

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE CHURCHES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Karbon Philip Benjamin, PhD

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo

karbon01@yahoo.com

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Naira Danladi

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo

karbon01@yahoo.com

&

Johnson Simon Hensu

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo

karbon01@yahoo.com

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Abstract

In the 18th to 20th centuries, the use of Information and Communication Technology was less relevant to the Churches because of their low level of education, interaction, and integration, and fewer worshippers in the Churches. This paper examined Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its Relevance for the Churches in 21st Century and evaluates the history of ICT usage in Churches. The researchers employed a descriptive survey for data collection in the course of this work. The researchers discovered that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its Relevance for the Churches in the 21st Century is very important and that the Church organization that does not make use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) remained stagnated in growth and development. Many Churches that were established not a decade ago, with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have spread to many countries. Therefore, this paper recommended that Churches should make use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their Churches for faster growth and spread of the gospel, and the paper ended with a conclusion.

Keywords: Information, Communication, Technology

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology is a great tool in powering the message of the Lord in our individuals' churches, and denominations, and in spreading the gospels of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ to the different parts of the world. The truth cannot be denied; advancement in technology has given Christianity a right to be heard and to reach the world extensively. Yet some Churches in Nigeria are yet to enjoy its benefits or its relevance.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a force that has changed many aspects of the way we live. If one were to compare such fields as medicine, tourism, travel business, law, banking, engineering, and architecture, the impact of ICT across the past two or three decades has been enormous. The way these fields operate today is vastly different from the ways they operated in the past. But when we look at church, there seems

to have been an unseal lack of influence and less change than other fields have experienced. Several people have attempted to explore this lack of activity and influence.

There have been several factors impeding the wholesale uptake of ICT in Churches across all sectors. These have included such factors as a lack of funding to support the purchase of the technology, a lack of training among established teaching practitioners, and a lack of motivation and need among Pastors to adopt ICT as preaching and teaching tools. But in recent times, factors have emerged which have strengthened and encouraged moves to adopt ICTs into churches and learning settings, these have included a growing need to explore efficiencies in terms of program delivery: the opportunities for flexible delivery provided by ICTs, the capacity of technology to provide support for customized church programs to meet the needs of individual and the growing use of the internet and World Wide Web (www) as tools for information access and communication.

As we move into the 21st century, these factors and many others are bringing strong forces to bear on the adoption of ICTs in Churches and contemporary trends suggest we will soon see large seal changes in the way sermons, evangelism, and mission activities are planned and delivered as a consequence of the opportunities and affordances of ICT. This article seeks to explore the likely changes we will seek in Churches as ICT acts as a powerful agent to change many of the Church practices to which we have become accustomed. Information and Communication Technology will be likely to have in coming years what is learned, when and where learning will take place in the Churches, and how learning will occur.

History of ICT Usage In Church

The word church means assembly. The Greek word ‘*Ekklesia*’ refers to any assembly or local bodies of believers. The church is a covenant community whose members are responsible for edifying one another. The church is meant to set the right pace for everything, including the use of technology for God’s divine purpose. More so, information sharing is the vehicle to fulfilling the church mandate of propagating the gospel, and to be effective in the dissemination of information requires the knowledge and resources available for the job to be done. Before the hubbub of 21st-century technology, church ministry was well managed with a strategy of a Pastor-Member relationship. Church leaders used the pulpit, accurately in effectively relating with, managing, and leading their congregation, churches had fewer congregations to speak to and manage. But today, with many congregations, there have been radical changes in the above strategy due to the unprecedented impact of ICT. New technologies are not only changing our way of communicating but are a pedestal to living through a period of vast transformation. In the last two decades, there has been adoption of ICT in contemporary churches communication for growth with varying levels of adoption across countries and church groups. Bolu, (2012, p.80) The activities and management of the church in this new age of globalization are so huge and important for the church to take a close look of happening around with the lens of fulfilling the great commission. The church cannot pretend to wait to see the outcome before steps are taken to get on board since the sharing of information is vital to its expansion. Rev. Exodus M. Adi once said, “We are called to use science and technology fully and constructively, while recognizing that the findings of science always have to be evaluated in the light of the centrality of the human person, of the common good and the inner purpose of creation.” Exodus, (2022)

However, a discourse on the usage of ICT in the Church seems inexhaustible due to the dynamic trends in technology that arise daily because the usage of ICT in the Church is somewhat wide. Some of the areas where ICT can be practically seen are:

- 1. Church Branding:** The concept of branding is the use of distinctive means to make customers associate a specific product with a specific company or manufacturer. Today, church ministry has evolved into a brand. This in the most scintillating manner, was made possible via technology especially Internet Technology which comprises social media e.g. Facebook, Google Plus, Skype; email e.g. Yahoo mail, Google mail; Internet/Satellite/Local Television Ministries via YouTube, Podcasts. Imagbenikaro, (2023)
- 2. Church Service:** Modern technology has emerged to enhance the worship experience of the congregation in the celebration of the church service. Media telecasting equipment is being used in Churches now. A viable example is that of Living Faith, Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (RCCN), Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), Deeper Christians Life Ministry, and Reformed Church of God (RCG). Churches that make use of Projectors and digital Sound Recording systems. In addition, Projectors, and Recording equipment, LCD Digital Podiums/Pulpits are been used today in most Churches in Nigeria which enhances the Pastor's preaching and Teachings. Modern musical instruments built with top-notch technology, and modern beautiful, and electrifying lighting systems whose ambiance can make a sorrowful soul suddenly smile, now abound in churches and worship centers all over the world.

Effect and Relevance of ICT in Society and Church

Effect of ICT

As human beings, we are always connected with a lot of essential things in our everyday life. With the use of ICT gadgets like computers and projectors in our lifestyle, many time-consuming calculations and touch tasks have become easier, and social contacts have increased. ICT has affected lives by improving the timely distribution of information through the media and improved communications in homes and workplaces through social networks, email, etc. ICT has greatly enhanced the quality of human life. For example, a letter could take days to reach the receiver but an e-mail reaches instantly. Information and Communication Technology has affected life through the use of Facebook, podcasts, and TV stations. ICT affects various fields of daily life some of which are discussed below.

ICT is Information Communication Technology. It has an essential role in modifying, and modernizing present-day's learning and educational systems. ICT is another technology that helps people to get access to information.

It focuses on communication that includes wireless networks, the internet, as well as communication mediums. The market is filled with a wide range of ICT tools that include the computing industry, electronic display, and telecommunications. ICT impacts our lives in positive and negative ways. Let us know more about these effects in detail.

Positive Effects of ICT

- 1. Quick and Easy Access to Information:** The major benefit of ICT to people is the

increased access to services, church activities, and information that has accompanied the progress of the internet. ICT provides quick access to affordable and better means of communication in the form of Instant Messaging, VoIP (voice over internet protocol-computer) telephone, and handset phones. It brings exciting ways to indulge in entertainment, and leisure, build contacts, make relations, and procure services, and goods from supplies, as well as evangelism.

This technology assists in enhancing access to the church, in the form of online services, and distance watching. Jirapye, (2021) People get to enjoy newer modes of learning as virtual reality, and interactive multi-media. Mobile working, flexible work schedules, virtual offices, etc. help people to enjoy improved job opportunities in the communications area. Bosamia, (2023)

- 1. Offer New Tools and New Opportunities:** The second important impact of Information Communication Technology is that it provides access to a wide range of new tools that have not existed before.

ICT provides a distinctive and highly innovative set of tools and processes in the area of photography. The use of photo-editing software, high-quality printers, and digital cameras enables people to yield impressive outcomes. In this way, these technologies have replaced the need for a photographic studio to a large extent.

ICT also aids people in overcoming their disabilities. Screen reading or magnification software assists blind or partially sighted people to work using ordinary text instead of using Braille.

- 1. Enhances Operation of Organizations:** Three main regions are influenced by ICT in an organization: communications, security, and information management.
 - a. Communication: ICT further advanced to provide technologies like VoIP which are more efficient and affordable than other forms of commonly used communication in the organization such as telephone, messaging, email, and sales catalogs. VoIP allows people to access large and worldwide markets easily.
 1. Flexible response: Organizations that have implemented ICT ensure good communication. This implies that they can quickly and easily respond to changes. These services, and goods, serve customers efficiently by quickly manufacturing new products to their requirements, etc.
 2. Information management: Organizations greatly benefit from ICT for the management of their information. Better stock control, less wastage, increased cash flow, etc. organization. By being constantly updated on the information, they can make better decisions.
 3. Enhanced Security: ICT can improve the security of the data. Its encryption methods help in keeping data secure from people with malicious intent. This technology enables commercial secrecy within the organization. ICT uses physical security systems to access data such as face or iris recognition, or fingerprint detection.

Negative Effect of ICT

(i) **Loss of Job:** A major negative effect of ICT is seen in the form of job loss. This technology is capable of automating commonly used operations in an organization so that humans are no longer required to perform those tasks. Manual operations are being replaced by automation which has become the sole cause of job loss. Some of the examples include robots that have replaced people in the assembling of parts, a barcode scanner replacing a worker for checkout tasks, etc. The use of ICT leads to adverse economic consequences, social consequences, loss of earnings loss of self-esteem, and status among people in society. Rundell, (2007).

(ii) Reduced personal interaction: Work from home which is considered a benefit of ICT also hurts a person. A person loses touch with people due to reduced social interaction. This makes him/her feel unhappy, isolated, and bored and gradually leads to depression.

(iii) **Reduced physical activity:** As most of the operations have now become automated, and are done by machines, the life of people is becoming more and more sedentary. This lack of physical activity gives rise to health issues such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc.

(iv) Expensive: The cost of implementation and use of ICT is high. This technology requires the installation of several specialized software and hardware that are expensive to buy and upkeep. It requires a specialist, and dedicated staff to operate equipment that works on ICT technology.

(v) Need for Heightened Security: As with ICT systems, data is stored at a centralized place on the web; an organization should constantly monitor internet connections and data for its safety from hackers, viruses, malware, and other threats that are released every day. ICTs have an impact on almost everybody who has access to them and the internet has changed society and how we live. ICT brings people from different parts of the world together to communicate with each other across the world. It allows for improving communication, meeting new people online establishing a friendship, sharing personal information online, and increasing education opportunities. Undoubtedly, ICT gadgets have made people's lives simple and entertaining, but Information, Media, and Technology Skills are needed for the use of ICT. ICT can have a positive impact on our lives but still, we have to be careful when using it because we may suffer from some negative impact by using them. We have to be wise in using the ICT gadgets. Thus, ICT is the new technology of the digital age that has been accessible in our everyday lives with a confusing blend of guaranteed benefits with some problems.

The Effect of ICT On Society

ICT is a comprehensive term that includes all types of technology used for exchanging, storing, using, or creating information; it benefits the business world, education, government, church, and society at large.

Communication is the foundation for social interaction and therefore society itself is based on communication. This means that every huge change that humanity has experienced derives from a technological discovery related to communication.

Technology and human life cannot be separated; society has recurring co-dependence on

technology. We depend on technology in our daily life and our needs and demands for technology keep on rising. We use technology for transportation, to communicate, to learn, to do business, and to live in comfort.

Multimedia technology and internet networks have revolutionized the whole philosophy of learning and provided us with the opportunity for close interaction between teachers and learners with an improved standard of learning materials compared to what existed only with printed media.

Education generally has benefited from ICT and students who live in rural areas can access online lessons, e-mail their tutors, and also converse with other students on a social network. It has altered the way we learn so instead of visiting libraries and looking up encyclopedias, we simply Google for information. We can find a wealth of information without leaving our desks.

ICT has also helped the government to improve their “service”, for example, sending information from another office has enabled the governments of various countries to collate and monitor statistical information that they can use to combat fraud and manage the economy in a more informed way. Zakari, (2023)

Commercial business has been influenced in several ways. The most important role of information technology here is to provide a commercial advantage. Advances such as computer-aided design; relational database technologies, spreadsheets, and word-processing software all provide commercial benefits to the businesses just like the automation of manufacturing processes. These days one can attend business meetings without having to be there physically. The business partners in such a virtual meeting can see and hear each other as if they are real.

In this 21st century, it is obvious that mobility is very important to the need to travel physically is decreasing significantly instead of flying to an important meeting somewhere, one can just attend the meeting virtually and save a lot of time and money, and everything else will be done by technology. Now no one prefers to go shopping anymore, one will order things online with some sort of sophisticated devices that are easy to handle and understand. This is our world!

The Effect of ICT on Church

Technology has given Christianity a voice to reach a worldwide audience. Historically there have been advances for Christianity when there has been an advance in technology. Not all Christian groups have reacted to it as have the Amish (an orthodox Anabaptist sect separated from the Mennonites in the late 17th century; and settled chiefly in southeastern Pennsylvania). Dale, (2023) In many cases the Church has been one of the first entities to adopt or profit from technologies.

The Pax Romana that existed at the time of Christ played a large role in the spread of the gospel. Technology that created good roads for transportation, bolstered the strongest army in the world to enforce relatively peaceful times, and stabilized governments for common laws, common language, and common culture allowed a small group of Christians to become a large following in a generation. (Ibid)

Technology has been good for Christianity in several ways. i). it has greatly magnified the

voice of those preaching the gospel. Instead of reaching hundreds or even thousands when preaching a sermon, a pastor now has a possible audience in the millions. ii), it has enriched the message of the Cross by providing more information to more people in a shorter amount of time. iii), it has increased the number of channels of distribution of the gospel. iv), it has provided help for the encouragement, strengthening, and edification of the saints through technological tools and discipleship materials. v), it allows Christians to administer grace to a world that is distracted and burdened, by using tools that people are familiar with and expect to see in everyday contexts. (Ibid)

Relevance of ICT

The world is fast becoming a global village and the thirst for more knowledge and information has been a driving force for the drastic changes in Information Technology around the world, these changes are what people have termed the “third industrial revolution”. One can see the basic trends in the Information Communication Technology revolution in terms of its structural changes, from telephony to the Internet, fixed to mobile telephone, and from narrowband to broadband. The development in information technology has left an impression on us as individuals not just in the Western world but generally. Information technology today has a completely distinct essence to it when compared with how it was perceived to be back in the day. The drastic changes that information technology has introduced in our lives have completely changed our lives and perhaps our lifestyles. Life has become much less manual and a lot more hassle-free for people all around the globe who have active access to the innovations of information technology. Babangida, (2023)

It is commonplace to say that nowadays we live in an information society, that is, a world of media saturation, which is heavily influenced by information technology, instantaneous movement of information across time, and space, which come under communication in information technology. (Ibid) The researcher would explore the riddle, which is “information communication technology” as the most subtle element and a decisive factor in the effective running of our daily life, which means looking at the way we consume information technology and the end uses, of Communication-Security-Finance industry-Medical field. We are constantly been drenched by one form of information technology or another, when the technological revolution began the question on our minds back then was “Does information technology shape human communication” but now this has changed, we now ask under what circumstances, in what way and to what extent does information technology shape our lives.

The Relevance of ICT to Church

Here are five (5) ways the churches can grow through technology.

1. The Guest Experienced

It only takes seven minutes for a guest to form a first impression of your church. Why not engage them not only in your physical building but also through technology? Have your church app, your church website, social media channels, and next points of engagement advertised around campus (at the guest center, through your volunteers, and the announcements, etc.). With all the opportunities to connect, people are likely to engage in all these ways, and they will notice that you value a connection with your audience beyond the first interaction. ICT, Bosamia, (2023)

1. Train and Coordinate Volunteers

Volunteers who understand the importance of their role and are equipped are essential for effective ministry in your church, Technology not only helps you train volunteers with videos, podcasts, and interactive tools, but it also helps you manage and communicate with volunteers more effectively. Utilizing specific chat features or group pages that are all within the same platform makes it convenient for volunteers to find information easily. Bosamia, (2023)

Track Members, Regular Attendees, and First Time Guest

With an integrated and actively updated database, each person who sets foot in your church can have a profile by volunteering minimal personal information. Information can be captured through church online giving and saved to a profile, and through an online interactive form that can be accessed through a church app or a link sent via a text message. Whatever you do, gathering information about who is in your church is vital. The technology ensures you will not lose track of people by putting the information you gathered into one place. Bosamia, (2023).

1. Improve Follow-Up with Guests and Communication

You can record a first-time guest's personal communication preferences on an online form and follow up in a way that's most appealing to them (email, phone call, text message). Online forms can also help your regular attendees and members easily submit prayer requests, concerns, or praise reports anonymously to church staff during the week without feeling like they are "bothering" them with a phone call or lengthy text message. Bosamia, (2023)

1. Technology Supports the Goals of Growth

Technology improves engagement and retention by making it easier for everyone to find and get involved with a group or connect with your church. Once someone has established relationships with others in your community, technology helps guide them toward taking responsibility for their spiritual development and for a portion of one of the ministries within the church. Bosamia, (2023)

The church is growing beyond numbers on a Sunday morning attendance board. All it takes is adjusting the medium and mindset of what growth looks like. Plus, growth is vital to reaching the lost about the Gospel or good news of Jesus. If we have growing, healthy, and thriving churches, then the message of Christ has no limit. With technology here to say, it is invaluable to know how your church has grown in the past and where it is currently growing. Embracing what church mobile apps, church websites, church online giving, and mobile technologies have to offer can grow our churches in Nigeria and the message of Jesus.

Recommendations

- The Church must take its original mandate given by God which is dominating the earth seriously, this can only be done through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- The Church should intensify its efforts in the area of Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) to make her enrich services.

- ✓ The Church should train more of its members in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), this will enable the Church to spread the gospel faster in the shortest time.
- ✓ The Church should make sure that most of its members, if not all should know Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills.
- ✓ The wealthy members should be encouraged to buy and train the younger Churches to meet up with the usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their services and other activities in the Churches for faster growth.

Conclusion

The researchers examined “Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its Relevance for the Churches in the 21st Century”. The following main points were discussed: the history of ICT usage in the Church, the effect and relevance of ICT and the Church, the positive effects of ICT, the negative effect of ICT, the effect of ICT on the Church, relevance of ICT and the relevance of ICT to Church. In bringing this to a close, the article has shown clearly that ICT is very relevant to the Churches in Nigeria. It is believed now that this has given reasons why Christian members who say that ICT in the Church is wrong should without hesitation engage in it. It bothers the researchers during conferences like Bethel; and Shiloh all the people are struggling to get there, but there will not be enough cars, motorcycles, and funds to reach there. Many Church members wish to watch the Bethel, Shiloh Conference on TV, YouTube, and podcasts, but no how, because of the lack of participation in ICT. This reminds me of a post on Facebook that says “I don’t know how much it will cost, but I am calling on the Church leaders to start working on setting TVs”. Hassan, (2021)

For some Church members ICT is just a game as normally said in Hausa “*abubuwan zamani*” which means the things of nowadays. ICT is more than that, we hereby encourage all Churches in Nigeria should make good use of ICT in their churches so that it can help them. The motive is not to puff up, make a name or fame but to let the Churches know that ICT is relevant to aid the church in attaining its purpose on earth

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