

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND EFFECTIVE EVANGELIZATION OF THE NIGERIAN CHURCH MISSION: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS EVALUATION

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Abstract

This study ventures into socio-religious analysis of the effectiveness of Artificial intelligence towards evangelization in the Nigerian church mission. Both primary and secondary means of data collections were employed in this study. The relevant articulations were delineated strictly on the analysis and synthesis of the gathered data made through phenomenological and culture centered approaches. The computational learning theory was simulated in this study. Findings show that utilization of artificial intelligence for evangelization in Nigeria presents both opportunities and challenges. Thus inasmuch as the use of artificial intelligence for evangelism in Nigeria will enhance outreach by reaching a wider audience via digital platforms, customized messaging, efficient dissemination of religious teachings including easy acquisition of cultural peculiarities of each given mission station: Extreme caution should be expressed in adopting artificial intelligence powered evangelism towards respecting cultural perceptivities along with ensuring that its missionary expertise is culturally appropriate, and also eschewing from complete dependence on artificial intelligence in order to continually give missionary enterprise a genuine human engagement, connection and personal touch in the Nigerian church missionary fields. This study submits that utilization of Artificial intelligence for evangelization in Nigerian church missions wields the potential to be a valuable mechanism in reaching a broader audience as well as ministering to individuals in meaningful ways. However, pertinent ethical, social and religious implications should be conceived as that will enforce the effective leverage of integrating Artificial intelligence to boost missionary expertise in Nigeria while tolerating in addition to appreciating the cultural norms, values including beliefs of the local population.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Effective, Evangelization, Mission, Socio-Religious, Church, Evaluation.

Introduction

Copeland (2024) underscores that Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the capability of a machine to undertake tasks generally perceived to entail human rationality and intelligence. He stressed that general operations of AI include game playing, language translation, expert systems, and robotics. Copeland enlightens that while the notion of machines imitating intelligence dates back to the ancient past, the advent of authentic intelligence in machines was only possible with the evolution of digital computers in the 1940's. The author streamlines that AI has evolved to the point that the initial AI projects via playing chess and solving mathematical problems, are now considered quite plain compared to the more complex tasks of AI in recent times like visual pattern recognition, complex decision making, and the use of natural language.

Sequel to Copeland's elucidations, Anyoha (2017) and Roser (2022) remark that human kind now lives in the age of complex and cumbersome data available for analysis. They posit that mankind is faced on steady basis with huge sums of information too ponderous for persons and even groups to process. The application of Artificial Intelligence in this regard has already proved efficient in several corporate institutions and facilities like technology, banking, marketing, and the entertainment world. Artificial Intelligence thus is everywhere. It has actually come to stay with multidimensional future prospects. E.I Ozor and T.O. Okonta (personal communication, January 12th, 2024) assert that if Jesus Christ were to come to save mankind in this age, He might not ride into Jerusalem in an Ass again. He will have to make use of the available cheapest means of transportation to still signify humility and prudence. Truth remains that mankind ought to make use of scientific innovations of which God is the one that endows human kind with such creative capacity and inspiration. The Holy Spirit always ministers to human kind from the known to the unknown. He utilizes things available to man while instructing him.

It will be good that church missionary enterprise in contemporary times especially in Nigeria, should integrate the capabilities and services of Artificial Intelligence in evangelization. Although Lynch (2013) cautions that human contact which is exemplified in one-to-one encounter is extremely important and irreplaceable in the church missions. He stresses that even Jesus Christ maintained more of person to person contact in his ministry. Jesus actually trained his 12 Apostles via personal contact; none was operating from afar. Lynch insists that dependence on new technologies can strip that from the church missions. He emphasizes that the question of how the church can integrate new technologies in the furtherance of her mission ought to be a secondary one. Thus, there is need for sitting new technologies in order to retain and prioritize on good innovations. The author advises that no technical progress can replace nor outdate the level of

relationship built by Jesus' kind of communication that hinged on singular, specific, and personal love for His disciples. Lynch further exposit that church missionaries must embrace man's limitation in their endeavours in order to avert the quest to reach out to a wider audience or congregation thereby dispersing in activity and bearing little fruit in the process. It is actually within the limitations of nature that church missionaries can experience the fulfillment and beauty of their vocation. Capturing Lynch (2013) concluding remarks, it states:

The church exists because people are wounded. Her goal is not just to proclaim the Good News efficiently, and then move on to do something else, but physically to be the Body of Christ. All of Christian life rests within the experience of the sacraments, the liturgy, the communion of the church, and the mystery of God's time. Wounds take time to heal, and often a doctor cannot speed up their healing. He must be willing to wait, to consider each person as completely unique, completely worthy of his entire attention. He must not rush from patient to patient, in an attempt to care for great numbers, to the detriment of the quality of the care itself. In his just desire to do more good, he must not end up considering his patients simply as problems and not as people. (p. 2).

Be that as it may, Lynch's advice should be put in perspective. However, it is not enough to discourage the use of AI for evangelism especially in Nigeria since the world's system is geared towards that direction. Besides, there is nothing sinister regarding AI. AI has equally proved its value in other human institutions as will be portrayed in this study.

Scientific cum technological advancement facilitated the evolution of AI. In the face of Lynch's advice, some authors had lent their voice towards technological and scientific gadgets associated with the integration of AI in the church evangelical missions. Tithely (2018) insists that technology enables the mission of the church in expanded reach; intelligent decision-making; radical collaboration; and in mobilized and equipped congregation. Ugboh (2023) adds that the church should embrace technological innovation since it is open-ended; it is ubiquitous; it is not limited to a single aspect of any system; there is no limit to its occurrence; it is not an end by itself; it is a means to an end; it cannot stand in isolation from other factors that supports it; and for the fact that it wields an alchemic mode of competing with some external factors which can sustain it or obstruct it. He streamlines that what the church requires are creative leaders; creative agents of change; enabling environment along with other human entities who are creative enough to respond appropriately to it and foster sound change.

Hendriks et al (2022) note that digital science and technology has become an effective method in attaining church's mission despite the contemporary situation of the world since the Covid-19 pandemic of 2019 and 2020. Diaz (2021) and Opade (2023) encourage

the integration of digital technology in evangelization since it has made series of improvements on conventional religious practices whenever employed in an ethically sound mode. They equally reflect that the integration of digital technology in Christian religious education can serve evangelization once it incorporates the meditative practice of prophetic dialogue.

In response to the pervading discuss on AI and church evangelization, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) (2019) affirm that the development of AI is a demonstration of the unique creative abilities of human beings. Once AI is employed in accordance with God's moral will, it portrays man's obedience to the divine command of steward creation and in honour of God Himself. They declare that Mankind should develop and harness technology in ways that lead to greater flourishing and the alleviation of human sufferings which ratifies his God-given creative nature. They conclude that AI should not be appropriated for the satiation of whims and caprices as well as in ways that devalues or degrades the dignity and worth of another human being.

Sequel to the above reflections, the integration of AI in the Nigerian evangelical mission raises the following inquiries; will the use of AI engage cultural values with respect? Can the churches in Nigeria appropriate it with dignity and sound morality? Will it reduce the gospel message to mere stereotypes bereft of the demonstration of God's power? Can the churches in Nigeria meet both its capable human intensive cum capitals demands? Adopting the Computational Learning Theory, this study attempts a socio-religious evaluation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its effectiveness in evangelization in the Nigerian church missions. Primary and secondary means of data collections were patronized herein. Both the phenomenological and culture centred approaches were qualitatively utilized in analyzing the collected data.

Comprehending Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The definitions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as posited by some scholars will be reflected herein to accord vivid conception of what AI entails. Marsden (2017) borrowing and adapting from various scholars' definitions he examined, defined AI as "Technology that behaves intelligently using skills associated with human intelligence, including the ability to perceive, learn, reason and act autonomously" (p. 1). Thus, it is a collection of scientific and technological inclined devices that authorizes computers to conceive independently.

Marr (2018) intimates that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a term coined by John McCarthy in 1956 at a summer workshop he referred to as Dark-mouth summer research project on Artificial Intelligence. This workshop was actually organized by John McCarthy with the

purpose of discussing what will ultimately become the field and AI specifies as Marr affirms. Owing to the fact that up to that point, the concepts surrounding “thinking machines” were still divergent; the researchers summoned by John McCarthy rallied together to clarify and develop concepts pertinent to “Thinking machines”. Marr exclaims that McCarthy chose the name Artificial Intelligence because of its neutrality in order to avoid punctuating one of the leads being pursued at the time for the field of “thinking machines” which includes cybernetics, automation theory and complex information processing. Marr’s deliberations posit the essence of AI as computer systems that utilizes human reasoning as a guide to proffer superior services or actualize exceptional products other than trying to achieve a perfect replica of the human rationality and mindset. Thus, human reasoning is adopted as a model in the evolution of AI but not actually the ultimate target.

Saleh (2019) maintains that AI stands in contrast to the actual intelligence expressed by humans; it is intelligence demonstrated by machines as opposed to that of human kind and other animals. He stresses that since Robotics is the field tasked with the connection of perception to action, AI then ought to wield a pivotal role in Robotics for the connection to be intelligent. Saleh equally expatiates that AI tackles fundamental inquiries such as what information is necessary for various cognitive tasks, how should that information be structured, and how should it be applied. Robotics pushes the boundaries of AI by requiring it to interact with tangible objects in the physical environment. Thus, AI explores what knowledge is needed for thinking, how to represent it, and how to utilize it, while robotics tests AI by involving real-world object interaction.

Sheikh et al (2023) intimate that AI has no general acceptable definition. However, after evaluating various definitions by specified scholars, he concludes that the definition from the AI KLEG provides the necessary freedom of scope. He thus posits their definition as “systems that display intelligent behaviour by analyzing their environment and taking actions-with some degree of autonomy to achieve specific goals” (p. 2). This definition encompasses all the currently recognizable AI applications while allowing for potential changes in what mankind will consider becoming of AI in the future.

Duggai (2024) indicates that an Artificial Intelligence program is a program that is capable of conceiving and thinking. He streamlines that it is possible to consider anything to be AI once it consists of a program that performs a task that is meant for humans. He delineates that there are three types of AI.

- Weak AI: This focuses on a specific application and operation. It does not perform beyond its limitations.

- Strong AI: This can conceive and appropriate any intellectual task that a human being can. Researchers are still aiming to attain and actualize this.
- Super AI: This one is still a concept in perspective. It surpasses human intelligence and can perform any task better than a human.

In all, Artificial Intelligence is the science of making machines perform tasks that would require intelligence if done by men. These machines carry out tasks in consonance with in-depth study of the environment of each given and specified field of operation.

The positive Impacts of Artificial Intelligence to the human society

Artificial Intelligence benefits the human society in various ways. From the works of Oza (2021), Maheshwari (2023), the Marvelous World of OGI (2023) and Duggai (2024), the positive impacts of AI in the human society are as follows:

- *AI in healthcare facilities:*
AI has revolutionized the healthcare sector in recent times pertinent to the gleg utilization of AI powered diagnostic tools, like machine learning algorithms; have demonstrated the ability to analyze vast data sets; and enabling faster and more accurate disease detection. AI for instance has proven instrumental in early cancer detection, analyzing images, and even predicting patient outcomes based on historical data. Furthermore, AI-driven surgeries and telemedicine platforms powered by AI technologies are revolutionizing healthcare by enabling precise, minimally invasive surgeries and expanding access to health care services for remote and underserved populations. This democratization of healthcare has the potential to reduce disparities and enhance global health outcomes.
- *AI in academic discipline:*
AI has ushered in a new age of personalized learning in education. Intelligent tutoring systems can adapt-coursework to most individuals learning capacity and ability; considering their weaknesses and discovering easiest way for enhancing and improving their conception. Additionally, AI streamlines administrative tasks in education, enabling educators to focus more on teaching. In utilizing machine learning algorithms, AI can pin-point at-risk students for timely interventions; ultimately decreasing dropout rates. Moreover, AI-powered content creation tools automate the production of educational materials; enhancing accessibility of quality education. Various AI platforms assist students to summarise articles for faster and easy conception.

- *AI in the labour market:*

AI has facilitated profound transformation in the labour market as perceived in the AI-driven recruitment platforms that delineate hiring processes, matching applicants and candidates with roles more efficient and suitable for them. Chatbots handle routine HR inquiries, freeing human resources professionals to focus on strategic tasks. Automation creates new opportunities in AI development, data science, and robotics. AI-powered data analytics drive informed decision-making in business, leading to increased productivity and competitiveness.

- *AI in arts and creativity:*

The creative capabilities of AI are blooming on borderlines. AI-generated art, music, and literature are furthering the horizons of human creativity. Algorithms can compose music, generate visual art, and even write new articles.

- *AI in church missions:*

Well programmed AI in church missionary enterprise can easily prepare sermons of any length both audio and written. AI can easily detect potential threats at mission target locations. AI can also easily detect and ascertain within the mission focus zone, areas with people that are susceptible to the gospel message in order to first prioritize evangelization therein. This will afford missionaries the opportunity of training leaders that will help them in evangelization to other areas within the zone yet unreached with the gospel. AI can equally be programmed to easily detect aspects of a given mission target area culture that can serve as a window to chip in gospel messages.

General positive impacts of AI in human society:

- i. It reduces human error. Once AI-enabled computers are programmed correctly, it makes zero errors. Oza (2021) and Maheshwari (2023) indicate that AI models are based on predictive analysis, thus it leaves no scope for errors.
- ii. It helps to save both time and resources along with achieving accurate and efficient results. Employers get time to focus on tasks that specifically require human abilities.
- iii. It aids fast decision making, thereby conserves time. AI assists in gathering reliable and valuable insights at a much faster pace; saving lots of time in the process.
- iv. AI offers full-time availability. AI systems according to Maheshwari (2023) are programmed to work for longer hours and can handle repetitive and monotonous

tasks easily. AI based systems are productive all the time, available 24/7 and can be accessed whenever required at any given time.

- v. According to Duggai (2024) human beings are driven by emotions, AI on the other hand, is devoid of emotions and highly practical along with being rational in its approach. This equally aids AI in offering unbiased decisions which ensures more accurate decision making.
- vi. AI saves human kind from undertaking unnecessary risky jobs that places them on harm's way. AI robots undertake perilous tasks on man's behalf. Duggai (2024) notes that it can be utilized effectively in any type of natural or man-made calamity, whether it be going to mars, defusing a bomb, exploring the deepest regions of the oceans, or mining for coal and oil

The Ethical and Societal Consequences of Artificial Intelligence

While AI becomes more pervasive, concerns about its ethical and social impact intensify. Issues such as safeguarding data privacy, addressing bias in AI systems, and preventing AI from widening societal inequalities are increasingly prominent. Discussions revolve around the ethical implications of AI in various domains like surveillance, weaponry, and law enforcement.

Additionally, the emergence of AI generated content like, deep fakes, raises doubts about the authenticity of digital information. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive ethical guidelines and regulations frameworks to ensure the responsible and fair deployment of AI technologies. Besides, integrating ethics and moral principles into AI systems poses significant challenges, raises concerns about the potential for unchecked AI advancement, leading to existential threats such as the AI singularity.

Further negative challenges of AI to the human society as Duggai (2024) collated are as follows:

1. *Limited Adaptability*: Unlike human intelligence, AI systems are constrained by their programmed parameters and struggle to adapt or improve without manual intervention, hindering their flexibility and ability to address new challenges effectively. These limitations can lead to failures or inadequate outcomes when faced with tasks beyond their programming; or the unexpected and emergencies that demands alternative options.
2. *Costly Development*: Creating AI systems that mimic human intelligence demand excessive cum extensive resources and investment due to the need for cutting-edge hardware and software, resulting in significant financial burdens.

3. *Job Displacement:* Automation facilitated by AI, particularly through robotics, can lead to unemployment as machines replace human labour in various industries; although it may also generate new job opportunities in some cases.
4. *Lack of Emotional Intelligence:* Inasmuch as AI can excel in specific tasks, it lacks the emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills inherent in human interaction, limiting its ability to effectively collaborate and function within teams or groups.
5. *Lack of Innovation:* Despite the ability to learn from data and experiences, AI struggle with originality and creativity; often relying on pre-fed information and past patterns rather than thinking outside the box.
6. *Dependency and Laziness:* The automation of mundane tasks by AI can foster a reliance on technology, potentially diminishing the need for human cognitive engagement and problem-solving skills: Thus, leading to complacency and reduced mental activity.

The shortcomings of AI as expatiated above signals to the fact that human kind should not completely depend on Artificial Intelligence, especially in evangelization particularly within church missions in Nigeria. Mankind must always fill-in-the-gaps and equally takes the lead in all human endeavours, particularly in missionary enterprise. AI should always serve as aids and helping hands.

Empirical Studies

Para-Mallam (2019), Adibe (2022), Zengarini (2023) and Chandler (2023) underscore that the future of the church in Nigeria is at stake because of persecutions especially by Islamic extremists and Jihadist's. They record that over 50,000 Christians have been killed in Nigeria since the outbreak of the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency in 2009. The authors intimate that particularly in rural areas in the Northern parts of Nigeria, Christians are being killed and dispossessed of their ancestral homes and farmlands. Their homes are being burnt and many have been internally displaced or takes refuge in neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Others are in captivity and slavery. They reflect that the case of 15 years old Leah Sharibu is paramount as her refusal to deny Christ and convert to Islam cost her freedom, exposing her to the threat to make her a slave for life in captivity, by the Islamic Jihad in West Africa (ISWAP).

Thus, despite the vibrancy of evangelization in Nigeria that made the church in Nigeria to be remarked as wielding the most dynamic evangelical and missionary movements in Africa and the world at large: Nigeria equally had been delisted from the countries with unengaged unreached people's group (UUPGS) as Para-Mallam (2019) records. The future of the church in Nigeria is still at stake as a result of such persecution as

highlighted. The Artificial Intelligence expertise can efficiently be integrated in evangelization in the Northern parts of Nigeria to reduce the risk of death and kidnapping faced by Christian missionaries in the area.

Gunter (1991) asserts that if one takes missions out of the Bible, the bible will simply be left with only its covers. This signifies that missionary work is paramount and pristine in the bible. Mission is the heart-beat of God. The church in Nigeria ought to employ all within the capacity of mankind including Artificial Intelligence in engaging in core missionary enterprise within her regions, especially the areas facing Christian persecutions. Little wonder Kalu (2012) declares that Nigeria at 52 urgently needs a scientific and technological revolution. This will facilitate development, growth and progress in both the socio-religious, socio-economic as well as the socio-political terrains of Nigeria.

Konye (2024) outlines that ecumenical strives towards Christian unity in Nigeria had made remarkable progress. However, there is still need to maintain the already-achieved progress in addition to countering further divisions and engendering livelier ecumenical hope for Christian unity in Nigeria. The concerted efforts of human evangelical expertise cum AI Church Missionary adapted or inclined Robotics will facilitate and enhance ecumenical stronghold among Christian Faithfull's in Nigeria. As AI searches common grounds that might be ignored or taken for granted by mankind, such common grounds like same focus on nation building and Islamic Jihadist's persecution of Christians along with sickening feeling and shame of incessant bickering among people that confess one faith, one Lord and one Baptism; ecumenical vision pertinent to Christian denomination's unity in Nigeria can easily be actualized.

Fagunwa (2015) reckons that Christians in Nigeria reads online spiritual books frequently thus he underscores that technology in itself is neutral and should be encouraged in a SMART way for the growth of the church. Artificial Intelligence in the Nigeria's church missionary space will enhance the massive production of online easy to read Christian spiritual cum devotional books that can reach a wider audience within the Nigerian local communities. I. Egbuonu and O.S. Okonkwo (personal communication, April 2nd, 2024) lament that factors militating against better and wider use of AI in Nigerian church missions includes, although not limited to, poor infrastructure; lack of information and communication technology cum computer literacy; lack of trained human resources; the high cost of AI facilities and the illiteracy level of most church congregants.

George (2023) reports that the Pan African Episcopal Committee for social communications, an organization in the catholic church at the press conference to herald the 50th anniversary of CEPACS at Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos Island, Nigeria, states

that Artificial Intelligence and social media have disrupted the mode of evangelism by the church; hence the church ought to align with the new order, ensuring the love of Jesus Christ is preached to the world through the new media. Recently according to E. Ekeh, I. Ibeh and I. Meludu (personal communication, April, 2024) the Dioceses of Nnewi and Mbamili Anglican Communion in Anambra State, Nigeria, adopted respectively the “vicilook technology” that provides the public with digital information and access of only verified church priests and church branches around the globe. This is commendable as the vicilook Qrcodes connects one to all the church branches, church missionary institutions and ventures of a peculiar diocese, by simply scanning the Qrcodes on the Banner click on vicilooks.com/wgm to see all their verified priests, and click on vicilook.com/IQ5 to see all their parishes and institutions. This tech substitutes the popular church directory and lectionary booklet and also gives anyone around the globe online open access to any verified missionary priest attached to a verified church as well as helps anyone to find, verify and connect with their home town church or any church parish or branch on the globe.

The contemporary state of affairs regarding the integration of AI robotics in the various institutional and industrial services posits that without incorporating Artificial Intelligence into church missionary work in Nigeria, there may be challenges like inefficient resource allocation; difficulty in reaching specific demographics; and limitations in expanding outreach efforts. AI could enhance data analysis for targeted outreach, streamline communication with diverse communities, and optimize resource distribution for more effective church missions in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning

The theory most suitable for this study is the computational learning theory. This study adopts it because it is the mathematical framework for quantifying learning tasks and algorithms pertinent in the programming of Artificial Intelligence. It actually encapsulates a profound essence, constituting a cornerstone in the domain of AI. Brownlee (2020) attests that computational learning theory, or statistical learning theory or COLT for short, is a field of study concerned with the use of formal mathematical methods applied to learning systems. Brownlee intimates that it seeks to use the tools of theoretical computer science to quantify learning problems. This includes characterizing the difficulty of learning specific tasks. The author posits that computational learning theory is like the analytical extension or relation of statistical learning theory (SLT). It employs formal technique to measure and assess the effectiveness of learning algorithms.

Angluin (1992) and Brownlee (2020) stresses that in computational learning theory, the emphasis often lies on supervised learning, particularly binary classification tasks and

simple rule-based systems. However, applying theoretical findings to real-world algorithms and problems can be challenging due to the complexity involved; thereby limiting the practical application and interpretation of the theorems. Lark Editorial Team (2023) elucidate that computational learning theory is the foundational framework within AI that explores how machines learn from data, develop algorithms, and make decisions. They establish that it is crucial for enhancing knowledge acquisition and decision-making abilities in AI systems, thus serving as the bedrock for various advanced technologies.

Lark Editorial Team (2023) delineates that computational learning theory originated alongside early AI research, coinciding with the development of neural networks and pattern recognition theories. The history of this concept is entwined with pioneering figures such as Ray Solomonoff, Emile Borel, and Andrey Kolmogorov, who laid down the fundamental principles governing the acquisition of knowledge by machines as the authors aver. They equally declare that the computational learning theory has evolved with computing power, algorithms, and data accessibility, making it highly relevant in contemporary AI specifics. Lark Editorial Team streamline that computational learning theory is a fundamental aspect of AI, empowering learning algorithms, predictive modeling, and autonomous decision-making. They sum up that the pivotal significance of this theory within the AI domain is underscored by its crucial role in various applications like recommendation systems, natural language processing, and computer vision, thereby revolutionizing technological capabilities.

Computational learning theory is applicable to this study because it can support the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in evangelization within the Nigerian church mission by providing insights into how AI algorithms can be trained to understand and interpret religious texts, cultural nuances, and local languages. This understanding can aid in developing AI-powered tools such as chat-bots or recommendation systems tailored to effectively communicate religious teachings and messages to diverse Nigerian communities. Additionally, computational learning theory can assist in optimizing the performance of these AI systems through continuous learning and adaption based on user interactions and feedback, enhancing their effectiveness in spreading the message of the church. The paramount task should be that the church in Nigeria should seek and employ the services of specialists in scientific and technological algorithm and Robotics specifics to pilot the affairs in these ventures. If human capacity is lacking in that area, willing individuals should be trained in AI specifics for church missions in Nigeria. Every element of bias and idiosyncrasies must be eschewed. The focus should be on actualizing down to earth evangelization championed with the concerted efforts of both human and Artificial Intelligence.

Socio-Religious Evaluation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a means for Effective Evangelism in the Global Church Mission

Various scholars around the global had lent their voices on religious or ethical cum socially sound mode of integrating AI into evangelism. This study will attempt to patronize the works of the few scholars that their suggestions is pertinent to the Nigerian situation before drawing a final analysis on that issue at hand. Musonda (2023) reckons that there are six healthy ways to use AI for evangelism and they include, using chat GPT to repurpose sermons; using AI to generate images to capture audience during sermons; using AI to create captivating social media posts; using AI to write newsletters for church members; using AI in writing blog articles for church website; along with using AI to create contents in multiple languages thereby cutting across races and reaching a wider audience. Musonda sums up by exposing that to ensure that AI is used ethically, it is essential to respect the privacy and autonomy of those being evangelized and to avoid any strategies that could be perceived as invasive or manipulative like in a country like Nigeria with multifaceted tribes, languages, cultures in addition to diverse religious groups. He adds that once AI is programmed, trained, designed and tested adequately, it can never be biased or flawed. Hence there is need to ensure that the data and algorithms used are accurate and unbiased: This equally facilitates the smooth, trustworthy and reliable operation of AI. Musonda expresses that there is no inherent reason for a Christian not to utilize AI. He declares that AI can be a highly effective medium of reaching people with the gospel message especially in the contemporary digital age. It is obvious that any Christian church that has used Youtube, Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms had actually used AI. AI should simply be used in ways that align to biblical values and principles. Adequate caution should be taken to avoid using it in ways that could harm others or violate their privacy.

Musonda (2023) avers that AI can potentially revolutionize many aspects of man's life including the church missionary work since AI is becoming more and more prevalent in the human society. He insists that AI powered chat-bots can assist in answering questions about Christianity, providing biblical references as well as engaging in conversations about faith. Musonda analyzes that AI makes it easy to evangelize localities of significant population. This is realised by analyzing data from social media platforms and surveys to understand the audience's struggle and challenges. Armed with such information, AI can aid in crafting relevant messages tailored to the audience's needs. Nothing captures an average Nigerian audience as ministering directly to their needs, passions and areas of weaknesses. He however still emphasizes that while AI can assist in providing information and resources, it cannot replace inspiration that comes from God.

God kulture Team (2023) add that AI can assist in evangelism via the repurposition of sermons. They maintain that in the contemporary fast-paced world, not everyone engages with the church's YouTube sermons. Mankind's attention spans have shortened, making it challenging for people to invest time in lengthy content. They reflect that leveraging AI allows the church to effectively condense and repurpose sermons for various platforms. The church can convert them into text for blogs or create bite-sized social media posts, thereby opening up numerous possibilities. This is quite relevant in the Nigerian situation where everyone is agog with social media content creation cum news blogging.

La Cruz et al (2024) finalize that evangelical and Pentecostal cum Charismatic Churches (EPCCS) employ advanced AI tools to improve the sanctification process for believers; in translating the Bible, distributing and fostering its reading around the world; and the spreading of spiritual revival among EPCCS through mediated algorithms. They express that there are clear future positive prospects pertinent to the integration of AI in the church missionary enterprise.

Socio-Religious Considerations in Integrating Artificial Intelligence into the Nigerian Church Mission

In the light of the deliberations of this study hitherto, the social and religions consideration to be taken into account in incorporating artificial intelligence for effective evangelization in the Nigerian church missions because of the peculiarity of the Nigerian state are as follows:

- *Cultural Awareness cum competency*: It is crucial to guarantee that adoption of AI in evangelism regards the cultural norms, principles and customs of the Nigerian people. Messages delivered through AI should be culturally sensitive and respectful to avoid causing chaos, offence or misunderstanding. Bearing in mind that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, tribal, cultural and language nation.
- *Religious tolerance and inclusivity*: In using AI for evangelism in Nigeria, it is important to ensure that the messages are aligned with Christian teachings and believes to effectively reach and engage with the target audience. This should equally be appropriated devoid of any abusive or insolent remarks to other religious groups' faith. Moreso, the acceptance of AI in evangelism may vary among different Christian denominations; hence, there should be an ecumenical public enlightenment campaign on the values and importance of AI for effective evangelization in the Nigerian church mission in order to facilitate general acceptance.

- *Ethical/moral considerations:* Churches must ensure that while using AI for evangelism, the AI content being shared should be truthful, accurate, respectful and culturally sensitive. Data privacy ought to be maintained. Individuals or groups should not be potentially manipulated through targeted messaging. Churches should establish ethical guidelines and ensure transparency in their use of AI for evangelism to maintain trust and credibility.
- *Community engagement and civic participation:* Churches must ensure that AI messages are tailored to promote peace, unity and solidarity in the Nigerian state. Messages spread via AI evangelical expertise should encourage and spur citizens of Nigeria to be deeply involved in the art of nation building. It should equally enlighten citizens on civic responsibilities. It is equally essential to involve local communities in the design and implementation of AI-driven evangelism initiative to ensure relevance and effectiveness. On no account should AI message be directed towards sponsoring a parallel government or insubordination to the ruling class and the government.
- *Efficacy, impacts cum outcomes:* Ultimately, the effectiveness of utilizing AI for evangelization in Nigeria will depend on various factors, including the quality of the content, the engagement of the target audience, and the alignment of AI tools with the values and beliefs of the community. Churches that leverage AI for evangelization should continuously evaluate and adopt their strategies to ensure that they are making positive impacts and fostering meaningful connections with their target audience.
- *General literacy level and exposure:* The literacy level of target audience for AI-powered evangelization in Nigeria ought to be considered. Not everyone can conceive the AI specifics. Individuals that are uneducated and unexposed may treat AI-powered missionary exploits with levity, disdain and ambivalence.
- *Availability of capitals:* Programming AI for missionary work is a capital-intensive venture. This should be considered bearing in mind the economic conditions of Nigeria. It may end up becoming an unfinished project after its inception owing to lack of capitals for continuation unto completion.
- *Humanity and empathic touch:* Care should be taken to ensure that the work of evangelism is not left entirely at the hands of machines. Mankind should always lead in the evangelical work to maintain the tactical and systematic touch involved in counseling. AI has no soul thus is without feelings, sensation or emotions. The gospel message should not be reduced to empty stereotypes.

Conclusion

The world has evolved. Artificial intelligence and its specifics has equally evolved. The contemporary world and the inhabitants are AI natives. Any institution, facility or individual that abhors AI will definitely lose out.

Christians should endeavour to remark that the brain behind AI is human intelligence. The creator of mankind is God. Human intelligence is equally reinforced and evoked by God Himself. There is no evil in integrating the services of AI in church missionary work. It will only facilitate evangelical expertise.

Everything created by God wields their various weaknesses resulting or originating from the created order, not to mention Artificial intelligence that is Robotics and man's brain child. Care should be taken that the gospel message should not be bereft of human cum spiritual touch in the process of incorporating AI in missionary strides. Moreover, the work of evangelism should not be championed by AI. Man-kind should always be at the helm of affairs; maintaining steady connection to God as well as exerting empathy towards the target mission audience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations in view of the renumeration of this study are hereby proffered.

1. Nigerian youngsters should rise up to the challenge of understudying courses pertinent to Artificial Intelligence Robotics and Algorithms. This should create enough personnel employable to program Artificial Intelligence and its specifics in the country.
2. Every church that integrates Artificial Intelligence in their church missionary work should be accountable for its shortcomings. This should make those churches to leave no stone unturned in the programming of their AI Robotics perfectly.
3. Nigerian government should capitalize on furnishing the federal universities in the country with the necessary equipment and tools for Artificial Intelligence Robotics and Algorithms studies.
4. Workshops and seminars to create awareness and educate church leaders about the potential of AI in enhancing church missions along with reaching wider audience should be organized by those at the helm of authorities of Christian Association of Nigeria.
5. Churches in Nigeria should foster partnerships with AI organizations to develop tailored ideas of spreading the gospel, such as AI-powered chat-bots for

answering spiritual questions or AI-driven content recommendation systems for personalized outreach.

6. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should establish ethical guidelines for the use of AI in religious contexts to ensure that its deployment aligns with the values and principles of the church.
7. Church denominations in Nigeria should offer training programs for clergy and volunteers on how to effectively utilize AI tools in their outreach efforts.
8. The Nigerian government as a matter of urgency should make education free to at least the high secondary school level. This will improve the literacy level in Nigeria so that greater percentage of the citizens can cope with the AI specifics.

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