church has clicked to them in her proclamation. Some of them include MyChurch.org, Zoom, group broadcast, line info, Mixlr, YouTube, Instagram, twitter, welife etc. Before this time, what was commonly used was broadband Internet with its first social network site called SixDegrees.com which appeared in 1997 but from 2002 onward, a large number of social network sites were launched. Some – such as Friendster – enjoyed a surge of popularity, only to fade. Others developed niche communities: MySpace, for example, appealed to teenage music aficionados.<sup>11</sup> Good to also note that the social and economic implications on the church are not yet fully understood. Some believe the Internet is making people more isolated, while others hope it will increase interactive participation among church members. It is believed that social media is providing ways of fostering participation with church members and enhancing relationships. This paper therefore looks at the implication of the social media on the Church in contemporary time and suggests few things for Nigeria Churches to guide against its abuse.

## **Impact of Social Media on the Church**

The world is becoming a technology village and social media as one arm of technology is really taking its stand, though the ecology of social media is ever changing. New social media platforms, services, and applications are introduced at a fast pace.<sup>12</sup> The Church with all religious spheres is making use of this as a tool to boost religion. Though, it is good to note that one of the causes to religion maligning in Nigeria is social media, however, it has done a lot of good than its evil and if managed well, it can still do well.

Among the impacts of social media on churches in Nigeria is an improvement on her interaction, communication, and interface. Social media has made information sharing faster and more convenient. The recent Cyber Church has made information dissemination and preaching easy, it has also reduced the physical meetings and gatherings in churches especially during Ebola crisis and COVID 19, meetings and prayers were being held through the various social media platforms. Isamuko and Oyekanmi affirm that the emergence of social media has changed the face of communication all over the world, making human beings the sources, processors, and the end users of all information. It has its powerful networks, and its transmission is very fast and strongly effective on many people.<sup>13</sup> Christianity is therefore, moved from the confines of place of Church building to the Web. Worship life is now beyond the physical limits of the routine assembly. It now affords Christians opportunity to watch live broadcasts of religious programs from the comfort of their homes.<sup>14</sup> It also gives Christians the opportunity to receive daily devotionals via phones, and download Bible applications to cellphones and computers.<sup>15</sup>

Social Media has also become a means of advertising Church programs and events, and this event when stream live in the other way has been an avenue to encourage a wearied hearted person in the face of adversity. Onimhawa opines that since religion is a relationship between the mystical and the natural realms and between a divine entity and a human entity. The human entity is man while the divine entity is the Supreme Being; God. The divine entity is the focus of all religions, therefore, religion has exerted a powerful influence on individuals, and the society.<sup>16</sup> This is to justify that when religion is brought to Social Media, its influence plays a major role in motivating people, developing people's idea about God and this can be seen as avenue of social progress has helped individuals to develop certain qualities. Predominantly in determining human behaviour as it performs functions of mental supportive and prophetic functions.

Again, social media to some Churches in Nigeria are gradually becoming a channel for evangelism, charity and propagating the name of God.<sup>17</sup> Though, some so called 'Men of God' used the same means to dupe some members of their properties and money. However, as Asaolu noted that it also helps to connect church personnel with members of the congregation and serves as tools for sharing information about the Christian faith without being physically present at the location of a religious service.<sup>18</sup> It affords Churches to make use of new ways of exploring the Christian faith. Church personnel are now able to chat and exchange information online on various faith related issues. It also enhances edification and benevolence. In addition, it is a brilliant way to reach users and attract new followers who may be entirely outside the church community. It is equally an important tool to enhance church growth and identify with missions through effective, heart changing messages that can benefit the viewing audience.

Though, social media as this paper has noted above has a lot of benefits to Church in Nigeria, however, mention must be made on some areas of its demerits to the body of Christ:

Before the advent of social media in Nigeria Churches, hardly do we hear of the fall or mistake of Men of God. The ministry and office of a Pastor was noble, honourable, respected and valid but in the face of social media and especially with the story read daily on it, the office of a Pastor was considered common and insincere. Asaolu also noted that there is gross digital manipulation of images on the Internet which negate the Christian standard and principles<sup>19</sup> though, some of these images and events on social media are merely photo-shops. For instance, the case of Archbishop Vining peaceful protest against the killing of a Rev Father in 2019 with the placard explaining their grievances; it is horrible that before the next day when the press would broadcast life the items on the placard were changed to Support Buhari.

Another factor that is cogent is the abuse or misuse of social media by the young people, which Ononogbu and Chiroma noted that, the use of social media by young people may leave a trail: a digital footprint, that may make them become victims of sexting, pornography, and cyberbullying, or may be recruited for terrorist cells and other anti-social behaviours and groups.<sup>20</sup>

Added to these disadvantages are isolation, laziness, idolatry as it has been discussed under the technology. Other possible negative outcomes include a lack of privacy, reduced capacity for learning and in writing skills, reduction in real human contact, higher vulnerability to crime, emotional distress, and anxiety, which may lead to depression and suicide.<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper has traced the influence technology has on the Church from the age of reawakening and reformation. It also explained the strengths and weaknesses of technology in relation to the Nigerian churches. It explored the relationship between religion and technology, especially social media during Covid 19. It however stated emphatically that technology and social media has come to stay with this world. One cannot do without it, though, it came with its demerits, but Christianity has also benefitted from its merits. It is argued that the next decade in Nigeria might be a decade of work and information that some might not be able to attend physical Church. It is therefore proposed that Cyber Church be encourage. On a big note, is the matter of fake news around the Church, which is the major work of the bloggers.

This paper therefore recommends the following:

1. A serious teaching on the implication of technology on Christianity and how Christian can harness its benefits should be part of Churches' teachings.
2. Churches should discourage the abuse of social media by preaching and teaching about it.
3. The Church should encourage youths that are doing well in the area of innovation and invention and she should also discourage cyber-crimes.
4. Christian Association of Nigeria should find a channel to fight against those using technology to dupe members and those in charge of fake Church news.

It is therefore concluded that technology is an important tool in the contemporary Church and social media is a God given channel to propagate the Gospel to the larger society, however caution must be taken on its abuse and misuses.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon. 2018 Online

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, 2021 online

<sup>3</sup> Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary: Retrieved via internet assessed on 20th January 2022 <sup>4</sup> Kolawole O P., An Evaluation of the Use of Technology in the 21st Century Nigerian Church in Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 100 - (2019) Open Access/Author/s - Online @ <http://www.pharosjot.com>

<sup>5</sup> John Olu Adetoyese, *General Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Egbe, Nigeria: Bhoti International Publishing Limited, 2011), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Manning, J. Social media, definition and classes of. In K. Harvey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of social media and politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 2014, 1158.

<sup>7</sup> Manning, J. (2014.)

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan A.M., and Haenlein M. Users of the world, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media *Journal of Business Horizons*, vol 53 no 1, 2010, 59-68.

<sup>9</sup> Pastor 'Kunle Badmos, *Effect of Social Media on the Church*; being a Paper presented at the 2014 Annual Conference of Theological Friends and Fellows, organized by the Redeemed Christian Bible College Lagos, Nigeria online assessed on 29/1/2022@6:20am

<sup>10</sup> Samson Fatokun, *Church in the Apostolic Age* (Ibadan: Erodise Publication 2014), 34.

<sup>11</sup> Samson Fatokun, 2014

<sup>12</sup> Stine Lomborg, "Meaning" in Social Media <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/>

<sup>13</sup> Isamuko, B.J., and Oyekanmi M.O., Impacts of Social Media on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press. *Journal of Information and Communication Technology*, 5 (1), 2014, 104110.

<sup>14</sup> Ogunsola K., and Raji D.A., Qualitative Study of the Use of Social Media by Church Personnel for Religious Activities in Ibadan, Nigeria in *African Journal for The Psychological Study of Social Issues* Vol.22, 2019, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Omotayo, F.O., Adoption and Use of Information and Communication Technologies by Pentecostal churches in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 1-12, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Onimhawo J.A., Role of Religion towards Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria. *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies*, 30, (2), 261-270, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Ogunsola K., and Raji D.A., 2019, 190

<sup>18</sup> Asaolu, O., Effects of the Social Media on Christian Youth. A Presentation at the Indoor lectureship Bariga. Lagos, Nigeria. 2014, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Asaolu O, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Ononogbu D. C. and Chiroma N., Social Media and Youth Ministry in Nigeria: Implications and Christological Thrust. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*. 5 (1), 2018, 48-54.

<sup>21</sup> Ononogbu D. C. and Chiroma N. 2018, 48-54