

## **CONTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) TO CHURCH EVANGELISM**

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### **Abstract**

Life is about change and security does not change for nothing. Church evangelism has led tremendous changes done to the role of information communication technology. The changes have made it easy to meet with more people and even send message of God easily to the people. It has equally made understanding the word very easy and brought about more converts in the society. Though it has so many challenges, the ability of the church to manage would go a long way in making evangelical work faster and better. It is therefore important that the modern church should adjust to the use of Information Communication Technology in their evangelical activities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is an undeniable fact that we live in the era of change. One thing that has brought much change is Information Communication Technology (ICT) whose ripples are left on almost all sectors of the society. let us cast our mind back to the past when we were using typewriters, telephone lines, we could not withdraw money outside the banking hall, or when there was no price scanner machines, no colourtv, digital cameras and computers. Today because of ICT, our tasks are reduced and we do things better and faster. ICT has changed how we work, learn, play and relate with each other. that is what ICT is doing.

Presently, the world is experiencing tremendous changes owing to the advancement in information and communication technology (ICT). Information technology (IT), as defined by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA, 2005), is “the study, design, development, implementation, support and management of computer-based information systems, particularly software applications and computer hardware. IT deals with the use of

electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit, and securely retrieve information.

parson and Oja (2003) defined internet as a global communication network that carries a variety of computer generated data such as documents, e-mails, pictures, videos and music. Encarta (2007) also defined the internet as a network that links computer network all over the world by satellite and telephone; connecting users with service networks such as e-mail and World Wide Web (www).

In religion, the use of ICT is more pronounced in the area of evangelism. Over the years, the mission of the great commission: was carried out by missionaries through different strategies. These ranges from house-to house visits, retreats, catechisms, open air preaching, missionary journeys etc. This later culminated into the use of letters or epistles, pulpit preaching, crusade, tyrants etc. With the advancement in modern technology, the use of print media, radio, and television was also introduced.

Today, the paradigm has shifted due to the revolution of information and communication technology (ICT). ICT tools have provided the opportunity for worldwide evangelism. The great commission is now going digital. JIMI (2008) sees cyber missions or using ICT in evangelism and Christian training as one of the most important tools in spreading the gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Web evangelism, internet bible teaching, scripture downloads and mobile phone, online seminaries, Christian websites and discipleship discussion forums are just a few way of spreading the gospel message.

This work therefore focuses on the contribution of ICT to the growth of Christian evangelism. it also attempts to buttress the magnitude of different channels through which evangelism or the Great commission is being carried out using ICT tools and how people's lives have been affected.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Information and communication technology (ICT):**

According to World Bank Group (2002), it consist of hardware, software, networks and media for collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information (voice, data, text, images). United Nation Publication (2003) defined ICT as technical system that receive, manipulate and process information and facilities communication between at least two parties.

According to this publication, ICT's are more than informatics and computers since they do not operate as isolated system but instead embedded into a network. They are also more than just broadcasting technologies, since ICT systems are not only for dissemination of information abut also permit interactive communication. The National Policy for Information

Technology (2001) described ICT tools as such device which include computer (hardware and software), networking, telephone, mobile phones, videos, multi-media and internet. Essentially, the application and utilization of these devices convert information, text messages, sound and motion to common digital form.

In religion, the application and the use of computers have led to e-evangelism, i.e. internet evangelism.

**Evangelization:** Evangelization translates the Greek verb evangelization as the good news of Christ. It is proclamation of the gospel of Christ to all mankind without boundaries (Achunike, 2008). Pope Johnpaul VI (1994) sees evangelism as “carrying forth out of the good news to every sector of human race so that by its strength, it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race”.

Evangelism: this is the practice of attempting to convert people to a religion. The term is used most often in reference to Christian and Islamic religion since those two religions mandates that their followers make efforts to recruit as many people as possible into their faith (Jordaens, 2009)

The intention of most Christian evangelism is to convert those who do not follow the Christian God to Christianity for the purpose of eternal salvation. Christians who specialize in evangelism are known as evangelists. Evangelism is done in obedience to the great commission command from Jesus Christ to his disciples to proselytize as in Mathew 28:18-20 which reads

Then Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciplines of all nation, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have command you.

For this reason, Broderick (1987) sees evangelism as "the whole mission of the church apostolate through which she announces, implants and brings to maturity the Kingdom of God". Achtnike (2008) affirmed that "mission is the very essence of the church, it is what the church is and indeed, the reason for its existence". Continuing, he said which the church does and that evangelism is the means by sees evangelism as expresses itself in mission.

### **EARLIEST METHODS OF EVANGELISM**

Christians all over the ages have strived to embark on this "Great Commission" through several means. The first century church often used a particular strategy to spread the gospel and that strategy took advantage of the circumstances and technology of the day. At that time, the use of writing was the cutting edge technology of the day. While the Roman Empire built their road system to allow their armies to move quickly, Christian missionaries

took advantages of those roads to spread the gospel. They would travel the roads from city to city, and when they reached a city, they would very often go the 'agora', the market place or the location in each city where the majority of the residents, as well as the community's most influential thinkers usually gather on regular basis to obtain information and for the agora', the Christian There, in social interaction. "Missionaries would declare the gospel.

The early apostles employed written communication in the form of letters or epistles to encourage and teach believers. They also engaged in out-reaches, witnessing, missionary visits to places and different countries. In Nigeria, according to Achunike (2008)

The 19th century missionary enterprise vibrantly evangelistic preaching house-to-house evangelism, erecting charitable institutions. It also captured the print media as its most forceful means of evangelization, newspapers, catechism and tracts were also printed.

It was also discovered that in 1960s, that numerous Pentecostal evangelists doubled their activities through the use of literatures, radio and television to reach their audience (Achunike). The 19th century catholic missionaries also used four-method approach to evangelism. Ozigbo (1988) categorized these missionary programmes as "the provision for the slaves, social outcasts and the helpless, education in literacy, vocation and aesthetic susceptibilities of the evangelized". The missionaries also engaged in direct evangelization approach in making converts. This direct approach meant a face-to-face teaching of Christian doctrines or instructions, pulpit preaching, crusades and tarry nights etc

### **THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ICT TO CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM**

Today, the evangelistic mission has taken a new paradigm which is enhanced by ICT. Achunike (2008) opined that:

In today's fast developing world, media trends dictate the move and direction of evangelism. The electronic media (radio and television) provides the tools with which this is executed.

Globalization has also taken evangelism to a different direction Globalization itself entails universalization whereby the object, practices or even values transcend geo-political boundaries penetrating the hitherto sovereign nation states and Impacting on the orientation and value system of the people. It embraces the colonization of the globe like the recent use of the world wide web (www) has increased the shrinking of time communication and space in global technology. Also, the invention of cellular and satellite phones is contributing its quota in the defiling of equally nationalboundaries in the area of communication.

Today, the church is faced with a historic opportunity, the cutting-edge technology of the day, which is the Internet. The internet provides us with the means of communication to reach the entire world. The Great Commission is now going digital. The internet consisting

primarily of the world wide web (websites), e- mails, news groups, forum, blogs, digitracts, chat room (instant- messaging) etc has helped Christian evangelism greatly.

In religion, ICT has helped greatly in the practice of religion. by various religious adherents. Almost every religion now has a web site in which they air their religious views, beliefs and practices. Religious groups can now use ICT tools in the dissemination of their doctrines, information and to reach out to other members in different locations of the world. The Internet. Has brought about advancement and improvements in religion. Generally as a system of believe and practices.

In Nigeria, some considerable number of youths and the literate can at least browse the internet to get information. Today in Nigeria, some people can access the Internet using their mobile phones. One can now listen to the gospel in the comfort of his room using digital televisions, to make contribution to T.V. discussion using telephones or mobile phones. Some people have also claimed to have gotten their healing by placing their hand on the screen of their television while televangelist is broadcasting healing on the television. Using ICT tools like chat room, people. can now chat with others in the other part of the world, send messages or e-mails, download messages, pictures or music's etc using their phone, evangelist can preach to a person in a very distance place using phone fishing, can pray for someone and someone can make prayer request using text messages (sms). All these have contributed immensely in the spread of the gospel. Using ICT tools, the former means of evangelization has been shrieked and made faster. Other contributions include:

(1) **Dissemination of Religious Doctrines and Beliefs:** The internet has helped greatly in the dissemination of information and communication. Almost all the major religious of the world now have website in which they disseminate their doctrines, teachings, instructions, history etc. Through their website anybody that wants to get information as pertains to their belief and practices can lounge to the internet via their website.

According to Enomchi (2000)

On the internet today, people can read about religion, talks with others about religion. download religious texts and literatures, buy religious books, artifacts, take visual tour of galleries of religious arts or the interior of religious building, search scriptures using electronic Indexes, locate church and religious centers, participates in mediation sessions, vote on church or group organizational propositions, see images of their religious leaders, watch video chips, listen to religions sermons, music, prayers testimonies, discourses, live internet gospel, radio and even submit request

He concludes by saying that marketing the sacred has become big business via the internet. Other means through which religious belief and beliefs can be disseminated is through chat room ministry which allows interactive session. The huge growth in blogging, social networking, and video sharing sites such as YouTube and Facebook has provided many more ways for Christians to interact with others and share their beliefs.

In Nigeria most of the New Generation' churches like Christ, Embassy has embraced and utilized ICT tools in the dissemination of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. From the home page of the websites, one can lounge into other website of the church like Christ Embassy Web TV, Rhapsody of Realities websites, Kiddies Love World website Atmosphere of morale website or Christ Kanlassy Healing Selusal etc. The Redeemed Christian Church (RCCG) also have their websites and the web TV station in which their monthly Holy Ghost service is being covered from the Redemption camp and from this camp, the happenings in the services can be viewed in other churches through the Streaming Video TV station that is connected to the internet. With satellite links, the gospel could be spread to the other branches in the country and in the world, as long as they have the necessary gadget for them to receive the satellite signal. The Deeper Life Bible Church also uses this medium especially during their Easter or December Retreats to listen to their General Superintendent, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi from their local churches provided they have satellite and projector to view the scene instead of traveling to Lagos for the retreat. There are also Internet-based churches, on-line ministries who thrive in cyberspace, Bible Colleges or Seminaries. Though most Pentecostal churches make maximum use of ICT tools, the mainline churches are still coming up.

**(2) Enhancement of Faith:** Through ICT tools, people have testified having been healed during TV broadcast of an Pastor Christ evangelist pastor In Ovakhlomeh's 'Atmosphere for Miracle' and other preachers TV programmes such miracles like healing, getting financial breakthrough. Reversing of family curses etc has been claimed to have gotten by people through TV broadcast. In the comfort of someone's room, one can participate in a mass that is being celebrated in the television or satellite television and with faith believe that he/she has gotten the full blessing just as someone that is the church. With present in Mediated Computer Communication (CMC), sick people, disabled or physically. Incapacitated people, socially restricted people like the Moslem women etc can as well participate in religious discourses, and make their contributions. Also using telephone or mobile. Phone, an evangelist can minister to someone you pray to a person that needs his/her assistance and with faith, the person believes that the problem is solved..

**(3) Enhancement of Communication:** With ICT and its technologies, communication on one-on-one basis through chat room ministry is possible. An Internet evangelist can minister to a

very large number of people at the same time with less cost and less stress. The use of the Internet has increased the shrinking of time and space because millions of people in many countries of the world could be reached at the same time. Various denominations and Pentecostal churches through their website can communicate to their members instead of going the long way of organizing a face-to-face meeting which takes time and expensive.

## **FACTORS THAT MILITATE AGAINST THE USE OF ICT**

Generally, there are widespread disparities in the extent in which different developing countries benefit from information and communication technology in Nigeria, there is digital divide between those with access to information and those without. Many people are yet to own mobile phones, talk more of desktops, laptops and of course connectivity. That was why the United Nations (2005) ICT Development Indices pin-point sub-Saharan African as facing the worst in terms of access to new technology. Other factors include:

**(1) Low Level of Computer Literacy:** In Nigeria, the level of computer literacy among people is irksome. It has been reported that in schools in Nigeria, both colleges and universities access to the Internet and other IT material and facilities are very limited. Majority of church members in the urban and rural areas are not educated and do not have computer literacy. That was why Daveri (2002) said that it is unfortunate that the amount of resources allocated to education in developing countries is insufficient to create the level of human ICT required. **Low Level of Internet Connectivity:** The availability of Internet connection is very limited. Most times, one has to carry his/her laptop to a cyber cafe before he/she could be connected to the Internet and often times, the Internet explorer will time out thereby frustrating the enquirer or taking most of his time. For this reason, World Bank (2004:24) said that "the production of some ICT services and efficient ICT userely. Heavily on a dependable infrastructural framework. Unfortunately, most developing countries and Nigeria in particular do not possess an adequate information and communication infrastructures and consequently, services is limited and expensive.

**(3) High Cost Associated with Building a Network:** High cost of procurement and maintenance of ICT infrastructural facilities and software packages in Nigeria and elsewhere is alarming. On this Onyeiwu (2002) maintains that given extremely low level of per capital income in African countries, the prices of prohibitive that only affluent urban dwellers can afford to pay for Internet access. On the religious side, high cost of maintaining a website have made so many Pentecostal churches to emphasize more on giving and in tithing without considering the income level of members. For Daveri (2002), ICT's such as the Internet were

designed with the capital/labour endowment and the economic structures of developed countries in mind. Therefore, introducing ICTs into developing countries results in relatively high adjustment cost.

**(4) Incessant Power Outage and Blackouts:** NITDA (2005) stated that in situation where ICT equipment exist, incessant power outage and blackouts increases both the running and maintenance cost of the equipment.. Energy which is the fulcrum upon which other ICT things revolve. Affirming this point, Bates (2001) also noted that application of the Internet fundamentally depends on stable electricity not epileptic provision, stable telecommunication network and stable human resource capacity to build and maintain these technical infrastructures.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) The underlying fibrotic and the last mile network connections to individual homes and the entire country should be finished. This will offer long distance and local telephone services, Internet services and high speed data transmission (Miller, 2001:24).
- (2) The government should support and sponsor ICT programmes. Big companies in the country like Shell Oil Company, NNPC, Mobil etc should use some of their gains to sponsor the country they are working in Private Internet Service Providers (ISPS) should also be encouraged by the government to establish international gateways. In evangelism, big churches in the cities should support the growing ones.
- (3) The government should provide basic ICT educational foundation in schools, improve physical infrastructures Christian owned schools should ensure that their pupils or students start computer literacy on time.
- (4) Private business in information and technology area grow more robustly in an environment of competition and minimal government intrusion. should allow competitive environment in the Information and Communication sector.
- (5) Government should provide stable electricity and the human resources capacity to build and maintain the ICT infrastructures

### **CONCLUSION**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped immensely in the spread of Christian evangelism. I has enhanced the dissemination of doctrines, communication and has built the faith of Christians. Although, these are good, it should not replace face-to-face evangelism. Attending the communal masses that are being done in the church. Christians should endeavour to fellowship together. The mainline churches should also imitate the Pentecostal in their utilization of ICT tools in the disseminations of the Great Commission.

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