Effect of Utilization of Whatsapp Social Media Platform on Spiritual Growth of Church Members a Case of New Life Church Kenya

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Abstract:- **The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of utilization of social media on spiritual growth of church members. The study focused on use of the most popular platform (WhatsApp) on the particular target population.**

The study was anchored on technology acceptance model and collected data from 278 church members. The study utilized a questionnaire which was pretested to ensure its validity and reliability.The findings indicate that utilization of WhatsApp social media contributes significantly to spiritual development of church members. The study recommends that church leaders and members should be sensitized on importance of using social media not only for social interactions but also to enhance spiritual growth of church members.

*Key words***: Social media, Whatsapp, spiritual growth, relationship development, mature believer**

I. BACKGROUND

The twenty first century has seen rapid growth in communication technology that has revolutionized the way we live and interact with one another. People around the world are rapidly integrating virtual form of communication in their daily lives. According to (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008), the rapid growth of online network is transforming interpersonal relationships with a shift to the digital world, thereby changing landscape of social communities from the physical to the digital realm. This however is developing contrasting views in cultivating and maintaining online social connectedness that befits face-to-face relationships. The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of Whatsapp social media platform on spiritual growth.

Social network sites

The Social networking sites (SNSs) otherwise known as social media provides an online space for people to share their opinions with others and to participate in a variety of activities. A social networking sites provide interactive platform that enables its users communicate with other members to establish social relations, to share information and knowledge relative to individual experiences activities in real-life, (Chun-Ming & Meng-Hsiang, 2016).

Table 1Top Most Social Media Based on Usage

	Social media platform	Monthly active users
1	Facebook	2.23 billion
2.	YouTube	1.9 billion
3.	WhatsApp	1.5 billion
4.	Messenger	1.3 billion
5.	WeChat	1.06 billion
6	Instagram	1 billion
7.	QQ	861 million
8.	Tumblr	642 million
9.	Qzone – 632 million	
10.	1 TikTok	500 million

Source: https://buffer.com/library/social-media-sites

It has been observed that using SNSs has become a collective social action and a part of daily life (Cheung, Chiu, and Lee 2011). The social media consist of sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and QQ among others. Table 1 shows the ranking of ten top social media depending on usage. This study focuses on use of Whatsapp as it is the most popular among the target group. From table 1 Whatsapp is the third most used social platform after Facebook and YouTube. Started in 2014, the platform is used in over 180 countries and is used by over 1.5 billion people. It has attracted great attention and continue to be used for various purposes (ttps://www.whatsapp.com, 2019). The platform was started as an alternative to SMS and currently its services support sending and receiving a variety of media: text, photos, videos, documents, and location, as well as voice calls. The firms mission is to let people communicate anywhere in the world without barriers. The platform enables users to text, hold group chat freely as well as share photos, videos and documents. Beside this their business app enables business owners to make quick replies, creation of business profile, labels and setting of automated messages.

The use of social media is not limited to social networks and business organizations. Religious groups have also taken

advantage and are currently riding on these platforms to communicate with their followers. Hutchings (2011) observes that 'Online churches' are Internet-based Christian communities, seeking to pursue worship, discussion, friendship, support, proselytism and other key religious practices through computer-mediated communication. Churches meet through chat rooms, forums, blogs, video streams and social network sites. According to Campbell &Lövheim (2011), The Internet constitutes the space where individuals and groups live out their social and spiritual lives. Internet is regarded not as a place but as a 'tool' a technology that enables church leaders to reach new audiences with the messages and styles that have proved effective (Hutchings, 2011). These churches blend local and online resources, practices and connections, offering digital forms of education, spiritual experience and social ties that generally complement local church membership rather than replacing it. The majority of online churchgoers are long-time local church attenders, using the Internet to find additional spiritual and social resources. Online churches operate as one component of the digitally infused Christian lives of their members, shaped and given meaning by offline practices and experiences.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is a component of human development (HD), which according to (UNDP 2014) is the process of enlarging a person's operations and capabilities to function, as well as the range of things that a person could do and be in life. It is expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy, (UNDP, 2015). For those professing the Christian faith, spirituality is considered not only as measure of the state of human development, but also a means to human development since humans are spirit beings living in a body and having a soul. Woodroffe (2011) argues that richness of human life is achieved through embedding of divine standards, where people become internally massive in order to overcome dysfunctionality and limitations of the past and of the surrounding environments. He asserts that relationships, collaboration and sharing of divine values and community life are key indicators of spiritual growth. According to Gibbs and Grey (2011), worship of God is one of the key means of living a fulfilling life and listed five foundations of human development as spiritual, moral, social, intellectual and physical. The authors proffer that human beings possess the capacity to rise to a higher state of civilization when we allow 'Spiritual Intelligence' to underpin 'human intelligence' as our capable guide.This study employed the spiritually anchored human development model of spiritual growth evidenced through consistency in prayer, reading the bible, giving, caring, sharing, and strong relationships among the members as key spiritual growth indicators. This model agrees with Kim (2010) who was of the view that growth will always include spiritual factors that lead to spiritual life and growth, such as prayer, fasting, revival, and the power of God. These factors are further classified into characteristics and deeds. Characteristics include love, faith, knowledge, wisdom, holiness and joy, while deeds include the life engaging in God's Word, prayer, thanksgiving, worship, obedience, human relations, and consistency of speech and action. The spiritual factor of deeds is practiced both at individual and at corporate level. The corporate level is within a community of believers who gather together for bible studies, corporate worship and prayers under a well organization spiritual oversight.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Fiske (1992), people are fundamentally sociable and they generally organize their social life in terms of their relations with other people. Lundby (2011) posits that, the relationship between new media technology and religious change today concerns how online expressions of religion can be seen as part of broader social and cultural transformations, where new media technology, as well as offline religious institutions and traditions, play a part. Social networks make communities based on stability and converge on a common purpose and identification.

Hutchings (2011) opines that chat room is used almost constantly for social conversation, while Facebook has been adopted with great enthusiasm as an informal communication space. Facebook and Twitter are used to generate a constantly updated cycle of communication, integrating church discourse into participants' everyday online activity. The importance of Facebook demonstrates the integration of online churches into wider online activity where Church Online participants can sign up to receive daily questions, challenges and videos or join proselytizing missions to Facebook and Myspace. International Telecommunication Union ITU (2010), indicates that social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are driving new forms of social interaction, dialogue, exchange and collaboration. Social networking sites (referred to more broadly as social media) enable users to swap ideas, to post updates and comments, or to participate in activities and events, while sharing their wider interests.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The use of Whatsapp social media to foster spiritual growth of members of new life church was the core of this study. The study collected data from 125 men and 153 ladies making a total of 278. Online and self-administered questionnaires were used.

IV. FINDINGS

The collected data was assessed for validity by use of cronbach alpha test. The results presented in Table 2 indicates that the data had internal consistency as it attained 0.907 for Whatsapp while spiritual development attained 0.958. The recommended level is 0.7 and above.

Table 2 Reliability test

	WhatsApp	.907	12
4	Spiritual development	.958	19

Source: primary data

To validate the data further, it was subjected to factor analysis to determine whether it measured what it was expected to measure. The results presented in Table 3 showed that WhatsApp was assessed using eleven items and factor analysis produced two critical factors that drive WhatsApp services in church which cumulatively accounted for 60.80 percent of the total variance in this construct. The main components identified were relationship development and spiritual development.

Table 3. Principal Components Analysis Results for Whatsapp

WhatsApp Rotated Component Matrix				
Items	*Item loadings*		*Factor*	*Variance explained*
	1	2		
I receive meeting reminders on WhatsApp.	**.772**	.165	Relationship Development	60.802%
We use WhatsApp in our pillar for sharing our social life	**.739**	.290		
Our church uses WhatsApp to advertise church meetings	**.737**	.127		
I use WhatsApp for relationships building with other church members	**.722**	.386		
Overall, I am satisfied with the use of WhatsApp by the church in enhancing spiritual growth.	**.676**	.345		
Through WhatsApp I have been encouraged to pray more	**.568**	.532		
We use WhatsApp to facilitate sharing sermons in Our growth group	.479	.452	Spiritual Development	
I receive praise and worship songs through WhatsApp	.189	**.775**		
I us WhatsApp for posting sermons as video clips	.153	**.761**		
I use WhatsApp as an evangelistic tool	.264	**.758**		
I use WhatsApp for posting bible verses	.477	**.634**		
I use WhatsApp to post encouraging messages to other members	.551	**.619**		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.				

Source: Primary data

Spiritual growth was assessed using nineteen items and factor analysis produced two critical factors that drive spiritual growth in church which cumulatively accounted for 67.26 percent of the total variance in this construct Table 4.

Table 4 Principal Components Analysis Results for Spiritual Development

Spiritual Development Rotated Component Matrix				
Items	*Component Loadings*		*Factor description*	*Variance explained*
	1	2		
My love for other people has grown.	**.831**	.247	**A developed Spiritual life**	67.261%
My desire to evangelize has grown	**.818**	.128		
My desire to share bible knowledge with others has grown.	**.810**	.281		
My bible reading has improved.	**.755**	.327		
My prayer life has become consistent.	**.742**	.349		
My praise and worship life has grown.	**.734**	.404		
My selfish life has been dismantled.	**.668**	.336		
My community life is richer.	**.662**	.435		
My relationships with church members has grown	**.656**	.404		
My awareness of being God's son has been enhanced	**.654**	.529		

My love for the body of Christ has become practical	**.607**	.587	
I contribute strongly to the development and stability of my family	.272	**.807**	
I have identified my position of functionality in my church	.313	**.797**	
I faithfully attend to my relevant church meetings	.300	**.776**	
I faithfully pray for my spiritual leaders.	.414	**.768**	**Mature believer**
I have a finalized commitment to advance God's purposes on earth	.426	**.751**	
I fulfill my financial commitment in the church	.187	**.721**	
I am strongly committed to finishing Gods purpose for my life	.500	**.691**	
Overall, I am satisfied with my spiritual growth.	.200	**.613**	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.			

Source: primary data

Testing of hypotheses

The study sought to test hypotheses that there is a significant relationship between use of Whatsapp social media and spiritual growth of church members. To accomplish this task simple regression analysis was carried out and the results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Results of Goodness-of-fit model summary of spiritual growth on utilization of WhatsAppsocial media

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.691ᵃ	.478	.475	.5101602	.478	200.354	1	219	.000ᵃ
a. Predictors: (Constant), WhatsApp									
b. Dependent Variable: Spiritual Development									

Source: Primary data

When aggregate mean scores of spiritual growth were regressed against WhatsApp, the results produced an R^2 of 0.478 as shown in Table 5. Thus, WhatsApp scores explain 47.8% of the variation in spiritual growth scores. The model was statistically significant with a P value= 0.000. This shows that the model was appropriate for this kind of analysis.

Table 6: Regression beta coefficients of spiritual growth on utilization of WhatsApp

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.303	.200		6.524	.000
	WhatsApp	.672	.047	.691	14.155	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Spiritual Development						

The results in Table 6exhibit a statistically significant relationship between WhatsApp and spiritual growth (β=0.691, p-value=0.0000). Therefore, at ά=0.05 the conclusion is that WhatsApp contributes significantly to spiritual growth. The statistically significant relationship between WhatsApp and spiritual growth is an indication that utilization of WhatsApp has to be effective for an organization to succeed in achieving its objectives.

Based on the results in Tables 5 &6, a simple regression equation can be used to estimate performance of spiritual growth in new life churchwhere:

Y= 1.303 + .691W

Y= spiritual growth

W= WhatsApp

1.303 = y –intercept; constant

0.691 = an estimate of the expected increase in spiritual growth corresponding to an increase in utilization of WhatsApp.

From the results presented in Table 6 WhatsApp contributes significantly to the prediction of spiritual growth in new life church. The regression coefficient of 1.303 under constant indicates the value of spiritual growth performance when WhatsApp utilization is at zero. The regression coefficient of 0.691 implies that a unit increase in utilization of WhatsApp would lead to a 0.691 increase in spiritual growth.

V. DISCUSSION

The use of social media will continue to be used by all groups of people to enhance interaction among different groups of people. The study findings point to the fact that religious organizations can benefit a lot by using social media to foster spiritual growth of their members. Social media can be used to create relationship among church members, remind them of their meeting time and place and also share the issues of life affecting them. Social media would go a long way in building their prayer life and consequently enhance their spiritual development. Members are able to shares encouragement scriptures, play video clips with music and drama to facilitate increase in spirituality. They are also able to share evangelistic messages used to reach out even to those not in their groups thereby winning new members. We can therefore conclude that the use of social media will influence spiritual growth of church members positively.

The use of social media results in more developed believers whose lifestyle are characterized by more love for one another, consistency in prayers and meditation, increase in selflessness and a richer community life. The findings further show that more stable families are developed and that church members become more functional in their congregations. The use of social media also enhance giving of finances and other material things in different congregations. This study concludes that embracing social media by church leaders and their members would result in more mature believers who are able to carry out their ordained functions more effectively. The study recommends that church members be trained on use of social media to enhance their spirituality. The study further recommends more awareness to be made on the positive effect of social media by the church leaders.

This study focused on one church in Nairobi Kenya. It would be prudent to expand this study by looking at use of social media in several congregations to determine its effects. Studies should also be carried out to determine if the use of social media has any negative effects on spiritual growth of some members. More studies are required to establish the role of social media in addressing family and marriages problems among the faithful in different churches.

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