

Social Media as a Source of Self-Identity Formation: Challenges and Opportunities for Youth Ministry

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to God Almighty who has called me to be His co-worker in His vineyard.

Abstract

Social media are technological media (websites) that create a digital environment for networking between network users who interface and share information with each other. Social media network users use these media on different platforms, such as social networking sites – to share information and network with offline and online friends; wikis – to share, modify, create and disseminate information; and blogs – to create content and interface with network followers. These three platforms of social media disseminate information that influences the self-identity formation of young people.

The self-identity formation of young people is both discovered and developed. The discovery of self-identity entails an understanding of humanity as God's created being – created for His purpose and mission. The developed identity entails that young people go through different phases of life that shape their self-identity formation. These different phases are influenced by different social institutions such as social media. Social media as a source of information dissemination influence young people's self-identity by creating a digital continent where all sorts of uncensored information is disseminated. This digital continent is used for whatsoever purpose. This fact – that social media create a complex digital continent that influences self-identity formation – is what led to this research study to investigate how do social media influence the self-identity formation of young people? To investigate this research question, this research employed conceptual analysis to give conceptual clarity of words and concept. In situating this research study within the field of practical theology, Osmer's theological framework was adopted to understudy the research title, social media as a source of self-identity formation: Challenges and opportunities for youth ministry.

Youth ministry guides young people to discover their self-identity in God and equips them to influence their friends (offline and online friends) and fellow network users. Social media as a digital continent also creates platforms for youth ministry to incarnate and influence young people's self-identity by disseminating biblical and theological information that has the potential to help young people create a healthy self-identity formation.

Opsomming

Sosiale media is tegnologiese media (webblaaie) wat 'n digitale omgewing skep vir netwerking tussen netwerkgebruikers wat 'n koppelvlak skep vir hulle om met mekaar inligting te deel. Sosiale netwerkgebruikers gebruik hierdie media op verskillende platforms, soos sosiale netwerkingsruimtes – om met aflyn- en aanlynvriende inligting te deel en met hulle te netwerk; wiki's – om inligting te deel, te modifiseer, te skep en te versprei; en webjoernale (*blogs*) – om inhoud te skep en netwerkvolgers van 'n koppelvlak te voorsien. Hierdie drie sosiale media platforms versprei inligting wat die selfidentiteitsvorming van jong mense beïnvloed.

Die selfidentiteit van jong mense word beide ontdek en ontwikkel. Die ontdekking van selfidentiteit behels 'n begrip van mensheid as God se geskape wese – geskep vir Sy doel en missie. Die ontwikkelde identiteit behels dat jong mense deur verskillende lewensfases gaan wat hulle selfidentiteitsvorming vorm. Hierdie verskillende fases word deur verskillende maatskaplike instellings, soos sosiale media, beïnvloed. Die sosiale media as 'n bron van inligtingsverspreiding beïnvloed jong mense se selfidentiteit deur 'n digitale vasteland te skep waar 'n groot verskeidenheid van ongesensureerde inligting versprei word. Hierdie digitale vasteland word vir wat ook al doel gebruik. Hierdie feit – dat sosiale media 'n digitale vasteland vir invloed skep – is wat tot hierdie navorsing gelei het, naamlik om ondersoek in te stel na hoe jeugbediening jong mense se selfidentiteitsvorming op sosiale media as 'n bron van selfidentiteitsvorming: Uitdagings en geleenthede vir die jeugbediening.

Die jeugbediening lei jong mense in die ontdekking van hulle selfidentiteit in God en rus hulle toe om hulle vriende (aflyn- en aanlynvriende) en medenetwerkgebruikers te beïnvloed. Die sosiale media as 'n digitale vasteland skep ook 'n platform vir die jeugbediening om jong mense se selfidentiteit te inkarneer en te beïnvloed deur Bybelse en teologiese inligting te versprei wat die potensiaal het om jong mense by te staan om 'n gesonde selfidentiteit te skep.

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Abbreviations

Gen. Genesis

SM Social Media

SNS Social Networking Sites

Matt. Matthew

Mk. Mark

Lk. Luke

ed. Editor

UN United Nation

Deu Deuteronomy

Jn. John

Cor. Corinthians

Rev Reverend

Pst. Pastor

Capt. Captain

Bar. Barrister

Engr. Engineer

Dr. Doctor

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Social media¹ (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, vimeos, WhatsApp, blogging, viber, Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn) influence young people with regard to their self-identity, irrespective of their geographical location and space. According to Schultze, Anker, Bratt, Romanowski, Worst and Zuidervaart (1991:46), a young person in a developing country² (like Nigeria) turns on his³ favourite rock video channel on some form of media in the privacy of his bedroom, he watches and listens to the latest ‘hot’ rock singer or movie celebrity whose name is globally an advertising brand. Although alone in the bedroom, he has instantaneously joined the shared culture of several other million rock video devotees from coast to coast, even from continent to continent, and from disparate ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. This reflects that young people share the same visual and aural media called social media, which dramatically affects their self-identity and the way they relate to each other and even to their immediate family members in the community. Thus, young people could be influenced globally through their engagement with and interaction on social media.

The practice of young people sharing the same visual and aural media called social media is removing geographical boundaries in the world, causing a confusing platform of challenges and opportunities through information dissemination and networking on a global scale (Couldry 2009:16; Pirraglia & Kravitz 2012:165; Qualman 2011:12; Taiwo 2007:76; The City Reporters 2013:6; Tony 2001:26). Qualman (2011:12), commenting on the reason for the confusing platform, notes that social media are global in nature, an integral part of young people’s lives, and have numerous users who use them for whatsoever purpose. Sefton-Green (2003:2), commenting on the challenges, argues that the diversity of ways in which young people are accessing and appropriating information in creating a youth culture through social media are redefining young people’s self-identity and causing anxiety because of the

¹ Subsequently in this research study, social media could also be written as SM. I henceforth either will write it out as social media or abbreviate it as SM.

² Nigeria is one of the developing countries in Africa, as reported by Gabriel (2013).

³ It could be either gender (he or she). I will be using him/her in my argument as inclusive of the male and female genders.

unlimited access to information that social media affords young people. Campbell (2013:44) says this global phenomenon of multiple usage for whatsoever purpose has informed the challenges of allowing uncensored information and networking among young people, which is influencing their understanding of authentic identity. Cloete (2012:4), however, has observed that the media as a source of information on anything cannot be viewed as bad, but the dissemination of uncensored information makes it unrealistic to expect all the content on social media to be good or trustworthy. Social media thus create a confused platform of challenges and opportunities.

Scholars differ on the different types of social media. Although scholars differ on the types of social media, they universally agree on three major types of social media; social networking sites⁴ microblogging and wikis (Osatuyi 2013:2621; Qualman 2011:38; Marwick & Ellison 2012:378). Although this research study investigates these three types of social media, its emphasis is on social networking sites because these are the types of social media that are primarily used to share individual potential, quality and impression management through daily updates of beliefs and convictions that inform the users' self -identity.

With regard to Nigeria, Oso (2013:13) and Kintz (2007:6) admit that social media (especially social networking sites) are regarded as the voice of the people and the social watchdog, because they offer the opportunities of setting the agenda and providing citizens with a platform to share their self-identity and personal disposition on societal issues. These are platforms that social media provide for Nigerian youth to share their personal dispositions without censorship are causing various challenges. Commenting on why social media cause challenges for young people, Qualman (2011:51) argues, and I infer, that social networking sites keep the information flow of individuals open to users and allow for deeper self-identity influences among users. This implies that information disseminated on social networking sites could replicate users' self-identity, or the identity impression management of the user (Marwick & Ellison 2012:379; Qualman 2011:51). The use of social networking sites to express self-identity and identity impression management is what accounts for why this research study reflects more on social networking sites like Facebook as a type of social media.

⁴ Subsequently in this research study, social networking sites could also be written as SNS. I henceforth either will write it out as social networking sites or abbreviate it as SNS.

1.2. Motivation for the Study

There are two motivations for this study: first, my interpersonal discourses with young people on and about social media as a youth minister; and second, my interaction with the literature as a student of practical theology (youth ministry) at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Huysamen (1994:2) notes that, during daily dealings with and observations of students in relation to human behaviour, social and behavioural researchers are confronted with phenomena that arouse curiosity and generate questions concerning this behaviour. Daily dealings with human behaviour and how this behaviour is influenced can generate an interest in conducting research on how social institutions influence human behaviour.

The rise of social media is a technological development and also an interaction space for network users. Noticeable among young people is their addiction to social media. The self-identity of young people could be influenced by their human interactions with social institutions like social media. Couldry (2003:16) argues that the impact and implications of social media are pertinent. The impact and implication of social media are pertinent because social media are beyond just technical development. Social media creates space for interaction which implies that this research study focuses on a practical theological investigation of the implications of the influence of social media on youth ministry, and how, through social media, a youth minister can create a theological framework that will influence young people's self-identity as they interface with social media.

The first motivation for this research is my ministry experiences with the youth in the Church⁵ as a youth pastor in Abuja, where I established a youth ministry (rhythms of life) that, among other platforms, uses social media to engage young people. As a youth minister, I noticed a common trend among young people who interface with social media. Social media influences their worldview, self-identity and relationship with their community, family and leadership. According to Strommen and Hardel (2000:257) social media poses the challenge of influencing young people to cultivate a culture of depersonalised identity formation. It also isolates these youth from their parents and families and encourages self-gratification, individualism, anti-authoritarianism and the like, which are powerful shapers of self-identity (Strommen & Hardel 2000:257). It also affords me, as a Christian youth minister, the opportunity to live with dual citizenship of proactively responding to the challenges of social

⁵ I am a youth pastor with the Evangelical Church Winning All, formally the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA).

praxis in society and being conscious of heaven (Ailish & Gempf 2002:13). Dual citizenship in this sense means that a Christian is concurrently regarded as a citizen of a particular country and also doubles as a citizen of eternity in heaven by virtue of faith in God.

Secondly, this research is motivated by interaction with the literature as a student of practical theology in the field of youth ministry at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Dean and Root (2011:17) arguing for youth ministry as sub-discipline in practical theology, comment that practical theology studies the interception of God's actions with human practices, contexts, and moments. Muchová and Štěch (2012:60) buttress that practical theology attempts to synergise actions between the human and divine. Youth ministry, Dean and Root (2011:17, 64) argue, guides young people to understanding the points of God divinely intercepting with human practices, context and moments. Nel (2003:67; 2005a:9) supports the synergy between youth ministry and practical theology when he argues that youth ministry is a sub-discipline and a practice within practical theology. This implies that practical theology is mobilised for the study of youth ministry.

From constructive engagement with the literature, I discovered youth ministers who as practical theologians mobilized practical theology in their involvement in youth ministry. They engaged their denominations and society in youth ministry by proposing different approaches to addressing social issues among young people; Root and Dean (2011:37, 44) suggest the development of a theological framework for Christian youth that will guide their interaction with society and prepare them to live out the gospel among their peers, and in their family, community, church and government. Dean (2001:33) and Elton (2014:175) suggests a theologising youth ministry and incarnational approach where youth ministry guides young people with theological understanding of God's dealings with humanity. Hershey (1986:11) argues for an intentional approach where youth ministry is done deliberately and not an aimless ministry among young people. Strommen and Hardel (2000:72, 73) recommend a personal relationship with God where young people are nurtured and fostered to develop a personal relationship with God. Devries (2008:57, 60) proposes sustainability in youth ministry where youth ministry is structured over a period of years and not expecting an instantaneous and sporadic impact in youth ministry. Nel (2000:85) advances an inclusive congregational approach where young people are seen and treated as part of the church and not an independent arm of the church; Ward (1997:1) proposes the outside-in and inside-out approach; and Chiroma (2008:18) advocates for mentorship as an approach to youth ministry.

I learnt that practical theology (youth ministry) invites youth ministers to develop a Christian praxis approach to social issues in their denomination and society. In relation to youth ministers' engagement with social issues, McLaren and Campolo (2003:113) advance the need for Christians to maximise the opportunities for ministry that social institutions afford by engaging with social issues in society as God's light to the world.

Social media is one among many social institutions that affords the faith community platforms for Christian ministry. Social media have the potential to provide the faith community with the opportunity, despite its challenges, to influence the self-identity of young people through the various platforms of social media. This research study will not be the first of its kind in practical theology (Cloete 2012:4; Cloete 2015b:3; Gibson 2014:18; Menardi 2012:23; Stephen 2013:254). However, this study will add to the limited literature on social media by Nigerian theological educators.

1.3. Research Problem and Question

Social media removes geographical boundaries and create a confusing platform for young people. Confusing platform because it poses challenges and offers opportunities to young people (Coudry 2009:16; Pirraglia & Kravitz 2012:165; Qualman 2011:12). These confusing platforms have the potential to influence young people's self-identity formation (Sefton-Green 2003:2; Campbell 2013:44). Thus, this research sought to investigate how social media influences young people's self-identity formation.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2010:73), a research problem is often formulated in the form of either a research question or a research hypothesis. In this regard and with this being a qualitative study, the research problem is formulated in the form of research questions. The primary research question for this study is: how do social media influence the self-identity formation of young people? The above primary question is supplemented by the following secondary (sub) questions:

1. What can be understood by "social media" and what are its origins and the extent of its use?
2. What is self-identity formation and how is it formed, specifically when pertaining to young people (youth)?

3. What are the challenges posed by social media and how do they offer possibilities for youth ministry as a field of practical theology?
4. How can youth ministry influence young people's engagement with social media?

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of a research study is to clarify the aim and goal of the research. Badenhorst (2007:23) suggests that the purpose of the study is drawn from the problem statement (research problem). This is because the problem statement is the key conceptual statement that guides the research. The purpose of this research was to understand how social media influence young people's self-identity and the implications this may have for youth ministry. The focus will be on youth ministry to consider how social media affect the self-identity of young people.

This research study further aims to:

1. Understand how social media influence young people's self-identity (Chapter 2 and 3).
2. Construct a general conceptualisation from the literature of social media origins and the extent its usage by young people (Chapter 2).
3. Construct youth ministry approach that can interface with young people through social media in order to influence their self-identity (Chapter 4).
4. Make suggestions toward developing a Christian praxis that may guide young people to cultivate theological discernment in their engagement with social media (especially social networking sites). (Chapter 4 and 5).

1.5. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Research methodology is crucial to how a researcher conducts credible research. It entails using a process, a kind of tool and a procedure to examine a research topic (Hansen 2014; Mouton 2001:57). With regard to the research design, this research is qualitative in nature,

using conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis, according to Mouton (2001:87, 175) and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014:70), brings theoretical clarity by engaging with the literature of academic conversation and scholarship reviews.

By engaging conceptual analysis, the researcher implies that this research conceptually interprets the ongoing academic conversation and scholarship through journals, newsletters, authors, experts and researchers who have been interacting with social media and self-identity formation in journals, books and articles, at conferences and on the internet, with particular interest in interpreting the conceptual relationship between social media as a youth culture, and its implications for youth and youth ministry in my context of Abuja, Nigeria. In summation, conceptual analysis is giving clarity to subjects and phenomena that have the potential to be connected, for example, investigating how social media influences the self-identity formation of young people.

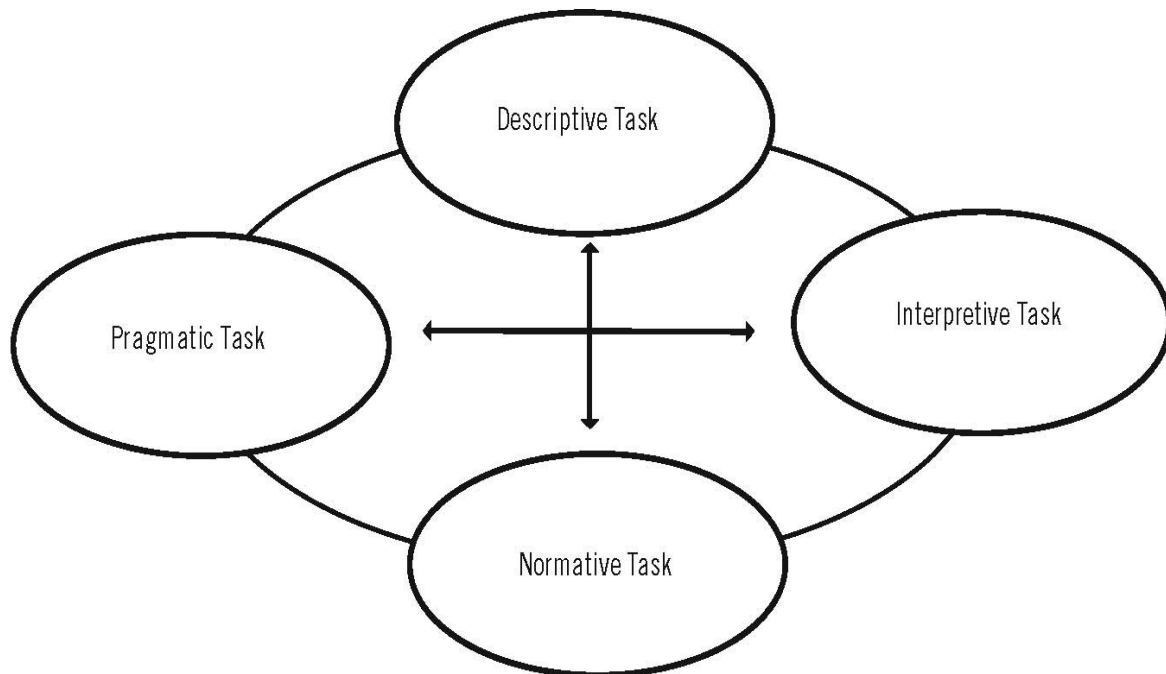
The weakness of conceptual analysis is that concepts sometimes are poorly constructed, which can lead to conceptual confusion, theoretical ambiguities, and fallacious reasoning (Mouton 2001:177). This weakness is curbed using Huysamen's (1994:190) suggestion that staying focused on the methodology chosen when reviewing scholarly published literature on a particular topic of interest is important in curbing the weakness of that methodology. This is so because it enables this research to be aware of inconsistencies and gaps that may justify the need for further research on that topic.

This research is a non-empirical literature study. Creswell (1998:2) and De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:47) indicate that a literature study provides the logical reasoning essential for analysing a large theoretical framework. Bak (2004:17, 26)⁶ elucidates that a theoretical engagement with the literature is potent for academic research, as it serves as a resource for further empirical and non-empirical research. Primary and secondary data can be integrated into a coherent and systematic knowledge system as a concrete foundation for understanding the research subject and become a basis for further studies and empirical research (Babbie & Mouton 2010:5; Musa 2011:329). The reason why this study was

⁶ "Many students think that, in order to undertake proper research, they have to undertake empirical data collection (do interviews, a survey, questionnaire, an experiment, a case study, etc.). This is not the case. Rigorous research can also be purely theoretical – think of the many academic books and journal articles that have not undertaken empirical studies, although they may report on empirical studies done elsewhere. Your thesis can be purely theoretical or combine literature engagement with empirical work" (Bak, 2004:25).

undertaken as non-empirical research was to provide literature for further empirical and non-empirical research in Abuja, Nigeria.

Regarding the theoretical framework of this research study, the practical theological task of Richard Osmer (2008:4) provide the theoretical framework and domain in which this research is conducted. Within the practical theological discipline, Osmer (2005: xv; 2008:4; Osmer 2012:319) suggests that research is conducted to understand and guide studies on the role of the Christian community as a Christian praxis. I find Osmer’s framework helpful because it is relevant to the field of practical theology in which this study is situated. Osmer (2008:4) four theological task are:



1. Descriptive- empirical task which this research study adopts in chapter two ask: what is going on? It seeks to investigate empirically (qualitative and quantitative analysis) and to describe as fully and accurately as possible a particular field of experience
2. Interpretive task which this research study engages in chapter three asks: why is this going on? The data of empirical research is not self-interpreting. It must be placed in a more comprehensive framework, offering an explanation of patterns of behavior, attitude and ideas.

3. Normative task which this research study adopts in chapter four ask: what form ought Christian praxis to take in this particular social context? It focuses on to access, guide, and reform some dimension of contemporary Christian praxis looking for the normative source of Christian faith.
4. Pragmatic task which this research study engages in chapter four and five asks: it focuses on the development of action- guiding models and rules of art (open-ended guidelines about how to carry out some form of Christian praxis).

I therefore engage with Osmer's practical theological task to understand what is going on in social media? Why is this going on? What ought to be the practical theological response to what is going on? And investigating how might youth ministry respond using the platform of social media?

1.6. Theological Significance

This research study could contribute to the field of practical theology in cogent ways. To youth ministry in Abuja, Nigeria, it will be resource material for youth ministries that use the platform of social media to engage the youth in their missional approach of constructive influence. As elucidated by Osmer (2012:320), practical theology teaches members of the Christian community to solve certain problems in society by embodying the mission of the Church in a particular social context. This study provides literature for interdisciplinary dialogue in which practical theology converses with sociological problems in society (Osmer 2008:163). The sociological challenges in this research study are young people's engagement with social media.

1.7. Limitation of the Research Study

The specific focus of this study is on how young people's self-identity formation is influenced due to the confusing platform of challenges and opportunities on social networking sites and not on all types of social media, also with specific reference to how the social networking sites of social media influence youth self-identity formation. The scope is limited to the Christian praxis of youth ministry, taking into cognisance God's normative task of Christian praxis against the background of Abuja, the capital of the Nigerian Federal territory, Abuja.

1.8. Conceptualisation

It is important to provide some clarity on the terminology that is employed in this research. This provides a conceptual understanding of the terminology that frames this research.

1.8.1. Youth / Young People

Cloete (2012:2) describes youth as a distinct life phase and social cohort in society with a particular lifestyle or cultural identity. Hershey (1986:7), in grouping this phase of life, groups youth within the age range of 18 to 35 as young adults. Some, he says, expand these parameters and others narrow them. From a South African paradigm, Cloete (2012:2) narrows this parameter to between 12 to 18 years. From a Nigerian paradigm, Badejo, Stephens and Anyanwu (2011:284) argue for and categorise Nigerian youth as being between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This research study adopts Badejo and Anyanwu's categorisation of youth between 18 and 35 years old because it typifies the Nigerian parameters for youth. This research study also refers to this categorised group as youth, young people, or young adults.

Whether they are called young people, young adults or youth is not the focus of this research, because whichever name among the aforementioned is suitable for this age group of people will depend on their geo-cultural and geo-ethnic location, as seen in Hershey, Cloete, and Badejo and Anyanwu's classification. As classified by Badejo *et al.* (2011:284), I infer that youth in Nigeria are classified within the age range of 18 to 35 years and are either called youth or young people.

The investigation into young people's engagement with social media is an attempt to connect with other network users is the focus of this research, and not what name to use to categorise them. Cloete (2015b:1) argues that youth are desirous of a relationship with God and humanity, which implies that the youth engage with social media by establishing a relationship with an online community with whom they share common interests.

1.8.2. Youth Culture

Youth culture is the commonality of shared behaviour, values, customs, social pattern, norms, language (*slanguage*) and expected ways of life among youth (Branson & Martinez 2011:83). Youth culture serves as a medium of social patterns among youth, whose understanding of

life is greatly influenced by peculiar practices within and beyond a geographical location. Arguably, with the advent of social media, youth culture is learned more quickly and speedily beyond a confined geographical location due to young people's interaction with the global community through the available platforms of social networking sites.

1.8.3. Youth Ministry

Youth ministry is about guiding and influencing youth to discern God's will for their lives, community and creation through a personal relationship with God (Lewis, 2009:19; Root & Dean 2011:99). The act of discerning and guiding youth to a personal relationship with God is an arduous task in youth ministry, especially because youth ministry is not about the youth minister but about God (Yaconelli, 2003:6). Therefore, the onus of discernment makes the task of youth ministry very challenging (Beckwith 1997:7), as it entails guiding young people into knowing God's will for their lives by constructing their own practical theological and ethical principles that will aid them to filter information accessed on social networking sites. Youth ministry also entails guiding young people to discover their identity in God. Nel (2000:103) further affirms that the conception of youth ministry as helping young people to discover their God-given identity so that they, in turn, can influence their peers to discover theirs is reciprocal

1.8.4. Practical Theology

Practical theology is a branch of theology that guides the practice of daily lives (Ganzevoort & Roeland 2014:97). Practical theology informs how Christians should interface with and relate to their society. Practical theology is the construction of action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in a particular social context. Practical theology makes its own constructive contribution to the larger theological conversation by tailoring research on Christian communities in particular social contexts and seeks to develop norms and guidelines within a theological praxis that are normative and relevant for humanity (Osmer 2005: xiv; 2008:14, 2012:320).

1.8.5. Theological Praxis

The essence of practical theology and youth ministry is to cultivate theological praxis for the Christian community. Root and Bertrand (2011:215) note that practical theology and youth

ministry are primarily concerned with the theological activity of local communities, and then youth ministry embedded within practical theology is fundamentally about the articulation and association of practical theology and youth ministry to form actions and practices that are embedded in theological reflection of identity, and a sense of missional imagination that depicts humanity as God's creation (Dean 2010:197, Root & Dean 2011:210).

1.8.6. Social Media

Social media are technological media and network sites [networking sites]⁷ that serve as information and web-based services⁸ that allow individuals and corporations to construct public and private identities and spirituality that inform moral choices (Boyd & Ellison 2007:211; Qualman 2011:64). In this case, this research considers social media as an integral space and place for youth self-identity formation.

1.8.7. Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are types of social media that emphasise relationship initiation, where the user interface is personal between the audience and users (Osatuyi 2013:2622). Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, foursquare and the like are used to share updates on the user's self-identity and impression management.

1.8.8. Self-Identity

Self-identity in this research study is young people's awareness of their potential and qualities within their social context. This awareness is disseminated on social network sites to express the user's self-identity (Qualman 2011:51) and the identity impression management of the user (Marwick & Ellison 2012:379). The users on social media circulate information that either depicts their potential, qualities and conviction or an impressive management of what they want other users to know. This information's informs how young people see themselves and how they want others to see and identify them.

⁷ Network sites or networking sites can be used interchangeably, depending on the scope or emphasis; Networking emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers. Social network sites also do networking, but much more, they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks.

⁸ Social media is top of the agenda for many business executives, political leaders, decision makers, as well as consultants who try to identify ways in which firms can make profitable use of applications such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, podcasts, television, radio, Second Life, and Twitter (<http://www.journals.elsevier.com/business-horizons>. Accessed August 15th, 2014).

1.8.9. Impression Management

Impression management on social media, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008:220), means that, young people present either a profile picture or data about themselves that may be inconsistent with their real self. It connotes creating an image or disseminating information about one's self that is not true of one's self but is meant to impress other network users.

1.8.10. Interface

Interface is the networking point where social media users meet on a device or an app to connect and participate in shared common interest. Interface connotes that two or more people meet on a digital device or app to interact with one another (Capurro 2013:162; Osatuyi 2013:2621). Interface could also mean a point of user's interaction with a device or an app (Dijck 2013:4, 10). In this research study, interface implies people's interaction with other users and people's interaction with disseminated content (information) on the device or software applications because this study seeks to discover how the device itself and people influence young people's self-identity formation.

1.9. Conclusion

The interest of this research study is on reflecting how transformative (challenges and opportunities) social media have been in young people's self-identity formation.

This chapter discusses the preamble, motivation, research problem, research question, research design, theological task, methodology, theological significance and limitations of the study.

In Chapter 2, this study investigate the conceptual understanding of social media and social networking sites using Osmer's descriptive-empirical and interpretive theological tasks which ask the question, "what is going on social media? And why is this going on? Chapter 3 will engage Osmer's interpretive task by asking why social media has the potential to influence young people's self-identity formation? Chapter 4 will discover how youth ministry engages social media using Osmer's normative and pragmatic task that asks what ought to be going on and how can youth ministry be proactive on social media? Chapter 5, of this research study will provide reflections on conclusion, methodologies and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Understanding of Social Media

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a conceptual understanding of social media. To do this, the chapter employs Osmer's descriptive-empirical task, which asks: what is going on? The descriptive-empirical task according to Osmer (2008:4) seeks to investigate and to describe as fully and accurately as possible a particular field of experience. This chapter focuses on a conceptual understanding of what is going-on in SM and especially social networking sites. It will reflect on the type of information disseminated on SM and what does this constitute for SM users?

The analysis in this chapter focuses on investigating the various meanings and usage of SM. Attention is also drawn to the usage of SNS in Nigerian context.

This chapter explores three types of SM. The emphasis is on SNS because they are the most accessed type of SM that allow for freer information disclosure. In addition, SNS are the most popular category of SM (Marwick & Ellison 2012:378).

2.2. Conceptualisation of Social Media

It is appropriate to provide a conceptual definition of SM as a guide to understanding how these platforms influence the self-identity of young people.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59), SM are renowned communication media among both young people and older people. They point out that, according to Forrester Research,⁹ SM users accounted for 75% of internet surfers in 2008. Users who socialise on the network, read and create blogs and contribute reviews to shopping sites, represent a significant increase in internet surfers as SM users, from 56% in 2007 to 75% in 2008. Furthermore, they argue that this increase is not only within usage by young people. Adults

⁹ Forrester Research is one of the most influential research and advisory firms in the world. It works with communication, business and technology leaders who are interested in developing customer-obsessed and driven strategies for their interaction with customers on different strata of interest. Forrester Research evaluates social media users' interactions on social media by proprietary research, data, custom consulting, exclusive executive peer groups, and events, with the purpose of identifying the rise of social media users on the internet and challenging the thinking of communication, business and technology users' leaders to maximise their presence on social media by engaging their customers on social media networks. <https://www.forrester.com/marketing/about/about-us.html>, <https://www.forrester.com/Social-Media>. Accessed: June 10th, 2015.

within the age range of 35 to 40 years are increasingly using SM as their means of engagement on the internet.

Different disciplines understand SM and use SNS for different purposes, and their different understandings of SM and usage of SNS inform their interface with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008:219; Li, Peng, Li, Sun, Li, & Xu, 2014:5115). From a telecommunications perspective, Marwick and Ellison (2012:378) understand SM like Facebook¹⁰ as sites for public displays of connection and grieving. In the same way, O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:169), from a telecommunications perspective, understand SM as professional and personal media for expressing the user's identity. This then means that SM, from the telecommunication perspective is understood as a public domain that is used for expressing self-identity through personal and professional connection.

SM are technological media and network sites [networking sites]¹¹ that serve as information and web-based services¹² that allow individuals and corporations to construct a private and public identity (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:211; Qualman, 2011:64). From a SM researcher's perspective with specialty in information technology, Lewis (2010:2) adds that SM technologies are computer-mediated communication technologies that typically are used to connect people, as well as to produce and share user-generated content. Cloete (2012:1), arguing from a theological perspective, concurs that SM comprise a communicative technology, but adds that, beyond being a communicative technology, social media constitute a body of knowledge that is interactive in nature. These interactions are between people who are network users.

These SM as discussed above create platforms for information dissemination and user interaction. From the medical and health-care perspective, Osatuyi (2013:2622), Van den Dam (2010:2) and Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012:165) support the fact that SM technologies are becoming frequent and reliable platforms for information dissemination in a timely manner to an audience that extends beyond a geographical location.

¹⁰ In this research study I use Facebook as the SNS of focus because scholars agree that it is the main SNS (Elaine 2012:25; Jin 2013:2463; Nkechi & Christian 2014:2231).

¹¹ Network sites or networking sites can be used interchangeably, depending on the scope or emphasis; networking emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers. Social network sites also do networking, but, much more, they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks.

¹² Social media are top of the agenda for many business executives, political leaders, decision makers as well as consultants, who try to identify ways in which firms can make profitable use of applications such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, podcasts, television, radio, Second Life, and Twitter (<http://www.journals.elsevier.com/business-horizons> (Accessed 15 August 2014)).

SM are categorised into two broad categories, namely the user's interaction and the user's interface with the media (Capurro 2013:161; Cheng & Guo 2015:229; Osatuyi 2013:2621). The user's interface with media refers to how two or more media systems connect users for interaction and information dissemination (Capurro 2013:162; Osatuyi 2013:2621). The user's interaction with media refers to how engaged they are in discussions and conversations with online friends. This also entails why users participate in an ongoing dialogue with other users by talking, looking, sharing or engaging in any kind of action that involves them. For instance, SM sites such as Facebook and MySpace are used mainly to share updates on user's daily lives, experiences and relationships (Cheng & Guo 2015:229; Osatuyi 2013:2621).

SM are categorised into two broad categories, but are classified in three different types. Therefore, there are two categories and three types of SM. As regards the types of SM, Osatuyi¹³ (2013:2621), Qualman¹⁴ (2011:38), and Marwick and Ellison¹⁵ (2012:378) argue that, although scholars differ in their descriptions of the types of SM, they universally agree on three major types. The SM technologies that these scholars and other scholars in the field of SM agree on are SNS, microblogging, and wikis. Osatuyi (2013:2623) points out some scholars argue for five types of SM, which further include online forums and online blogs. Osatuyi, however disagree on the five types of SM, which is why two types of SM are not universally accepted by most scholars. He notes that the two (online forums and online blogs) can be categorised under the universally acceptable types of SM, which implies that online forums can be created on SNS and wikis, while online blogs can be created on microblogging sites (2013:2623). Online forums can be categorised and explained under forums, and online blogs can be categorised and grouped under online microblogging. The three types of SM that are universally accepted as types of SM are discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

In accounting for the reasons why SM are frequently used platforms, Osatuyi (2013:2622) mentions that it is because of the wide-ranging user base and rapid spread of information within a timely space. Van den Dam (2010:1), arguing from a digital broadcasting paradigm, adds that the reason why young people (in particular) have made the SM platform a

¹³ Babajide Osatuyi is an information technologist and a scholar at the University of Texas, Pan-American.

¹⁴ Erik Qualman argues from a business perspective for the relevance of social media in daily lives. Due to his influence on social media, he was voted the 2nd most likeable author in the world behind the legendary author of Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling. One of the most reputable computer magazine in America, PC magazine, lists Qualman blog as a top 10 social media blog and he is acknowledged by the same magazine for writing and producing one of the most watched social media videos.

¹⁵ Alice Marwick and Nicole Ellison are scholars in communication and media studies. Marwick is a faculty member of Fordham University, U.S.A., and Ellison is a faculty member of University of Michigan.

frequently used platform for interaction is that SM provide a landscape for communication that is global, social, cheap and universal. It also gives voice and power to young people, whose opinion would not have been heard or read if not that SM are open to all users who wish to air their views. The influence of SM as a source of self-identity formation is in the ability to connect people all over the globe across space and geographical location.

2.3. Function of Social media

SM serves different functions to different network users. A few of these functions are discussed below:

2.3.1. SM facilitate self-disclosure.

Media psychologists Tsay-Vogel and Oliver (2014:111) argue that SM aid self-disclosure among users. Explaining their reason for this argument, they note that self-disclosure is a process through which personal and private information shared and public knowledge – implying that the user’s personal and private information that is disclosed on SM becomes a public resource.

On SM, young people make their personal and private information become shared and public knowledge. Allison (2013:69) concurs from a youth ministry standpoint, confirming that young people on SM share their personal and private information with other young people who are in their network of users.

Young people’s self-disclosure on SM is a means by which nearness, friendship, familiarity, and satisfaction are formed through interaction. Tsay-Vogel and Oliver (2014:112) confirm that self-disclosure on SM is what makes people feel connected to each other, and it thus enhances closeness and dyadic interactions¹⁶ among users, despite geographical distance. Boyd and Ellison (2007:220) provide a different understanding of self-disclosure. Differing from Tsay-Vogel and Oliver’s concept that self-disclosure is a means of connecting young people, Boyd and Ellison prefer to use the word self-presentation, thus arguing that some young people on SM only present an aspect of themselves that may not be an accurate profile of who they really are. They (Boyd & Ellison 2008:220) call this impression management.

¹⁶ Tsay-Vogel and Oliver (2014:112) explain “dyadic interaction” to mean breeding relational closeness, sustainability, and satisfaction in a relationship.

Impression management on SM, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008:220), means that, in their user profiles, young people present either a profile picture or data about themselves that may be inconsistent with their real self. This could be as a result of what MacKinnon and Heise (2011:466) call “a demanded identity” by a social environment or institution. SM, as young people’s social environment (institution), make demands for trendiness in profiling young people’s self-identity. This makes young people create, select and enact identities that depict a youth culture that is trendy, which might not be a true representation of themselves. Impression management is difficult to detect in an online network friendship. However, possibilities are that impression management could be discerned through an online friendship that leads to offline friendship.

The self-disclosure of users on SM explains how youth culture is formed. Allison (2013:69) claims that the fact that SM affords young people the platform to disclose their identity, ideologies and daily event updates accounts for how a shared youth culture of communication is formed among generational peers across global land space. This youth culture is called different names by different scholars. Theologian, Walt Mueller (2007:2), calls it the audio-video generation, the cyberkids, the digital age. Mueller (2007:2) argues that the diversity of ways in which young people are using the media of the digital age to create youth culture is causing anxiety and optimism in youth ministry. The reason for these mixed feelings of anxiety and optimism is not far removed from the fact that self-disclosure on SM is creating a commonality of depersonalised identity, ideologies, *slanguage* and culture that is unique to peers, the generation and a particular SM user.

2.3.2. Social media aids self-identification.

Tsay-Vogel and Oliver (2014:112), arguing from the point of view of the entertainment industry, note that societal celebrities¹⁷ on SM use character perception to influence the self-identity of their network of users. Self-disclosure by such societal celebrities influences their audience’s self-identity and character. Deacy and Arweck (2009:238), while reasoning that SM on the internet influences self-identity, submit that, since the internet provides space in which identity is being worked out, and SM and the internet are inseparable, the identity of a great populace is influenced on the internet through SM platforms.

¹⁷ In this context, societal celebrity could be seen through social interests among young people, such as music, movies, comedy and sports.

2.3.3. SM aids gossip, deformation of character, and widespread rumours

Boyd (2014:145) argues that gossip seems to take on a new dimension on SM. It facilitates how people share content and information about other people, which might or might not be true. Boyd argues further that, for example, a rumour shared on Facebook by a mischievous person has the potential to spread far and fast to millions of users (ibid). However, he notes that it is not that Facebook, as SM, creates gossip and rumour about individuals, but that Facebook users can easily leverage the Facebook platform to spread rumours and gossip.

2.4. History of Social Media

In modern historiography, social networking among people evolved before the internet or the mobile revolution. Unlike Ezeani and Igwesi (2012:2), who understand social networking history as an evolutionary development of online participation in which people of common interest communicate, share and contribute content in social cyberspace, social networking actually has its historiography before the advent of the computer, which heralded online engagement through the internet. Rainie and Wellman (2012:21) argue that it is pertinent to note that social networking among people came before the advent of computers. Explaining their reason for this argument, they submit that social networking is about relationships between network members – be they people, societies, organisations, nations or families (Rainie & Wellman 2012:27).

Rainie and Wellman (2012:21) argue that the concept of social media networks has been around since the Garden of Eden, when Cain hung out with Abel. In Genesis 4:8, Cain and Abel hung out and connected in their own environment called ‘field’. The field was like a venue or platform in which Cain and Abel connected as two individuals.

SM history predates the online-mediated technological revolution, as argued by Rainie and Wellman. However, Rainie and Wellman’s understanding that SM history dates back to Cain and Abel hanging out together in the Garden of Eden is subject to debates. Although I agree with their submission that the field where they hung out can be termed as their own environment, in which discussion and sharing of opinion could be experienced, I differ with their submission that Cain and Abel hanging out is synonymous with young people hanging out on SM. The reason why Cain and Abel hung out does not imply the basis for networking on social media. The basis for hanging out on SM between young people is shared interest

and shared interest of opinion, insight, perspective and experience with each other (Cheng & Guo 2015; Jin 2013:2463; Oladokun 2013: 246). It was not written in that passage of scripture that Cain and Abel hung out to share opinions, perspectives, insights or experience.

Technically, Aggarwal (2011:2) documents that the existence of social media pre-dates the advent of the internet. In October 1969, machines at Stanford and UCLA were used for communication between two individuals through the ARPANET. ARPANET was the technology that later developed to become the internet. ARPANET spread the usage of email, thus email became the application for ARPANET (“ARPANET app”). Ray Tomlinson’s invention of the @ sign further aided the user of email to identify users on individual machines. In 1978, the first two networks used for public connection and information dissemination were created. There was the public bulletin board system (CBBS) and the first multiuser domain, called Essex MUD. Later, in 1979, the Usenet was launched, which was used for private and public connection and the dissemination of information. How SM evolved from 1979 into modern history will be discussed under the history of SNS.

2.5. Categories of Information Shared on Social Media¹⁸

Osatuyi (2013:2623) posits that information is said to be dynamic when it generates multiple conversation among its customers. Information is said to be static when no response or engagement in conversation is required, for example the dissemination of information as a deadline reminder, or an announcement. Different categories of shared information on SM are discussed below.

2.5.1. Sensitive Information

MacKinnon and Heise (2011:466) argue that young “people confirm themselves cognitively and effectively in creating, selecting, and enacting identities in [a] particular social institutional context”. This implies that young people readily give sensitive information about themselves when demanded by a social institution, and not of their own volition. This sensitive information can either be static or dynamic, and it forms the identification of the young person. Commenting on how sensitive information influences an employer’s

¹⁸ Information is said to be dynamic when it generates multiple conversation among its customers. Information is said to be static when no response or engagement in conversation is required, for example the dissemination of information as a deadline reminder, or an announcement (Osatuyi 2013:2623).

conception of the identity of a potential job candidate, Qualman (2011:38) stresses that some business organisations identify a potential candidate by their network of friends and sensitive information displayed on SM. He adds that some business organisations hire a potential candidate or fire an employee based on sensitive information accessed on their SM profile (ibid).

2.5.2. Sensational Information

SM is causing great public interest and sensational excitement. Sensational information is more dynamic than static. Public interest and excitement account for why millions of young people use SM such that students in the United States use it approximately 30 minutes throughout the day as part of their daily routine (Boyd & Ellison 2008:210; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert 2009:227). Some users engage SM for social and romantic purposes and for networking exciting relationships on SM, that can result in a stronger relationships than face-to-face ones (McKenna, Katelyn, Green, Glenson & Marci, 2012:9; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering & Orr 2009:578). Beyond engaging and networking on SM, some network users transfer their excitement into offline connections that strengthen every facet of their daily offline lives (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza 2008:420).

2.5.3. Political Information

Political information on social media is more dynamic than static. This accounts for the reason why SM are influential in creating public space for politicians to provide a personal identity and impressive identity management and play a key role in the dissemination of political information. For instance, Qualman (2011:66, 68) observes that SM are credited as one of the successful strategies used by Barack Obama in his presidential campaign against John McCain.

Qualman further narrates that, since SM help create an identity that users rely on in the general freedom afforded by the web, “the Obama camp was smart in appealing to the perception of Obama as a religious man in the eyes of the young people of America by introducing a Chief Technological Officer (CTO) position to the president’s cabinet, which was dependent on an Obama victory” (2011:68). On Facebook, Obama had about 5.1 million fans, 833 161 friends on Myspace, 113 000 followers on Twitter, and 110 million viewers on YouTube. From these sentiments, I infer that SM have become a significant space,

opportunity and place for the youth ministry to influence young people for whatever perception of religion about God and life that the Church wants them to have.

In a related argument, Camara (2008:211) argues that SM can influence the political space of young people. Since SM affords network users the freedom to share choice information, some network users can disseminate information that has the potential to cause young people to become involved in the political culture in their region. The involvement of young people in the political culture of their region can be constructive or chaotic - constructive as discussed by Qualman (ibid) in relation to Obama's campaign strategy.

Iwilade (2013:1054) discusses how SM can be employed to fight for a just cause but cause chaotic scenarios. Iwilade (2013:1059) elucidate that in September 2010, the youth of Mozambique organized themselves on SM and staged a protest over the incessant rise in the cost of living from 2008 to 2010. This political action took place in the city capital, Maputo and in the satellite city of Matola, but was mobilized on SM by Mozambique's young people disseminating political information on how the government was being insensitive to the plight of Mozambique's people. (Iwilade 2013:1059).

A similar event of youth sharing political information to mobilize their SM network friends for political and activism action occurred in Nigeria. Iwilade (2013:1062) narrates that in January 2012, Nigerian youths mobilized themselves on SM network to protest the government policy to remove the fuel subsidy. These mobilizations on SM depict how youths can use the platform of SM to challenge perceived injustice. Iwilade argues that the information shared on SM to mobilized network users led to protest by young people, and the government did not grant them their request (2013:1066). It shows however how young people can use SM as a political information space to construct an agenda or cause protest.

2.5.4. Casual Information

Due to the dynamic nature of casual information disseminated on SM, some scholars are of the view that there is no such thing as addiction to technologies and SM. This implies that people are casually surfing and interacting on SM for a reason. Rainie and Wellman (2012:6) explain this ideology by arguing that continuous engagement with SM does not necessarily suggest that people are hooked on or addicted to technologies and SM; on the contrary, young people are hooked on each other and are addicted to communicating with their friends on SM.

SM thus creates a platform where users get hooked on each other and staunchly share casual information about themselves. O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:11) reason that young people are actually hooked on each other on SM, because they talk about books and magazines that they are reading, movies and videos that they are watching, music and jokes that they are listening to. They thus create what O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:11) call an "attention economy", in which young people on SM share their ideas and comments about what they care about and what defines their identity. The drive to achieve the attention economy on SM is one reason why the relevance of some disseminated information on SM is questionable. For example, there are persons whose identities on SM are virtually *alter egos* of themselves – i.e. a make-believe "other" for various reasons. E.g. a musical artist plying under a 'stage name' creates a different persona and engages fans in that identity while 'being him/herself' in reality.

However, there are casual information's on SM that are not based on friendship. What Rainie and Wellman (2012:6) and O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:11) do not take into cognisance in their argument that young people are addicted to friends on SM and not to technologies or something else, is that some young people actually are addicted to content on SM that has nothing to do with their friends or other network users.

For example, Cloete (2012) argues that some young people are addicted to sexual information on SM. Bosch (2011:78) supports the notion that some young people are addicted to women in sexually provocative poses on SM. This suggests the complexity of SM. While some network users are addicted to SM because of friendship with online and offline friends, some other network users are addicted to SM because of sexually provocative information and videos that are generated on SM. Therefore network users are on SM for shared interest.

2.5.5. Relational Information

Qualman (2011:262) submits that "1 out of 8 couples married in the United States met through social media". O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:9) concur with Qualman when they say that users use SM to establish relationship and also to update family members who are far away on events and happenings in their families. Relational information on SM is both static and dynamic, though more dynamic than static because it entails meeting new friends (lovers) who are willing to establish romantic relationships. This concept of meeting new lovers and updating family members with current information is what O'Reilly and Milstein (2009:9) call "ambient intimacy".

Unlike the United States, Africans are more disposed to offline relationships in which people meet and share relational information in physical contact than on SM. Although the influence of SM changing this African preferences cannot be denied, Africans traditionally are more relational in offline relationships than O'Reilly and Milstein's (ibid) concept of ambient intimacy.

2.5.6. Religious Information

SM is providing a world with no boundaries and allowing religious opportunities through the dissemination of religious information that is static and dynamic, and networking on a global scale (Collins-Mayo (2010:67). This informs the challenge of uncensored religious information and networking among young people whose identity and spiritual formation of truth and the meaning of life are being influenced. Collins-Mayo (2010:67) submits that what some young people know about religion is influenced by their absorption of other users' views, laments and frustrations about institutions and religious personnel; hence such young people may not be well informed in their religious acumen.

The dynamic nature of information dissemination on SM has created a sense of relativism in religious belief and in the identities that the youth have become and are still becoming. It has created a somewhat confusing platform for religion [inasmuch as it also has created positive communicative links], but has led scholars to ask many questions, especially within Christendom. Tony (2001:26) sheds more light on this relativism in which the youth deny the presence of absolutism. In this sense, truth is in the eye of the beholder, that is, one person's truth is another person's theory. Moreover, this kind of postmodern thought is intertwined with scepticism about what objective rationality is. In this kind of thinking, the truth becomes whatsoever a person chooses to believe it to be. For example, what sin is has become a debatable phenomenon.

Huffman (2011:116) illustrates this using the presidential elections in American in November 2008, as found on a blog named 'Christian today's politics blog', of which the full text was posted of Cathleen Falsani's interview with Barack Obama during his time as state senator in Illinois. In one conversation, Falsani asked, "what is sin?" to which senator Obama responded by saying that sin "is being out of alignment with my values". This verbal exchange reflects the profound depth of how individuals in a postmodern society (as explained by Huffman 2011:116) accord meaning to life, for instance, what sin means is alluded to in terms of one's

values [as in Obama's case above], and not some other, external standards that are informed by anyone [anything] but one's self.

These ideologies of religious belief and conviction being promoted by individuals as personal opinion instead of referring to biblical and theological authority as the compendium of truth raise the question: who determines the values displayed in SM? Are the Christian youth equipped to determine their value apart from that which is disseminated or imposed by SM? Why are the youth so immersed in and do they imitate values on SM that are external to biblical belief and conviction? These are questions that are left to be answered later in this research.

The researcher, using Osmer's theological framework in Chapter 4 investigates how the various plinths of SM can become an avenue for creating media applications for the propagation of the Gospel. Ailish and Gempf (2002:13) concur that Christians should live with the ideology of understanding the context and consciously influence people while being heavenly minded of God's eternal purpose.

2.6. Meaning of Youth Culture in Social Media

Culture is a social way of life among humans. Branson and Martinez (2011:83) say culture is that which embodies a matrix of social patterns: norms (worldview, belief, values and practices); traditions (heritage); patterned meaning (how values are understood and embodied); development (learning among those born into the culture, encultured for those who come from outside); symbolic representation (imagination, media); perception (how sensory input is filtered, received and processed); connotation (character, tendencies, wisdom); and extension (styles of encounter with outsiders). Culture is the worldview, way of life and the belief system of a particular group of people (Branson & Martinez 2011:83).

The youth are a group of people with their own peculiarity. Cloete (2012:1), commenting on youth as a group of people, says that the youth as a category of people have their own preference for a way of life and thinking that forms their culture, known as youth culture. Cloete (2012:2) further argues that this way of life and thinking is subject to influence, because it is constructed through different social processes. Youth culture is an exceptional way of life, ideology and perception that is generally observed among youth. This way of life, ideology and perception can be influential when shared among youth and can also be

influenced by other social institutions. Taylor (2012:3) confirms that various social institutions like the media have always influenced how people think, feel and behave in interacting with each other. Social institutions like SM have been a source of influence from time immemorial, because they enable young people to create their own youth culture.

Youth culture is a behavioural attitude and practice (values, norms and beliefs) that occurs mostly among the youth. This suggests that youth culture, as evident in the behaviour of the youth, includes certain customs, norms, values, languages (*slanguage*) and expected ways of doing things (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010:6). Hence, youth culture is the commonality of shared behaviour, values, customs, norms, language and expected ways of life among youths. Culture serves as a medium of social patterning among the youth, whose understanding of life is greatly influenced by peculiar youth practices within a geographical location. However, with the advent of social media, youth culture is learned quickly and speedily beyond a confined geographical location due to young people's interaction with the global community through the available platforms on SM.

Youth culture is not neutral in content and influence – it is influenced by social engagement with contemporaries in a social context. The global social culture of young people is influenced by peers from the global sphere. Culture (Branson & Martinez 2011:83; Hofstede *et al.* 2010:6) is a collective phenomenon that embodies a matrix of social patterns through the programming of the mind that distinguishes a group of people, because the ideologies that inform the thinking of the mind are partly shared with people who interact with other people within the same social environment.

Furthermore, culture is learned and not innate or genealogical¹⁹ (Hofstede *et al.* 2010:6). Culture is derived from one's engagement with the social environment, which informs the reason why cultural beliefs and practices are transmissible within a given social environment. Sefton-Green (2003:2) argues that the diversity of ways in which young people are accessing and appropriating information in creating a youth culture through SM is redefining their identity and causing anxiety because of the unlimited access to information that SM affords young people. In other words, SM offers the youth a platform to express a culture of collective identity (Cloete 2012:2).

¹⁹ Culture is not inherent in humans at birth. It is a way of life that is learned from the family, the environment and engagement with other humans.

All human beings carry within themselves a particular pattern of reasoning and acting or living that was learned within their social environmental context (Hofstede *et al.* 2010:6; McCallum 1996:21). These particular patterns of thinking and acting gradually inform the social identity of that person. For young people whose social environment is SM, the electronic technology of SM creates in them an insatiable longing for change in patterns on a continuous basis. Today's electronic technologies feed on this insatiable longing and appetite of young people for new cultural expression and experience (Schultze *et al.* 1991:4).

Sharing content of cultural expression and information is a form of currency, and the experiencing of a cultural artefact facilitates bonding among young people (Boyd, 2014:145). Cloete (2012:2) argues that people are in the habit of creating their "own world" through the choices they make and the lifestyle they live. This creates a problem of different kinds of lifestyle in society.

These different options of lifestyle sometimes confuse young people when they choose a lifestyle and culture. With the advent of SM, youth culture is learned more quickly and speedily beyond a confined geographical location due to young people's interaction with the global community through the available platforms of SM. Thus, young people on SM influence one another's patterns of thinking and practice by continuously sharing their thoughts and ideologies with users within their global network of friends (Gangel & Wilhoit 1993:65). This network of friends is beyond a geographical space, especially because culture is a normative way of life for a group of people irrespective of their geographical location (Cloete 2015a:3).

One social environment in which youth culture is cultivated is on SM. Boyd (2014:55) argues that young people on SM struggle to maintain their identity without the influence of a youth-centric community. SM provides an environment in which the identity of young people is influenced by the global youth cultural trend. Therefore, the identity of young people is trendier and globally inclusive rather than exclusive to an individual young person.

To ignore the influence of SM on the youth culture of a generation is to risk irrelevance, because SM is a powerful shaper of young people's culture. Strommen and Hardel (2000:257) support the view that "media that encourage self-gratification, individualism, anti-authoritarianism, and the likes are powerful shapers of the attitudes and values not only of young people but also of families, communities, and the culture itself".

Veith (1994:xii) further calls on the Church to engage youth culture by critically interacting with it through its various channels and media of information dissemination, like Facebook, television, radio and YouTube, because “to accept uncritically is to risk syncretism and unfaithfulness”. Yaconelli (2003:4), in addressing the effect that youth culture is having on the youth, says that the establishment of a youth ministry is in response to the influence of global culture among young people.

2.7. Types of Social Media

There are different types of SM in use by young people. The different types are microblogging sites, wikis and SNS. This research emphasises SNS because they are the most popular user-generated content-based computer and mobile-mediated communication technologies among Nigerian youth (Nkechi & Christian 2014:2231). SNS are apparently the most accessed sites for sharing daily updates, new pictures, and even for interaction among young people (Marwick & Ellison 2012:378; Osatuyi 2013:2622).

2.7.1. Microblogging Sites

Blogging is a SM contrivance for the dispersal of information. Houghton (2012:8) and Scher (2009:128) define a blog (a shortened form of the word ‘weblog’) as a particular type of website that contains articles and posts of ideas that are usually time-stamped and organized in reverse chronology so that the network users always see the most recent article and post of the blog creator’s thoughts, comments, personal views, press release and philosophies with a human voice first.²⁰ Osatuyi (2013:2623) argues that microblogging sites allow users to create and share short messages with the public or a targeted audience. Example of such microblogging sites on which short messages are created are Twitter, the most popular microblogging site, and also Vox and Windows Live Space (Marion 2009:137).

Beyond the fact that microblogging sites create and share messages, Murley and Teusner (2009:240) add that blogging sites are tools for the distribution of ideas. Through dialogue with other users, these ideas are then extended and reformed to produce a richer understanding and to construct notions of identity, theology and society in community. Thus, blogging provides a platform for saving, organising, processing and distributing information.

²⁰ Cheryl Ozinsky, the former head of Cape Town Tourism, is cited by Scher in arguing for the need for a human voice in explaining microblogging.

To this, Murley and Teusner (2009:240) add that blogging provides a mechanism for users' interaction and encourages new ideas and patterns of thinking to emerge communally, beyond individual experience, and for an understanding of the meaning intended by the originating blogger – thus making active participation in knowledge building possible and influencing the self-identity formation of users.

The idea that microblogging sites provide a platform of influence in the formation of the self-identity of users affords the Christian community an opportunity to constructively influence the self-identity of young people. Murley and Teusner (2009:240) note from the perspective of Christian ministry that the emerging church can engage users by creating blogs or a blogosphere that has great authority in constructing the identity of the emerging church in the world. This identity, they say, should include theological, missiological, ecclesiological, philosophical, sociological, economic and political components (*ibid*). These different disciplinary approaches in the discussion will give the emerging church a wide range of users of the blogs, whose self-identity they (the church) can influence in the missional mandate of reaching out to the world.

Online blogs are personal or cooperative blogging activities created by a user to add information to an existing topic of discussion (Newson, Houghton & Patten 2009:81). They are used to publish a personal journal online by an individual or group of likeminded users (occasionally) who disseminate information to a particular audience or a particular professional discipline. Chung, Kim, Trammel and Porter (2007:307) argue that traditional media companies use the social medium of a blogging platform to interact with and get feedback from customers who subscribe to their blogging websites.

2.7.2. Wikis

Wikis are collaborative web pages for developing web content for a free online encyclopaedia that provides background knowledge and definition of content (Ezeani & Igwesi 2012:3), with the potential of allowing multiple users to add, edit and remove information (Newson *et al.* 2009:79). Ezeani and Igwesi (2012:3) further note that wikis provide a platform for users to access, edit and contribute to content. Osatuyi (2013:2623) adds that the essentiality of wikis is to provide educational information for users. Despite being educational sites, it is not the traditional method of education that I had growing up, where a teacher was the custodian of information – thus the teacher was the producer of

knowledge and the students were consumers of the knowledge. Wikis, according to Osatuyi (2013:2623), differ from the traditional method of education because they do not entail a teacher-student or student-teacher praxis. All users of wikis have the administrative²¹ permission to edit and modify content in real time.

There are different types of wikis. Alex, Deryck and Justin (2009:79) note that among the types of wikis accessed by users are Wikia, a community of users who access different subjects, e.g. Wikipedia; and wikiHow, a practical ‘how to’ manual for everything. These sites inform users of how to do anything that interests them, from how to do things such as cook, draft a proposal, draft a business plan, and play the keyboard, dress, and etcetera. Finally, Wikinews is a site that disseminates static news information.

The vulnerability of the wiki platform is that no definition of the concept is absolute. Because all users can access, edit and contribute to an online encyclopaedia, this means that all concepts of words and meaning are subject to the users’ acceptance. This can create a confused interpretation of the meaning of words and concepts. On the one hand it is cyberspace, where users communicate and contribute to existing knowledge, and on the other hand, knowledge is subject to the users’ worldviews, and thus erodes the concept of universally accepted knowledge.

2.7.3. Social Networking Sites

SNS are types of SM that emphasise relationship initiation in which the user interface is personal between the audience and users (Osatuyi, 2013:2622). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:63) add that

Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending emails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs.

Social networking sites like Facebook and the like are used to share updates on the user’s self-identity and impression management. Another aspect of SNS is that they comprise a generic interaction between any groups of actors. Aggarwal (2011:2), in conceptualising

²¹ Permission is said to be administrative permission when the administrator, who is also the creator of the wiki platform, authorises all users to read, edit and comment on articles, documents and any educational information that is disseminated on the wiki platform.

social networking sites from a sociological paradigm, defines social networking sites as information networking sites for human interaction and relationships, where the nodes consist of actors and the edges consist of the relationship or interaction between these actors.

Besides social networking sites being generic interaction sites between groups of human actors, Ezeani and Igwesi (2012:1), from a librarian's perspective, argue that social networking sites (which are also called SNS services or social networking communities) are web-based services that allow individuals with shared interests to connect by constructing a public or semi-public profile that suggests the self-identity of the user. Ezeani and Igwesi further argue that, since social networking sites are web-based, they afford librarians a platform to engage SM users in interaction by sharing information of shared interest with network users. Therefore, the user and librarian are participants, co-creators and builders of knowledge in the social network space.

Qualman (2011:54) argues that SNS make it easier to stay in touch and to interface with users of interest, because social networking sites enable users to stay abreast of the people with whom they want to remain connected. The reason for this is that SNS are content and information based. In a like manner, Ezeani and Igwesi (2012:4) claim that social networking sites promote open access to knowledge. Users have open access to information and content that are readily available to them without authentication. Example of such SNSs are Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace and MyChurch (Marion 2009:135).

The librarian perspective, in which the user and librarian are both participants, co-creators and builders of knowledge on social networking sites, suggests that users are both consumers and producers of online information (Ezeani & Igwesi 2012:1; Mueller 2007:4). This implies that users and librarians are engaged in online participation and content distribution. Van den Dam (2010:1) adds that, because the users of SNS are both producers and consumers of information, young people are shifting their communication and interaction focus from traditional (telecom, television) media of communication to the media of social networking sites – the reason being that the traditional media are mostly one-way information dissemination that is not participatory.

The openness and freedom of users to air their views through SNS also pose challenges. Writing from medical practitioners' perspectives, Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012:165), Palmer (2012:14) and Curran (2012:14) note that SNSs of SM are forcing medical practitioners to

rethink how patients and the lay public ingest medical information. In the light of these challenges, Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012:165) understand SNSs as both a blessing and a curse. SNSs as a blessing implies that authors, scholars and editors can post information or educate patients and the lay public on the latest developments in the medical field that concern humanity. This information can be disseminated in real time. SNSs as a curse implies that the content of information disseminated can change from day to day, thus making the information confusing for patients and the lay public. Such confusing information can lead a patient to medication that is inappropriate for his/her ailment.

In addition, Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012:165) further comment that, on another, related curse-inclined paradigm, users can post or recommend to other users on their SNSs medication they took when they were sick, which may be dangerous for another sick person due to an allergic reaction or hormonal reactions to certain medication. To remedy this curse, Palmer (2012:14) suggests a drastic measure that medical personnel should steer patients away from websites like PatientsLikeMe, because on such websites, patients as users can post recommendations for drugs that aided their healing when they were sick. This concept of the patient becoming a 'doctor' who recommends medication on their SNSs is what constitutes the curse of SNS, according by Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012).

It is pertinent for SNS medical personnel who disseminate information on a medical platform to declare their conflict of interest on SNS before disseminating medical information (Curran, 2012:14), because SM users are susceptible to unconcealed and hidden conflicts of interest (Pirraglia & Kravitz, 2012:165). More so, it should be customary for SNS medical personnel to refer their SNS patients and the lay public to practising medical personnel who will run a diagnosis before prescribing medication for an ailment, because a wrong prescription can lead to the death of SNS users, who mostly are young people.

SNSs have created a global space for collaboration and communication. Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2010:1337) argue that, in terms of numerical figures, the numbers of users (especially young people) who are globally connected on SNS, collaborating and communicating by creating, sharing and contributing to existing knowledge are over a billion. Despite the disenchantment in some quarters with the validity and reliability of information on SNS, it still hosts over a billion users who daily access information and self-disclose their identity (Wilson, Guinan, Parise & Weinberg 2011:14).

From a theological perspective, SNS is a technological platform to share Biblical stories. SM affords users to tell and listen to other network users stories. Menardi (2012:10) argues that network users use the platform of SM to tell their stories. She (ibid) further argued that while some user's use SM to tell jokes and personal stories, Christian network users can as well use the SNS platform to tell biblical stories. It is almost the same as Jesus sitting around with His disciples and telling them stories of heavenly significance. The primary difference is that while Jesus sat with his disciples in a face-to-face sitting, SNS users share online stories with other network users.

2.7.3.1. Difference between Social Network Sites and Social Networking Sites

Over the last few decades there have been arguments about whether to categorise social networking sites and social network sites as the same. Authors like Ross *et al.* (2009:578) understand them to mean the same, but scholars like Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) challenge the traditional thinking that social network sites and social networking sites mean the same thing. For Boyd and Ellison (2008:211), social network sites and social networking sites should not be understood as the same and they choose to use social network sites instead of social networking sites in their discourse on SM, because social network sites and social networking sites each have a different emphasis and scope.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view their list of connections and those made by others within the system. In constructing a public or semi-public profile with users with whom they share a connection, social network sites enable users to articulate and make their social network visible for other users within their network. This implies that, on social network sites, the users' primary concern is not seeking to connect with new friends or strangers, but rather to communicate with other users who already are part and parcel of their extended social network (Boyd & Ellison 2008:211).

Social networking sites, on the other hand, emphasise communication among users who are strangers to each other, without a pre-existing network relationship or an offline relationship (Boyd & Ellison 2008:211). Social networking sites (Ross *et al.* 2009:578) allow users to find other users with similar interests, irrespective of any existing relationship. These

relationships with strangers could develop to become a stronger relationship than an offline relationship. These relationships can also result in offline relationships (Subrahmanyam *et al.* 2008:420).

Social network sites and social networking sites denote the same concept and type of SM, which can be used interchangeably, as admitted by Boyd and Ellison (2008:211). They both have the same types of SM platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, Myworld and MyChurch (Boyd & Ellison 2008:213; Cheung *et al.* 2010:1337; Pempek *et al.* 2009:227; Ross *et al.* 2009:578; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe 2008:434; Subrahmanyam *et al.* 2008:420; Zhong, Hardin, & Sun 2011:1265). Although some scholars choose to use the phrase social network sites (Boyd & Ellison 2008:213; Cheung *et al.* 2010:1337), others choose to use the phrase social networking sites (Pempek *et al.* 2009:227; Ross *et al.* 2009:578; Subrahmanyam *et al.* 2008:420). The interchangeable usage of social network sites and social networking sites is a matter of preference of phrase and not of concept.

Social network sites and social networking sites connote the same concept. Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) and Cheung *et al.* (2010:1337) agree that social network sites are an online social network through which users connect with people who were not necessarily in their network of friends (thus strangers). Steinfield *et al.* (2008:434), on the other hand, prefer to use the ideology of people establishing a new online relationship rather than using the ideology of users meeting strangers online – but establishing a new online relationship with someone a user does not know from pre-existing relationships means establishing a new relationship with a stranger. For the sake of this thesis, I will prefer the phrase social networking sites. The reason for this is that it is conceptually clearer to understand what it means since it is frequently used by most scholars. Another cogent reason for the preference of social networking sites over social network sites is that, even Boyd and Ellison and Cheung *et al.* who prefer to use the phrase social network sites, admit that most scholars are conversant with using the phrase social networking sites.

2.7.3.2. History and Evolution of Social Networking Sites

Aggarwal (2011:2) explain how SNS evolved from an experiment labelled, Milgram [18] to sixDegree.com. He argues that the history of social network [networking] sites has its roots in the late 1960s in the Milgram [18] experiment, which hypothesised the likelihood that any pair of ‘actors’ on the planet are separated by at most six degrees of separation. While such a

hypothesis has largely remained conjecture over the last few decades, the development of the online social network has made it possible to test such hypotheses, at least in an online setting, in what is also known as the small world phenomenon. This phenomenon was tested in the context of MSN messenger data, Milgram [16], that the average path length between two users of MSN messenger was 6.6. This can be considered a verification of the widely known rule of “six Degrees of separation” in the (generic) social network call sixDegree.com.

Boyd and Ellison (2007:214) further explain how SNS evolved from being sixDegree.com to become what is today known as SNS. They use the figure below to explain.

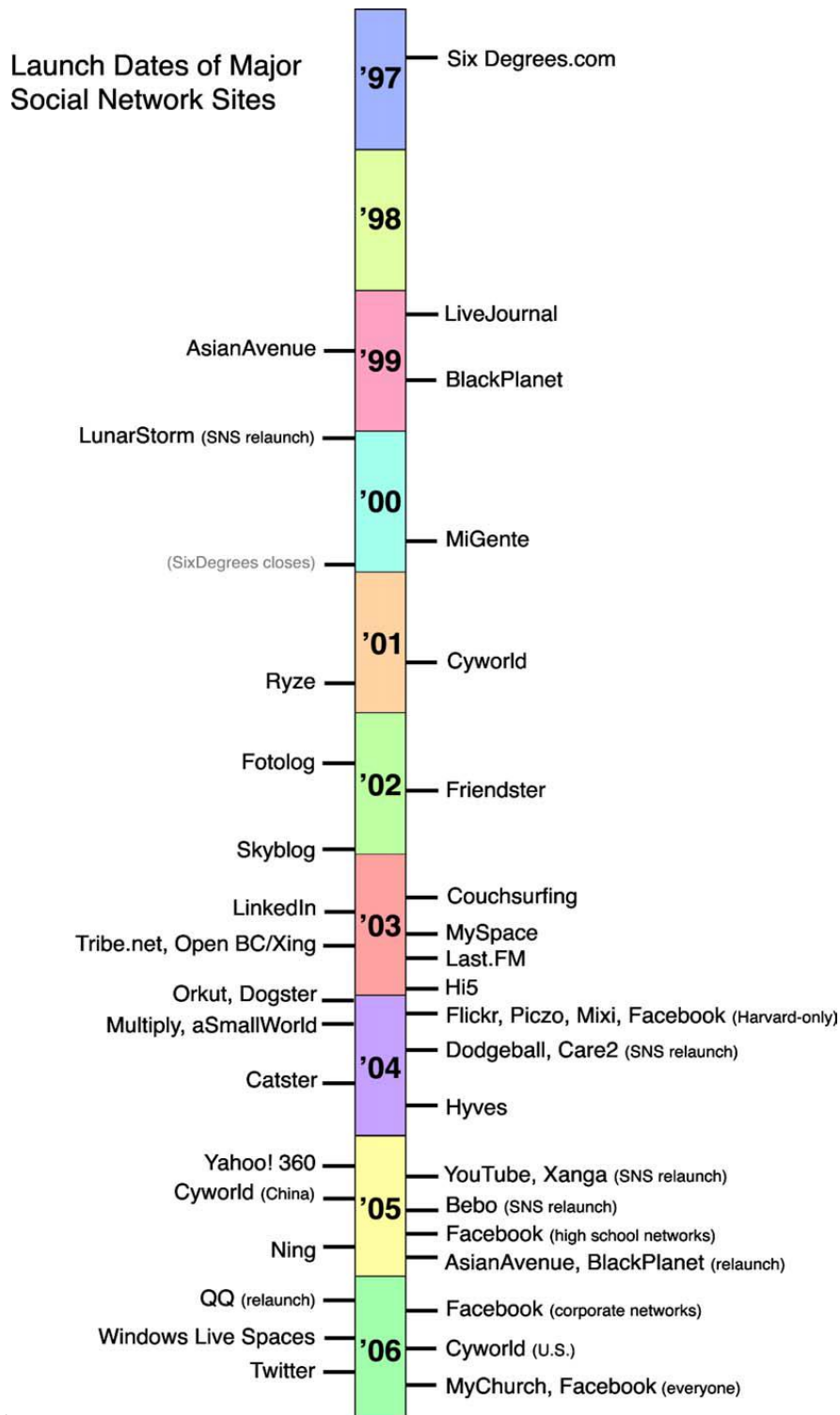


Figure 1: The timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs and dates when community sites with SNS features were launched.

As seen in Figure 1, sixDegree.com was the first social networking site, in 1997. Users on this platform could create their own profiles and enlist their friends. Later, in 1998, a pre-existing application was added that enabled users to surf their friends' profiles. In an attempt to create a platform where high school and college students could connect and surf, classmate.com was created, except that on classmate.com, users could not create profiles or enlist their friends until many years later.

Historically, sixDegree.com was the first network in which users could connect, surf and send messages to each other. The personal profile thus became a public profile. In 2000, sixDegree was purchased for \$125 million and, because it failed to become a sustainable business, it was shut down in 2001.

In 2001, Ryze.com evolved to become the leading SNS with the purpose of helping business networks to thrive with no or little competitiveness. The evolution of Ryze.com also gave rise to the advent of other SNSs with a business and friendship inclination. A network such as LinkedIn is for business and professionalism, and networks like Friendster are for friends to connect and interact in social events.

The year 2003 saw the remarkable emergence of MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004), which heralded the worldwide popularity and addictive phenomenon of online SNSs as a media of communication and influence (Cheung *et al.*, 2011:1337; Ross *et al.*, 2009:579).

2.7.3.3. Types of Social Networking Sites

There are different types of SNS in use, but Facebook is the most used by young people (Menardi 2012:25; Jin 2013:2463; Nkechi & Christian 2014:2231). Nkechi and Christian (2014:2231) submit that Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are some of the SNSs that provides users with video games, virtual worlds, mobile telephoning, text message devices, etc. Osatuyi (2013:2622) similarly argues that SNSs have a wide user base and afford users widespread information. Facebook as an SNS has made communication erstwhile impossible to become possible through networking, hanging out and the widespread sharing of information. This research focuses on Facebook because it is the most used SNS among Nigerian youth (Osatuyi 2013:2622).

Facebook is one of the SNSs that originated in the United States (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:63). Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in order to stay in touch with his fellow

students from Harvard University. The initial project of Facebook was to serve students of Harvard University as a platform for fostering relationships (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:63). In 2007 it became a global, public domain for all network users. Facebook is one of the most popular and global mobile internet-based online applications that accounts for a large population on SNS (Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan & Marrington 2013:608; Jin 2013:2463; Nkechi & Christian 2014:2232; Song, *et al.* 2014:446). Facebook is a communication medium that provides a platform for young people to meet and share information, connection and friendship (Grieve *et al.* 2013:608; Jin 2013:2463).

Young people who engage with each other on Facebook do so in order to connect with their friends, who are likely to be online or offline friends. Facebook as a technological site facilitates online and offline relationships. Grieve *et al.* (2013:604) and Jin (2013:2463) argue that young people's Facebook friends are composed mainly of their offline friends. Although this may be true, some Facebook users connects with people they do not even know (Nkechi & Christian 2014:2232).

Menardi (2012:25) says that Facebook has now grown from a network that was originally meant for Harvard University students to connect over 1 billion users. Facebook is not just a network that prides itself in the number of users who have registered on it; it has much more pride in itself in the fact that more than 50% of users frequently log in every day on multiple devices, such as desktops, laptops, smartphones, iPads and tablets. The viral nature of Facebook, which allows anyone to see anyone's profile and send an invite to anyone of choice, has made Facebook an appealing connection medium for young people who want to share their stories, make new friends and even hook up with a potential spouse for marriage.

2.8. Social Media in the Nigerian Context

The influence of SM, especially SNSs, on young people is global. It is not particular to a community, nation and continent, except that the kind of influence varies from community and nation to continent. Sefton-Green (2003:2) argues that the diversity of ways in which young people are accessing and appropriating information in creating a youth culture through SM is redefining their identity and causing anxiety because of the unlimited access to information that social media affords young people.

The access to SM and its vices is a notable phenomenon in Abuja, Nigeria, as it is in most parts of the world. Nkechi and Christian (2014:2232), reporting an empirical research that they conducted in Nigeria on the engagement (accessing and disseminating information's) of Nigerian youth on SM, argue that SM comprise a fascinating technological medium of communication and interaction in Nigeria, especially among the Nigerian youth. They argue that Nigerian youth are very disposed to SM as a medium of interaction and socialisation with friends, family and society. This interaction has not been without challenges (Nkechi & Christian 2014:2234).

The challenges that SM pose to the Nigerian youth range from exposure to sexual promiscuity, internet crime and the dehumanisation of healthy self-identity (Nkechi & Christian 2014:2234). These challenges are also a point of concern to the government. In a public address to young people in Nigeria in 2013, Benjamin Ezra Dikki, the Director-General of the Nigerian agency Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE), posited that “(a)s it now obtains, all manner of things are uploaded on the various platforms of the social networking sites without recourse to age and sensibilities of the users” (Nigeria’s plan to regulate social media 2013: np).

The government acknowledges that SM are posing a challenge of self-identity and immoral choices because they are not able to manage the information that is disseminated on SM. Oso (2013:13), admitting with the government that SM are posing a challenge to the self-identity formation of Nigerian youth, adds that social media also are the voice of the people. In Nigeria, Oso (2013:13) argues, social media (especially social networking sites) are regarded as the voice of the people and the social watchdog because they set the agenda and provide citizens with a platform from which to share their beliefs and personal dispositions on issues. These platforms provided by SM to Nigerian youth to share their beliefs and personal dispositions without censorship is what is creating concern for the Federal Government of Nigeria.

In an attempt to remedy these challenges, the Federal Government of Nigeria is proposing to enact a policy that will regulate the use of SM in Nigeria. In a statement, the Head of the Bureau’s section for public communication, Chigbo Anichebe, said, “In line with its reform mandate, the Bureau plans to initiate necessary policies and the legal framework for the regulation of the Social Media in the country” (Nigeria’s plan to regulate social media, 2013: np). The Nigerian government’s approach of proposing a reform that will regulate SM users

is short of a viable approach, because it will breach the constitution²² of the country, which the Nigerian leaders pledged to uphold. This approach was no different from the colonial master's approach in the 1950s. According to Kintz (2007:2), the colonial masters established authorities in Nigeria that controlled media development and information dissemination, which led then young people like Nnandi Azikiwe who later became the Nigerian head of state from 1963-1966 to rebel against authority, thus causing anarchy.

Nigerians, especially the youth in urban areas like Abuja, are more active on mobile social media, with the highest number of users compared to other African countries (Kintz, 2007:6). The World internet statistics²³ of December 2013 showed that Nigeria had the highest number of users of the internet in Africa, with 67 319 186. Egypt had 43 065 211, South Africa had 23 655 690, Kenya 21 273 738 and Morocco 18 472 835. The number of Nigerian users increased from 200 000 in 2000 to 67 319 186 in 2013 (Eklin 2013:np). According to Socialbakers' Facebook statistics²⁴ by country, Nigeria and South Africa are among the top 10 fastest growing countries using Facebook. Statistics reveal that Nigeria is the 8th fastest growing country, with an increase of more than 14.09% in the population using Facebook, and South Africa had an increase of more than 12.96% Facebook users (Socialbakers 2014). Inasmuch as various government ministries, departments, agencies and individuals in Nigeria are using social media to share information and personal interaction, the government is very concerned about its general usage among young people, whose self-identity and understanding of life are greatly influenced by information accessed on social media.

²² Section 22 of the 1999 Nigerian constitution states that "the media are empowered at all time to be free to uphold the fundamental principles of governance", and in section 39(1) states that "[e]very person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference" (Nigerian Constitution of 1999).

²³ Internet world statistics is an internet usage and population statistics site that features up-to-date world internet usage, population statistics, travel stats and internet market research data for over 233 individual countries and world regions. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm#africa>.

²⁴ *Socialbakers* is the most popular provider of social media analytic tools, statistics and metrics for Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn.

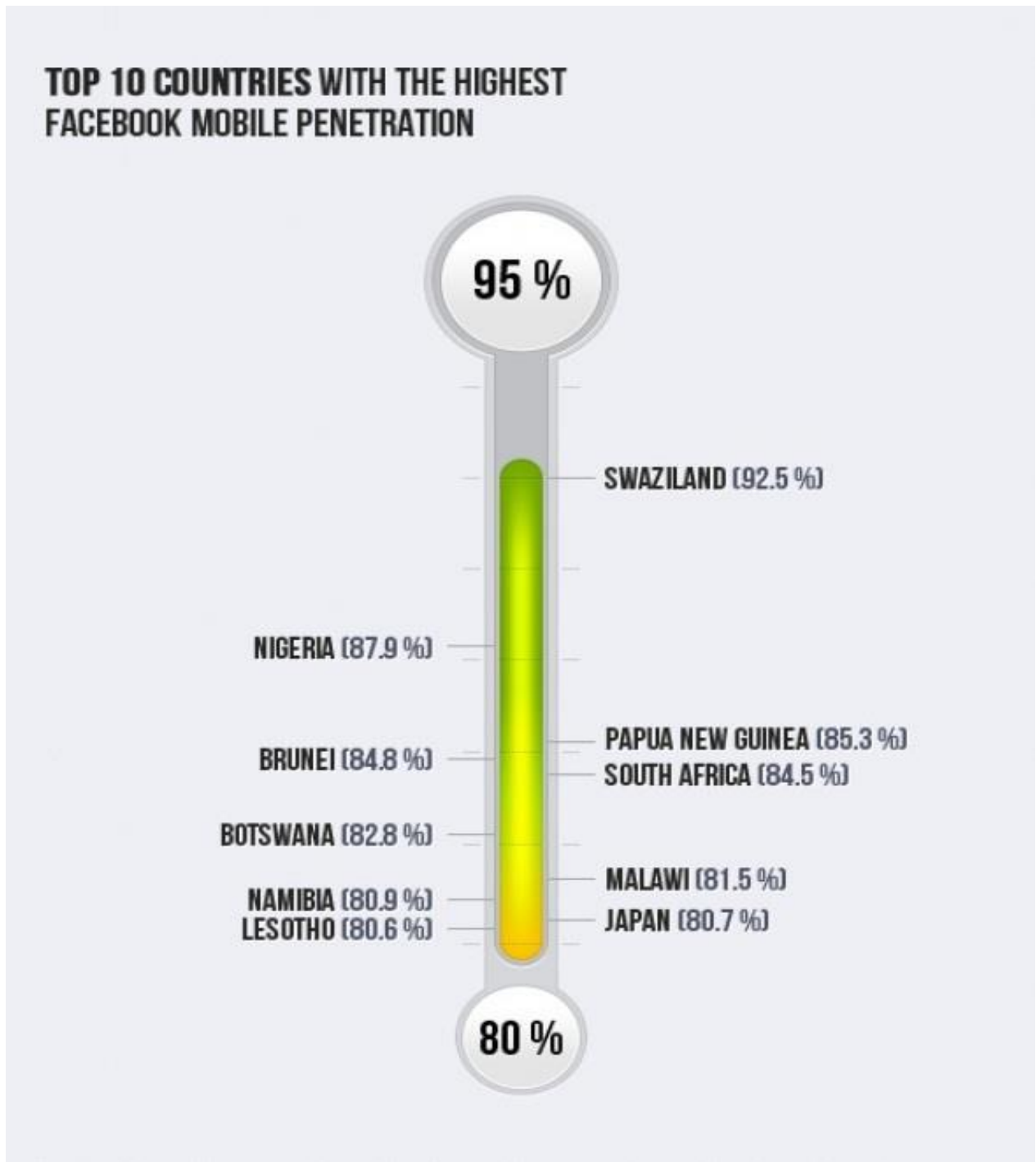


Figure 2: The ranking of Nigeria as one of the countries with the highest mobile Facebook usage. (Socialbakers Facebook statistics 2014)

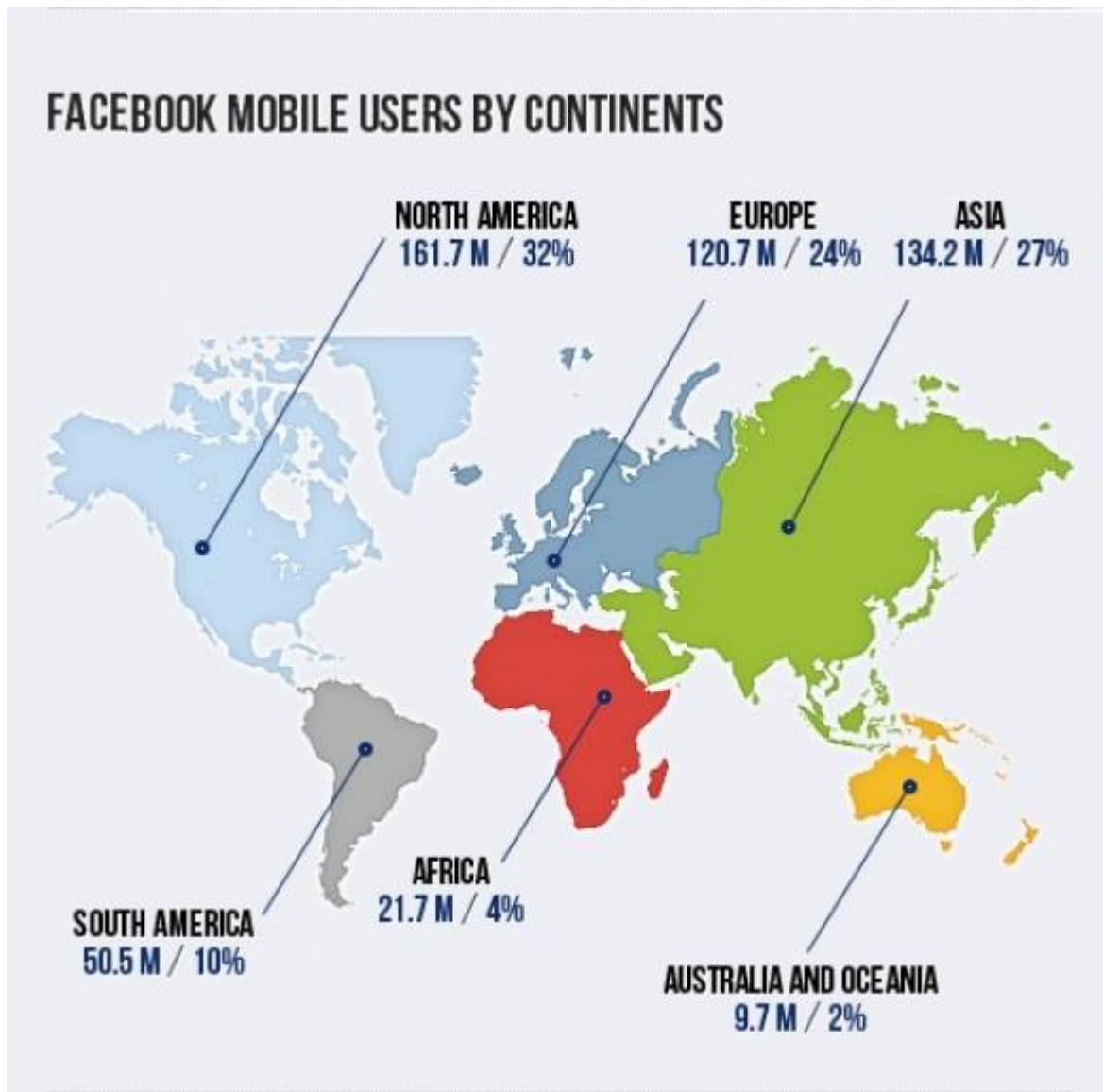


Figure 3: The graph of Africa in the world rankings of mobile Facebook usage (Socialbakers Facebook statistics 2014).

Figure 3 shows that 4% of the total population of Africans are on one of the largest and most frequently SNS, namely Facebook. Figure 2 show that 87.9% of those 4% of Africans are Nigerians. Socialbakers' statistics of 2014 prove that Nigerian usage of Facebook is on the increase, by 14.09%. Nkechi and Christian (2014:2233) conducted a survey among 127 Nigerian youth. The results show that 91% of these Nigerian youths frequently used Facebook, either on their mobile phones or on their computers. This shows that Nigerian youth account for the large percentage of the 87.9% of Nigerians on Facebook and also could account for the larger percentage of the 4% of Africans on Facebook.

2.9. Conclusion

SM has become a vital and integral part of young people's daily lives. The use of SM, and especially SNS, to disseminate personal and corporate information has the potential to influence young people's self-identity. Inasmuch as SNS as medium of expression enable young people to unveil their identity in a global space, they also pose the challenge of uncensored information to young people. SM also serve as a platform to create an impressive management of identity that depicts the person they want other network users to see and acknowledge, even though it might not be their true or real identity.

The next chapter of this research study will entail an interpretive task on why SM like Facebook influence the self-identity formation of young people. It will engage in an interdisciplinary discourse on self-identity formation from a sociological and psychological point of view in conversation with theological reflection (in which this research is situated).

Chapter 3

A Theoretical Investigation of Self-Identity Formation on Social Media

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, this research study discussed the conceptual understanding of social media as a platform for communication and information dissemination. Three types of SM were discussed: SNS, microblogging and wikis. The chapter explains what SM, especially SNS as the most used SM type, offer to young people. Chapter two briefly discussed SM in the context of the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria and the usage of Facebook as a SNS by young people in Nigeria.

Thus far it seems as though SM influence young people's self-identity formation because young people interact and interface on SM through the dissemination of information and networking with friends. Possibilities are that self-identity formation is influenced through information, interaction and networking with parents, family, friends and peers, who could be either offline or online. This assumption will be explored further in this chapter, using the interpretive task of theological task of Osmer (2008:4) in asking why young people's interactions on SM influence their self-identity formation. The interpretive task is employed in order to understand why certain event, action, and influence occur (Osmer 2008:4). Importantly is the fact that interpretive task of practical theological interpretation draws on theories which could be a family reason, psychological, congregational context and the likes to better understand the 'why' in a situation (2008:4, 80).

This chapter explores the primary research question of this research study, namely how social media influence the self-identity formation of young people. To achieve this task, this chapter firstly investigates the meaning of self as a prefix to identity. Secondly, it investigates self-identity formation as a process. Thirdly, it explores the different types of self-identity among young people, and how these inform their self-identity formation. Fourthly, this chapter investigates how SM is a source of self-identity formation.

Psychologists Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory and James Marcia's stages of identity formation illustrate how the identity of young people is influenced by different institutions at

different stages (Erikson, 1968:159). This chapter investigates these different institutions, with a focus on SM.

3.2. Investigation of the Concepts: Self, Identity and Self-Identity Formation

Self-identity is a compound word that comprised of two words that will be discussed in this chapter. The first word is self and the second word is identity. These two words are the compound words that create the concept of self-identity.

3.2.1. Self

Self is being independent from others in perception, emotional expression and individuality. Betz, Browning, Janoski, Bernd and Jüngel (2012:584), in the *Encyclopaedia of Theology and Religion*, explain self from a philosophical paradigm as having a sense of autonomy in whatever you do: This autonomy could be understood as the autonomy to believe whatever a person chooses to believe, the autonomy to disseminate any information to whosoever cares to access it, the autonomy to write whatsoever a person chooses to write on a social media platform, and the autonomy to be a source of information in a local or global space.

Self is depicting one's own interests over the other's interests. Crowther (1992:822), in the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, defines self by showing how self on SM influences users (other selves). Crowther defines self as having one's own interests, advantage or pleasure in whatever one does. This suggests that, in the context of SM, users who engage in SM with the biasness of self, post and disseminate information that is pleasurable to the user – even if it constitutes a problem for other users. SM afford young people the medium to express their autonomy of self.

The autonomy of self accounts for why users on SM disseminate information without recourse to other users on the same platform. From a theological perspective, Betz *et al.* (2012:584) acknowledge that philosophers define self as being autonomous in ideologies and practice, but add that self is not autonomous of the creator, God. Self is not exclusively withdrawn from the creator. They further argue that the creator of the human self is God, thus self is not autonomous from the divine creator, God. Self is under the purview of the creator's influence.

From the understanding that the human self is not autonomous from the creator, Betz *et al.* (2012:285) argue that Christian faith understands self beyond the human self. Christian theological understands self to transcend the finiteness and autonomy of human self, because the human self embodies dependence on the spiritual being, the divine creator – God. From a practical theological perspective, Betz *et al.* (2012:286) explain self as a superordinate representation of the unity and coherence of an “I”. The “I” that connotes self is the representation of a divine creator (as earlier explained), and not an autonomous individualistic representation, as argued by philosophers like Plato and Crowther (Betz *et al.* 2012:286).

The self shows the distinction of one individual from another. Hoelt (2005:905) explains that self as a term of identification is an inner aspect of a person, and is opposed to that which is non-self. Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of all time, understood self as the ground of personal being, which is accessible through remembrance and memory (anamnesis) and communicated through words and actions (in Betz *et al.* 2012:584). Plato and Hoelt’s explanation of self suggests that self is communicated through words and actions. Young people on social media express self through what they communicate on SM. They express their worldviews, opinions about a subject and reasoning on contemporary societal issues with network users through the technological medium of SM.

Self can be used as a prefix or suffix or as an independent word. In this research study, self will be used as a prefix, because it will be used as an adjective to modify the word identity and is hyphenated to connote its dependence on the word identity. Peter (2004:489) clarifies that self as a prefix personifies a variety of adverbial relations and it is always hyphenated. Self as a suffix is not hyphenated and only used at the end of the word. Self as an independent word is a noun that is modified by an adjective. Self in this research study will be understood as a prefix to the word identity.

This research study is situated in a theological paradigm, thus favourably disposed to the biblical and theological understanding of self as a representation of the creator, God. Russell and Suchocki (2011:185) cite Kierkegaard’s²⁵ concept of self, which is “a fluid, self-

²⁵ Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (5 May 1813 – 11 November 1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author. Kierkegaard's theological work focuses on Christian ethics, the institution of the Church, the differences between purely objective proofs of Christianity, the infinite qualitative distinction between man and God, and the individual's subjective relationship to the God-Man Jesus the Christ, which came through faith (Wikipedia, 2015a).

reflexive, internally multivalent, externally constituted, never ending task of becoming in relation to God". Russell and Suchocki (2011:185) agree with Kierkegaard's concept of self and add that the self comprises internal relationships upon other relationships, in consonance with God, who created self as depicted in Gen. 2:7, 21-22, which posits that humans were made in the image of God. Therefore self is personified in the image of the creator, God. God inhabiting the self and the self being an embodiment of God's communicable attribute.

3.2.2. Identity

Identity has been a popular subject of interdisciplinary studies and discussions among psychoanalysts and scholars of popular and social science over the past forty years (Frosh & Baraitser 2009:158; Kroger 1993:ix). The meaning of identity is extensive and varies depending on its usage and the study discipline (Erikson, 1968:15; Frosh & Baraitser, 2009:158; Gecas, 2000:93; Kroger, 1993: ix). Gecas (2000:93) defines identity as who or what one is, which implies that identity is who people discover and believe that they are. Whosoever people think, assume and believe that they are, that is who they are. In his book, *Identity: Youth, and Crisis*, which discusses identity from a social science discipline, Erikson (1968:15) argues that identity is not a word that can be defined easily. Erikson (1968:15) says that "'Identity' and 'identity crisis' have ... become terms which alternately circumscribe something so large and so seemingly self-evident that to demand a definition will almost seem petty, while at other times they designate something made so narrow for purposes of measurement that the over-all meaning is lost ...". However, Erickson claims that, despite the fact that the word identity cannot be defined easily due to the complexity of being large and self-evident, he explains what identity is to young people rather than attempting to define what identity connotes. Erikson (1968:87) explains identity as

The wholeness to be achieved at this stage I have called a sense of inner identity. The young person, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which others see in him and to expect of him. Individually speaking, identity includes, but it is more than, the sum of all the successive identifications of those earlier years when the child wanted to be, and often was forced to become, like the people he depended on. Identity is a unique product, which now meet a crisis to be solved

only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside the family.

Erikson's explanation of what identity means depicts identity as a process by which young people form an identification of themselves through different phases of their lives - from childhood to adulthood. These processes of identification enable young people to see themselves in a definite way that they want others people to see them. It also invites young people to present themselves in the way they want others to see them. These identification processes are influenced by different institutions. Waterman (1993:148) lists the institutions that influence young people's identity as parents, teachers, friends, peers, and those expectations conveyed in the media.

Jenkins (1996:4), arguing from a social anthropologist perspective, agrees with Erikson's explanation of identity and the fact that it is a difficult word to define, but he (Jenkins) defines identity as a process in which a person associates self with something or someone else, like a hero, friend, a party, group, or a philosophy. This presupposes that identity is developed as a person associates with friends, heroes, groups and ideologies. This depicts the concept that identity is a process that evolves within a span of life, as opposed to a final nugget of self.

3.2.3. Self-Identity Formation

Self-identity is the distinguisher of one person from others and the uniqueness of one person among other persons. Belanger (2010:933) and Black *et al.*, (2009:1487) define self-identity as a set of qualities that makes a person different from other people, while consciously recognising the uniqueness of that set of qualities. The formation of self-identity is an understanding and discovery of the unique qualities that make up a person. Self-identity connotes the qualities that distinguish a person from other people. It is the individuality of a person amidst other persons. Self-identity is how people see and define themselves and how they want others to see and define them. These individualities of persons are influenced by different institutions (Belanger 2010:933).

Self-identity formation begins after the struggle by people to identify who they are and how they want to be identified has ended. It begins when identification. Identification entails when struggles and uncertainties end (Erikson, 1968:211). The conventional trend is that young people, when they are teenagers, try to discover and develop their identity in three spheres,

namely biological, psychological and societal, but the irony is that it is not until they have passed the teenage years that they really form their self-identity. So the formation begins at the end of identification. Kroger (1993:3), in consonance with Erikson, says that, at best, young people only understand their identity formation through the first phase, namely biological (birth), but that identification through the other two phases of psychological and societal happens after the teenage phase.

The formation of self-identity is a process of identification and a process of emotional investment. The discipline of social science is more disposed to explaining the formation of self-identity as a process of identification, while the discipline of psychoanalysis explains self-identity as a process of emotional investment (Erikson, 1968:87; Frosh & Baraitser, 2009:158). Pratt (2003:168) argues that one similarity and point of consensus between the various disciplines in relation to self-identity is that the formation of self-identity is a process of developing identity.

Self-identity is a process that can be influenced. Jacober (2014:106), arguing from a practical theological paradigm, notes that self-identity formation is a process in which young people develop their own self-identity. Jacober further argues that young people are no longer forging or developing their identities based on family and community influence alone. Answering one of my research questions on how social media influence young people's self-identity formation, Jacober (2014:106) argues that the platform of SM affords young people a global public space to forge their identity fashionably in relation to how young people globally and their affinity groups have fashioned their own self-identity, either by reading their stories online or accessing information about their worldview and disposition toward life.

From the aforementioned discussion on self, identity and self-identity formation it is pertinent to understand that self-identity formation signifies how young people view themselves as people who could be influenced holistically by a discovery of who God has made them to be and what is expected of them by social institutions like the family, society and social media. This concept will be explored further through the work of psychologist James Marcia later in this chapter.

3.3. Types of Identity

There are different types of identity that people are known to have. These identities are not peculiar to young people alone, and are not exclusive to young people (Hollinger 2004:29; Jenkins 1996:24). This research study investigates seven types of identity that are particular to young people. The identity of young people is developed through association and networking with social institutions in society (Pratt 2003:168), suggesting that social institutions like culture, family, friends and SM are elemental donors of self-identity.

Some identities are individualised and peculiar to each young person, while some identities are shared and common to young people, irrespective of their geographical location. The types of identities (individualised and shared) that young people are identified with are personal identity; social identity; primary identity; ego identity; cultural identity; group identity; and religious identity.

3.3.1. Personal Identity

Personal identity is the type of identity that is peculiar to a person. Jenkins (1996:24) and Phinney (1993:48) note that personal identity is a nominal identity that connotes the name of the person. The name of a person is forms the personal identity of that person. Jenkins (ibid) further point out that people can have the same nominal identity but different dispositions towards life. Jenkins (1996:24) further notes that personal identity is identity in the eyes of the beholder. Identity in the eyes of the beholder (personal identity) is what Pratt (2003:168) refers to as the identity of the “I”.

Pratt (ibid) stresses that the identity of the “I”, or personal identity, is that part of the self-definition that is based on idiosyncratic (personal) attributes. These are attributes that understand and interpret identity from a personal perspective.

Integrating Jenkins (1996:24), Phinney (1993:48) and Pratt’s (2003:168) explanations of personal identity, I submit that personal identity is a personalised, individualistic identity that is peculiar to an individual and is self-defined. It is an identity that is situated in a person, without any external influence. Personal identity, like the name a person answers to, is unique to that person. Even if others also answer to that name, the individual person still holds the uniqueness and personalisation of the name.

3.3.2. Primary Identity

Primary identity is identity that is inherent in a young person and not influenced by or shared with others. Jenkins (1996:21), Phinney (1993:51) and Hollinger (2004:29) elucidate primary identities as identities that a person inherits by virtue of birth. These are identities that are not influenced by other identities and are not influenced by the person's self. Examples of such primary identities are humanness of personhood, gender, race and, under certain circumstances, kinship and ethnicity. Jenkins (1996:21) further stresses that primary identities are less likely to change or be influenced than other identities, such as social identity.

Jenkins (1996:21) argues that the primary identity is less likely to change. Hollinger (2004:29) concurs with Jenkins that primary identity is less likely to change, but Phinney (1993:52) argues that society can pose a challenge that may influence young people to change or at least desire to change their primary identity. Phinney (1993:53) argues, for example, that some young black people in America struggle to identify themselves as belonging to the black race as an identity; rather, they prefer to be identified by the mainstream superordinate category of identity called national identity.

Such young people will prefer to be identified simply as Americans, rather than being identified as black Americans or blacks. They struggle to see their primary identity from a multiple identity paradigm (Hollinger, 2004:31; Phinney, 1993:53). It also suggests that young people identify themselves with the mainstream superordinate identity of national identity, but still maintain the identity of their race and ethnicity in order not to be accused by their family relations of abandoning their primary identity. So a young black person in America will choose to be identified as a black American, instead of just being known and identified as a young black person.

3.3.3. Social Identity

Jenkins (1996:4) defines social identity as “the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, of relationships of similarities and difference”. In other words, social identity refers to the way in which people within a relationship share distinction from each other, yet have similarities between themselves, in the sense of a person's identity being singular because of uniqueness, yet plural because of collectivities with others. Brewer and Silver (2000:154) say that the shared understanding of the group's

goals and identity is sufficient to generate uniformity of behaviour and purpose among those who share the social identity.

Regarding the concept that social identity is a shared identity, Pratt (2003:168) adds that social identity refers to the “we” or “us” aspect of the self. Commenting on how the individual “I” in identity formation becomes “we” in social identity, Brewer and Silver (2000:160) argue that, in social identity, the self is transformed from “I” to “we”. It depicts the shared distinctiveness and collectiveness of a group of people, either in a social context, organisational context or cultural context.

Social identity is the connectedness of individuals who share commonality hitherto inimitable from each other. This suggests that togetherness is strong in social identity. Jenkins (1996:v) cites different personalities who explicate the essence of social identity. He cites John Donne as saying, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; ... any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.” Karl Max said, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.” And according to Solomon Burke, “Everyone needs somebody...”. Social identity connotes togetherness in the sense of identifying with each other as a group of people who share a collective commonality of identity, despite the individual’s self-identity distinction.

Jenkins (1996:5) furthermore explains social identity as the understanding of who people are and who other people are, and other people’s understanding of who they are and who the people around them are. Society comprises people who live with some or other social identity, be it along the lines of gender, age, nationality or social class. As a matter of clarification, the phrase “young people” delineates a social identity. Social identity gives a framework to know who people are and who others around them are. It is an identity according to which people routinely are related to each other in an intrinsically social identity relationship. Kazen (2008:100) suggests a litmus test for assessing an individual’s commitment to the group identity; if the individual places a premium on the group goals and purposes over their own, even when their self-interest will benefit them at the expense of the group, then it can be admitted that such individual has depersonalised the self for his or her social identity. Brewer and Silver (2000:160) and Pinel and Swann (2000:139) agree with this

litmus test, but emphasise that it may take a process and time for certain individuals to attain that dimension of reasoning in which social identity take precedence over self-interest.

Articulating the difference between social identity and primary identities, Pratt (2003:168) mentions that social identities are identities that reside in an individual, just like personal identity, but the difference between personal identity and social identity is that social identity is the collective identity of a group, while primary identity is particular to an individual. Examples of social identities are membership of a youth club, an organisation, a fellowship group, a football club, etc. Social identity is depersonalised and hinges on a collective definition of self.

Commenting on how social identity is developed, Phinney (1993:47) argues that young people's social identities are formed through the primary influence of their parents and family members, with whom young people interact on a daily basis. This implies that parents and family members play a potent role in how young people see themselves and how they will want others to see them. The identity of tribal affiliation or national identity is informed by parents, while the identity of cultural beliefs and practices is informed by family members, because young people inherit the culture and ethnicity of their family members. Young people's understanding of themselves is influenced first of all by parents, and then by family members, since parents and family members form young people's immediate integration into life and relationships.

This same notion is reiterated by Phinney (1993:47) when he says that, besides parents and family members, other institutions that determine the social identity of young people are ethnic group, class and society. These institutions play an important role in the social identity formation of young people, as these are institutions with their own identities. These institutions form young people's understanding of how they see themselves. Strommen and Hardel (2000:24) add that family, Church congregation, community and culture are the four levels of influence in young people's lives; this paradigm shift views the family as "God's domestic Church, the congregation as God's communal Church, the community and culture are viewed as providing the contexts within which faith-lives are shaped".

3.3.4. Ego Identity

Eric Erikson is acknowledged to be the first to have used the term ego-identity – in 1963. In an attempt to discover how people understand the uniqueness of themselves in society, both psychologically and culturally, he advocated for ego-identity. Erikson's quest for research on ego identity was prompted by the gap in identity formation and human development after studying Sigmund Freud's conceptualisation of biology and psychosexual stages of development. Thus, Erikson delved into studying how people should recognise themselves and how they should be recognised by others in society (Erikson 1968:24, 211; Kroger 1993:1).

Erikson (1968:24) explains ego-identity as

... a tripartite entity, an interaction of biological givens, idiosyncratic personal biography, and societal response within a broader historical frame that optimally gives coherence, meaning, and continuity to one's life and to one's life experiences. A healthy sense of identity provides the individual with a subjective experience of well-being, of being at home in biological, psychological, and societal context.

Ego identity entails how people understand themselves within the biological, psychological and societal context; it answers the questions of how people recognise themselves biologically; who they think they are by virtue of birth; who they think they are cognitively; and what identity they think they are by virtue of their societal origin.

Kroger (1993:2) submits to Erikson's position of defining ego identity through understanding the three aspects (biological, psychological, and societal), but puts forward that the process of a young person defining his or her ego-identity begins at birth (biological) and spans their existence on earth. Erikson (1968:87) adds that the task of discovering ego identity begins in the teenage years, when human beings tend to know who they are and how they want to be identified by other people.

These three elements (biological, psychological, and society or environment) form the thrust of young people's ego identity. The biological aspect is from birth, while the psychological aspect is developed by the individual young person, and the third aspect is influenced by the different environment or society in which young people live. For example, young people who interact actively with other young people in the SM environment will have greater influence on their ego-identity than young people who interact less on SM. The reason for this is that

the SM environment influences young people's ego identity by consistently giving meaning to their life. This meaning gradually influences young people's personalities and motivation for living on Facebook (Ross *et al.* 2009:582) and on Twitter (Qui, Lin, Ramsay & Yang 2012:710).

3.3.5. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is the cultural constituent of young people. Castells (2004:7) elucidates that cultural identity is the process of constructing meaning around cultural attributes and culturally structured attributes. It is a process in which cultural attributes define who young people think or know they are. Elton (2014:169) argues that culture plays a significant role in providing an infrastructure for defining meaning, creating relationships, and sustaining life. At culture's core are the beliefs and commitment of a group of people, a way of understanding humanity and abundant living, and a way of practising these ideas.

Commenting on such cultural attributes, Boesch (1997:5) argues that one of the identifying aspects of culture is the spoken language. The language spoken by young people is an identity given to them by their culture. The culture of a young person is a mode of identifying how young people see themselves and how they think people see them. The culture into which a young person is born constitutes an identity for the young person.

Young people born of African descent inherently are identified by the African culture through their language of communication. Commenting on how language communication forms an identity in culture, Boesch (1997:5) argues that one of the identifying aspects of culture is spoken language. The primary language of birth depicts a person's cultural affiliation; in other words, a person's culture can be identified by their spoken language or tribal dialect. Boesch (1997:5) and Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001:51), however, note that the language identity in culture can be verbal (spoken words) or non-verbal. Language in culture is not just an expression of dialectical words; it has the essence of how young people are to be identified when they speak within a family and social institution.

Verbal and non-verbal means of communication vary from culture to culture, and young people learn them primarily through parents and family members. Ward *et al.* (2001:51) argue that, in some cultures like the Asian culture, the word 'no' is seldom spoken, therefore the word 'yes' can mean 'yes' or 'no' or 'maybe'. In the context of non-verbal

communication, Ward *et al.* (2001:57) say that mutual gaze communicates a sign of respect in some cultures.

For example, in the Gbagyi culture in Abuja, a young person may not look into the eyes of an older person during communication, else the young person will be identified as a disrespectful person who lacks proper home training.

Another dimension of cultural identity in Africa is the global or popular culture that is peculiar to age groups – the youth culture of young people. Higginson (2008:vii) argues that, in Africa, the traditional culture of Africans, which he calls folk culture, is embroiled in the global popular culture. For African young people, the global culture (youth culture) among young people of their age is informing their cultural identity. Discussing how community organisation and youth culture translate into cultural identity, Castells (2004:64) explains that, when people cluster together and share information, beliefs and ideologies over time, it gives them a sense of belonging to a communal, cultural identity. Youth culture was discussed in Chapter 2.

African culture is experiencing a paradigm shift because of the advent of SM. Simply put, SM is creating a hybrid of identities among African youth. The Nigerian SM scholar, Iwilade (2013:1058), argues that although African youth are benefitting from the potential of SM, SM also is influencing African youth to create a hybrid of identities. These are hybrid identities in the sense that African youth are struggling with how to inculcate the global culture of SM into their own local culture and realities. How African youth can recreate themselves socially in their local culture is an African challenge.

3.3.6. Group Identity

Group identity is an identity formation that is shared and depersonalized. Jenkins (1996:24), Hollinger (2004:31) and Mamdani (2004:9) unpack group study as a thought and/or way of life that is characteristically constructed across a particular group boundary, in interaction with others within a particular category. Jenkins (1996:24) and Brewer and Silver (2000:153) add that identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary of a particular category. Mamdani (2004:27) submits that to have a group identity is to belong to a group, especially a group that is defined by biological descent. Kazen (2008:100), writing from the perspective of a New Testament scholar, differs from Mamdani (*ibid*), who in writing from

an ethnic African perspective. For the latter, group identity is not just sharing a biological descent with others. According to Kazen (2008:100), group identity is to be understood in a general sense as the experience of shared characteristics among a group of people – irrespective of their biological descent. The core concept is having a shared characteristic and goal that is devoid of individual self-concept.

Group identity is an identity developed within a social institution. Mackinnon and Heise (2011:466) add that young people “confirm themselves cognitively and effectively in creating, selecting, and enacting identities in particular social institutional context”. This denotes that young people form a group identity within a social institution that informs their cognitive development. Cognitively, young people influence each other as they interface within a social institution. That is why it is trendy for young people across the globe to share the same or similar knowledge and understanding of life. The reason is that, on the social media platform, they create their own social institutions through which they influence each other’s identity by sharing and having the same ideologies and exclusive pattern of youthful behaviour.

Group identity is a way of life and thought that is constructed around a particular institution or social context. Group identity is formed by members of a group who willingly depersonalise themselves in order to assume the identity of the group (Brewer & Silver, 2000:153). Castells (2004:7) and Kazen (2008:100), however, argue that group identities becomes identities only if and when each member of the group internalises the identity, and constructs his or her meaning around this internalisation.

3.3.7. Religious Identity

Religious identity is a group identity with religious affiliation. Religious affiliation could be a religious faith, denomination or sect. Hollinger (2004:31) observes that, in the American context, religious identity is a subnational affiliation for Americans. People readily define their identity by religious group, or are easily identified by others through their religious group identity, such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to mention but a few. In the Christian religion, some young people are favourably more disposed to being identified with their religious identity. E.g. a person may prefer to maintain religious identity while still admitting any other group identity. Some will prefer to be identified by the specifics of their religious

denomination, say Baptist, Methodist or Presbyterian, rather than by their primary or any other group identity.

In the Christian religion, the church has a potent role in superintending young people in an inclusive congregational method to form a social Christian identity (Nel 2001:63). The church has a potent role in teaming up with parents, family members, youth ministry, and other agencies that are concerned about young people and their Christian practice. Strommen and Hardel (2000:25) suggest that churches can help parents with young people through the baptismal journey, teaching and taking greater care in raising a godly family among couples because the spirituality of parents has a lasting influence on their children. Church therefore would need to provide Christian families with teachings and discipline that helps in building their children's Christian identity and enthusiasm to fulfil their Christian identity of sharing their beliefs and conviction with their friends and society (Clark 2001:66).

The enthusiasm of young people in expressing their religious identity accounts for how young people's self-identity is influenced on SM. SM give young people the platform to influence each other's religious identity, and this fulfils one of the aims of this research study (question one). As noted in Chapter 1, one of the aims of this research study was to understand how social media influence young people's self-identity. Campbell (2013:199), in relation to how SM influence young people in terms of religious belief and identity, notes that "social media influences religious authenticity and identity by presage of a new kind of individualized, personalized authenticity of religious experience". Since individual youth can post any information they like on SM about their religious identity from their religious experiences, this will expose SM users to personalising religious identities disseminated by other users.

Due to this interactive forum for religious expression that SM provide for young people, Campbell (2013:202) argues that young people who have a religious identity on SM may not be obliged to interact or engage with people (religious officials and offline religious young people). The reason is that social media afford young people an alternative platform to build their religious identity individually through the shared experiences of other SM users. Examples of such religious social media platforms are 'prayer app', which promises to send users' prayers directed to God; it assumes a spiritual experience of being in a church or temple. Other religious SM platforms are 'ritual app', 'religious social media app', 'self-expression apps', and 'focusing/meditation apps'. The accessibility of these religious apps

has shifted the religious identity of young people to individualisation as opposed to institutional religious practice and identity (Campbell 2013:202).

Speaking of religious identity, the Abuja youth in Nigeria are more inclined to religious identity than any of the other identities explained above. Adetiba (2014:32) argues that Nigerian youth have what he calls a *spirit of religion*. He explains spirit of religion as being extremely overwhelmed with religious affiliation, such that young people express their denominational affiliation through every means possible.

Nigerian youths are so particular about being identified by their religious identity that even their cars typify their religious affiliation. Although it cannot be said that their religious identity is connoted their spirituality, it is noticeable (as seen in the appendix at the end of the document) that religious identity is of great essence among Nigerian youth. Evidence of this claim is that young people buy cars and put on stickers that identify their religion and the particular denomination with which they desire to be identified. Religious identity is a noticeable identity among Nigerian youth. Nigerian youth show their religious affiliation through their way of dressing, their vocabulary, haircuts, stickers on doors and office post, and especially stickers on their cars (see Appendixes I, II and III). This supports why it is loosely said that Africans are very religious people but lack depth in their religious practices.

Appendixes I and II show how Nigerian youth take joy and pride in their religious identity. Appendix I depicts a Christian youth who had Rom. 8:38 shaven in his hair as his Christian identity. Appendixes II and III show how Nigerian youth develop religious identity in their denominational affiliation.

3.4. Erikson Psychosocial Development Theory

In his psychosocial development theory, psychologist Erik Erickson developed eight (8) stages of human development that influence people's self-identity formation. Interacting with Erickson's eight stages of human development informs how young people's identity development is being influenced by different social institutions.

3.4.1. Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 year)

The first stage of identity formation is within the age group 0 to 1 year. It is in this stage when infants are trying to figure out whom to trust and whom not to trust (Erikson; 1968:96;

1985:193; 1998:67). Williams (2015:2) argues that this stage is characterised by infants seeking for hope. In seeking for hope, certain salient questions determine what becomes of the identity of the infant (Erikson 1968:96). These questions pertain to the safety of the infant's environment and the global world, and relate to whom to trust and mistrust, and why to trust and mistrust (Erikson 1968:99; 1985:193).

The uncertainty of life characterises this phase of life. The family institution, which is the infant's primary caregiver, and especially the parents determine how this uncertainty influences the trust and mistrust of infants (Erikson 1968:98; 1998:67; McLeod 2008:np). Commenting on the role of parents in influencing infants, Strommen and Hardel (2000:37) argue that, since parents are the first custodians of children, their feelings about one another determine the climate of a home, establishing an atmosphere of love, trust, and security that nurtures children.

The care, love and affection that an infant receives from his or her primary caregiver and the enabling environment of love and care created by their primary caregiver inform their development of trust and mistrust in their families, society and the global world (Erikson 1985:194; 1998:67). McLeod (2008:np) argues that the love and care that the infant receives helps develop a sense of trust, which will carry the infant into trusting his or her family members, members of the society, and other relationships.

Erikson (1968:106) explains that the virtue of hope and faith that is a by-product of trust is mostly developed during this phase of life. This implies that, as infants develop a sense of trust, they can have hope that, as crises arise in life, there is a real possibility that they can trust other people to be there for them as a source of encouragement and support. McLeod argues that failing to acquire the virtue of hope will lead to the development of fear and mistrust towards life and people (2008:np).

These infants will carry the basic sense of trust and mistrust with them into every other relationship that they become involved in. Depending on the influence of their primary caregiver, the infants have the propensity to develop hope and fear towards life and people.

3.4.2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1-3 years)

The second stage of identity formation is between the ages of one and three years old. Children at this stage physically grow from infancy into becoming a child who begins to

show will (basic virtue) towards the primary care giver, family members and others who want to show a sign of relationship (Erikson 1968:110; 1985:194; 1998:67; Williams 2015:2). Erikson stresses that this stage is characterised by the child developing an independent will (1968:96). McLeod (2008: np) argues that children begin to desire and show their quest for independence and autonomy (psychosocial virtue). Infants show their quest for independence in refusing unknown faces to play with them, refusing their mother to collect their precious toys from them, wanting to choose their preferred clothes, showing autonomy and shame (psychosocial virtue) if rebuked in public, and showing shame if they urinate in their pants or bed (especially if parents talk about this in front of their peers) (Erikson 1968:110).

Children at this stage of identity development are will-driven and expect their parents to respect their decisions (Erikson 1985:195). Erikson's psychosocial theory argues that it is critical and very important to children's identity formation for parents to create an encouraging environment for their children to explore and learn to make decisions, but not without parental supervision and restriction where necessary (Erikson 1998:69). Such skills illustrate the child's growing sense of independence and autonomy.

An example is when a child is trying to feed herself or himself: the parents should patiently allow her or him the independence to try to do it and, if the child later asks for a parent's assistance, then the parents can graciously render their assistance (Erikson 1998:69). By so doing a child will learn to develop his or her will and a healthy outlook toward identity formation, but under parental supervision. Therefore, the parents need to encourage the children to becoming more independent but, at the same time, guide them in order to avoid too much failure in their exploration, which will create an unhealthy self-identity in their children.

Parent, who help guide their children into developing the basic virtue of will, will be creating an environment of autonomy for them and reduce criticism of them, which can create too much consciousness of shame in their children (Erikson 1968:110; 1998:70). This will enable them to become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world. Erikson (1998:70) propounds that if children are not given the enabling environment to develop an independent mind, because they are overly criticised and overly controlled by their parents, chances are that they will begin to feel inadequate in their ability to survive, and may then become overly dependent upon others, lack self-esteem, and feel a sense of shame or doubt in their own talents and potential.

3.4.3. Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6 years)

The third stage of identity formation is between the ages of three and six years old. This stage is characterised by the child developing an independent will. Williams (2015:2) argues that the psychosocial crisis in these children's lives is how to initiate their own ideas and overcome the sense of guilt. The basic virtue that is sought after by a child at this stage is purpose and ambition (Erikson 1968:96; 1985:195).

Children begin to decide which games they like and which games they do not like, they begin to take the initiative to plan their own adventures, either through games or by planning other activities for themselves and their friends (Williams 2015:2). Erikson explains that taking initiative is paramount to a child at this stage of life (1968:116, 121). Children begin to take the initiative on which friend to allow into their game and which friend not to allow into their game. Children begin to take the initiative for creating games that they like and that their friends will like. They can change an activity if their good friends think otherwise – they want to be creative in initiating activities for their friends (McLeod 2008:np). The reason for this is that they find purpose in their initiative to create and plan an event that their friends like and their parents applaud.

Erikson (1968:120; 1985:196) suggests that one central characteristic of this stage for children is questioning virtually everything they are told to do by their parents and immediate environment. They begin to develop a sense of guilt if their 'too much' questioning constitutes a nuisance to their parents. Caution has to be taken by parents, because if they do not respond as best as they possibly can to the numerous questions, chances are that their children will seek for answers among their friends and immediate environment, and that will constitute their base of knowledge.

Also, if the children's initiative constitutes too great a nuisance for their parents or immediate family members – such as siblings or relations living with them in their house, they will develop guilt for not being innovative (Erikson 1968:119). Too much guilt can make a child slow to interact with others and may inhibit his or her creativity (McLeod 2008:np). The reason for this is that they find their purpose in the initiative approved by their parents and their loved ones. Suffice it to say that some degree of guilt is necessary for the child's self-identity formation, else the child will not know how to exercise self-control or have a conscience.

3.4.4. Industry (competence) vs. Inferiority (6-12 years)

The fourth stage of identity formation is between the ages of six and 12 years old. The basic virtue that is sought after by a child at this stage is competence in industry (1968:123). If children's initiatives are encouraged by their parents and loved ones, children begin to feel confidence in achieving a purpose, thus feel industrious (Williams 2015:2).

Erikson (1968:122) enunciates that at this stage, teachers become another key influencer of children's identity. Erikson adds that, at this stage of life, the gender of the child teachers should be considered in passing (1968:125). The reason for this is that teachers begin to play an important role in the child's life as they partner with parents to teach children how to develop their competence in their specific skills and identification (Erikson 1968:125; McLeod 2008: np; Williams 2015:2). If this initiative is not encouraged, or if it is restricted by the parents or teacher, then children begin to feel inferior and doubt their own abilities, and therefore may not achieve their talent and full potential. However, just like the third stage of initiative and guilt, some degree of failure may be necessary so that the child can develop some modesty. A balance between competence and modesty is necessary for the child's self-identity formation.

3.4.5. Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-18 years)

The fifth stage of identity formation is between the ages of 12 and 18 years. The basic virtue that is sought after by a child at this stage is fidelity and curiosity (Erikson 1968:128). Erikson (1968:129) and Williams (2015:3) argues that children are becoming more will-driven, independent, purposeful and competent, and are beginning to imagine, understand and interpret the world from their own experiences.

During this stage, the child becomes an adolescent who is role-driven. Children want to act out roles that will show their identity and roles that they want others to identify them with (McLeod 2008:np). They play these roles with their parents, family members and friends, and even in their career choices. They play these roles so that they can be identified in society as individuals and members of certain groups.

Erikson suggests that two identities are involved at this stage of identity formation, namely the sexual and the occupational. Children know their primary identity, like gender, and become conscious of their gender status, the role of their gender, and the different body

changes experienced (Erikson 1968:132). During this stage, the body image of adolescents changes and they begin to learn about sexual changes and the sensitivity of their sexual organs.

Jordán-Conde, Mennecke and Townsend (2014:354) argue that, during this period, children explore possibilities and begin to form their own identity based on the outcome of their explorations. They begin to create a mental picture of the occupation with which they want to be identified. Erikson (1968:134) posits that the search for identity has the potential to create an identity crisis if children experience failure during exploration. McLeod (2008:np) explains that failure to establish a sense of identity in society (“I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up”) can lead to role confusion. Role confusion involves individuals not being sure about themselves or their place in society.

Erikson (1969:129) explained that, in response to role confusion or identity crisis, an adolescent may begin to experiment with different lifestyles (e.g. work, education or political activities). Also, pressuring someone into an identity can result in rebellion in the form of establishing a negative identity and, in addition to these feelings of unhappiness, being forced into a career by parents, etc.

Erikson, who is a German born American, explains identity crisis in adolescence within the adolescent age of 12-18years but not universal. Erikson (1968:27) concurs that the ideological structure of an environment influences the development of youth. He further elucidates that the youth of today and youth of twenty years ago are not the same (1968:26). Therefore, there are factors such as environment that influences the age categorization of youth. The experiences of young people within a particular age group are not universal. The environment in which people are nurtured determines the developmental stages that they experience. This implies that their parents and caregivers, and the environment in which young people are nurtured, are pivotal to influencing their developmental age. Thus, these age grouping and the peculiarity of the basic virtue are not universal.

3.4.6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (18-40 years)

The sixth stage of identity formation is between the ages of 18 and 40 years. The psychosocial crisis at this stage is intimacy verses isolation (Erikson 1969:135; Williams 2015:2). The basic virtue that is sought after by a person at this stage is love.

During this stage, young people grow into having a fair idea of a desired occupation (career), and are more concerned about establishing relationships that will be helpful and meaningful to their career decision, marriage life and social identity (Jordán-Conde *et al.* 2014:356; McLeod 2008:np). Erikson (1969:137) argues that erotic relationships characterizes the kind of relationships that youth desire at this phase, especially because of their sexual activeness. In seeking for these kinds of relationships, they become selective about with whom they share their intimate stories and experience. Relatively, Erikson (1969:136) and Williams (2015:17) argue that avoiding intimacy, and fearing commitment and relationships, can lead to isolation, loneliness, and sometimes depression.

Love becomes a driving essence for why the young person does what he or she does (Erikson 1969:137; Williams 2015:2). Young people establish relationships with those whom they love and those whom they know love them or assume love them. Erikson (1969:137) explain that young people tend to be reciprocal in their show of love at this stage. For example, they tend to reciprocate the love parents showed them when they were growing up, they show love to members of the opposite sex who show them love and, if married, their spouses experience love from them in reciprocation for their love.

For Nigerian youth, this stage of life is crucial in seeking relationships. People within this age bracket are still acknowledged as youth. As classified by Badejo *et al.* (2011:284), youth (young people) in Nigeria are classified within the age range of 18 to 35 years and are either called youth or young people. This then means that the age of this particular stage may not correlate with Erikson but the process involved during this stage of one's life is relevant.

3.4.7. Generativity vs. Stagnation (40-65 years)

The seventh stage of identity formation is between the ages of 40 and 65 years. The psychosocial crisis at this stage is generativity versus stagnation (Erikson 1968:138). Williams (2015:2) infers that the basic virtue that is sought after by a person at this stage is care. Erikson argues that a lack of care at this stage has the potential to cause boredom and interpersonal impoverishment (1968:138).

Erikson (1968:139) and McLeod (2008:np) argue that during this stage of life, the aging person grows into adulthood and establishes their careers, settles down within a relationship, grows their own families and develop a sense of being a part of the bigger picture that they

care about. People at this stage make attempts to influence people through their career and in their neighbourhoods, and to make a difference in society at large.

People at this stage plunge into stagnation in their psychosocial crisis if they are unproductive and do not experience care and are not showing care to their families, society, and various institutions of group identity (Erikson 1969:138; McLeod 2008: np).

3.4.8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair (65 years and above)

The eighth stage of identity formation is from the age of 65 and above. The psychosocial crisis at this stage is integrity versus despair. The basic virtue that is sought after by a person at this stage is wisdom (Williams 2015:2). The ego is the organizing agency where integrity and despair reflect in people's conduct (Erikson 1969:140).

During this stage, people become senior citizens who live with the virtue of wisdom and who have had to slow down their rate of productivity or retire from their occupation and contemplate their accomplishments (Erikson 1969:140). McLeod (2008: np) adds that people are able to develop integrity if they evaluate themselves as leading a productive and a successful life.

The psychosocial crisis of despair, which Erikson says can also lead to depression and hopelessness, becomes a consequence for people who evaluate themselves as unproductive, unfulfilled and not having time to correct their past failures and missed opportunities (Erikson 1969:140).

3.5. Stages of Identity Formation: James Marcia (1966)

Psychologist James Marcia (1966) gained his primary understanding of self-identity from Eric Erikson's psychosocial theory. Erikson asserts in his psychosocial theory of self-identity formation that identity formation among young people takes place between the struggle of identity resolution and identity confusion. This means that it takes place in periods of time when young people struggle to figure out who they are and who they ought to be among multiples of identities around them.

Observing the gap in Erikson's theory on how people can develop their identities during these struggles of identity resolution and identity confusion (identity crisis), James Marcia

expanded on Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory in 1966 on the basis of a psychological paradigm and propounded four identity stages as approaches to the task of identity formation (Jacobson 2014:98; Waterman 1993:148; Weber 2014:103).

The four approaches to consider in engaging with the identity crisis in young people, as proposed by Marcia, are diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure and achievement. Interaction with these four approaches aids in understanding how young people cultivate their formation of self-identity.

3.5.1. Diffusion

Diffusion connotes the unwillingness or ignorance of young people not to explore their self-identity. Waterman (1993:153), Cannister (2013:25) and Jacobson (2014:98) argue that the diffusion of identity formation connotes individuals who are ignorant of their potential because they have never identified their potential and are unaware of their purpose in life. Thus, they drift through life by focusing on distractions, which are the external pressures of society that cause anger, confusion, helplessness and hopelessness. Kroger (1993:205) supposes that societal expectations and values can easily cause young people to drift into identity diffusion because, at this stage of life, they are nonchalant about fundamental issues of life such as their faith in God, political disposition, career goals and objectives. Worse still is the fact that they are not even perturbed by these issues (Cannister, 2013:25; Weber, 2014:104). These traits are caused when young people have not been able to discover their talent and potential, thus cannot maximise their potential and talents. This same notion of young people not being willing to discover their talents and potential, which will enable them to discover their identity, is reiterated by Weber (2014:104) when she says that young people at the identity diffusion stage are not willing to take initiative and ownership of who they are.

Identity diffusion is not only caused by young people not being willing to discover their talents and potential, and not being willing to take initiative and ownership of who they are. Identity diffusion is also caused by young people intuitively knowing their talents and potential without them taking possession of these. Waterman (1993:153) further says that identity diffusion can also occur if young people discover their talents and potential but allow themselves to be distracted from their pursuit of these talents and potential. Due to the laborious nature of discovering and using these talents and potential, Waterman (1993:153)

cautions that pleasures that are incompatible with the young person's potential and talents can distract young people and cause identity diffusion.

Being ignorant of potential and talents is not the only crisis of identity formation at the stage of foreclosure. Waterman (1993:153) argues further that, beside identity diffusion being caused by ignorance of potential and talents, it also is caused by distractions from striving to pursue and implement the discovered potential and talents, and the striving to live by other people's preferences. Waterman (1993:154) explains that young people can become victim of identity diffusion in an attempt to please other's expectations of them – especially their parents' and family members' expectations. For example, when young people live their lives in view of what their parents wants them to be, without that way of life being their own way of life, chances are that the young people will live a life of identity diffusion because they will be living life and behaving in manners to get approval from their parents, and not necessarily developing their own identity on the basis of their discovered potential and talents.

3.5.2. Foreclosure

Cannister (2013:26) and Waterman (1993:149) argue that foreclosure is a stage in young people's lives that is characterised by the presence of commitment formed without exploration. It is a stage when young people form an opinion of themselves and an opinion of others without necessarily exploring if they were right to have formed such an opinion or not. At this stage, young people's identity is more of what or who others around them expect them to be than who they actually are. Jacober (2014:98) elucidates Waterman's argument when she says that this stage shows that young people who are not willing to explore, and are not willing to go through the process of commitment, rather adopt the self-identity inferred on them by their parents, family members, society and social media. Though this, institutions can be vital in aiding young people to develop a healthy identity formation. Dean (2010:224), arguing from a youth ministry paradigm, proposes that young people should be given permeable situations to question what they believe before taking ownership of the tenets of the Christian faith.

Young people's understanding and acceptance of their self-identity are informed by others, like parents, family members, society and social media. This state of accepting what third parties inform young people about their self-identity could be helpful or turn out to be non-

helpful. For example, young people whose parents are Christians will influence them into having a Christian identity, but young people whose parents are sadists also have the propensity to influence them to become sadist. Writing from a Christian theology paradigm, Millard Erickson (2013:482) provides another example of what the state of young people is who build their identity based on the influence of their parents: some parents are a bad influence on the identity of their children because they either do not instil values in their children or they try to instil and teach their children values that they themselves are not practising.

During the stage of foreclosure, which is characterised by exploration without commitment, it is very important that Christian young people are exposed to the three theological tenets proposed by Andrew Root. Root proposed a theological understanding of God as revealed; an obsession with God as near (Jesus is a prayer away); a fixation on God as a rational reality; and therefore faith as something you must come to know or believe (Root & Dean, 2011:125). These tenets will resonate in their conviction so that, after their exploration phase, if they intend to make a commitment to God, they will make the commitment to God from a well-informed and transformed understanding. These tenets will explain to young people that faith in God is an experience that they will have to develop personally.

The consciousness of God as ever-present is another understanding to which young people should be exposed during their phase of exploration (foreclosure). Root and Dean (2011:124) argues that the youth ministry needs to teach young people about the everywhere-ness of God. This means that the youth ministry should encourage young people to commit themselves to the everywhere-ness of God; this will help them to be conscious in their interactions and interfacing with their friends and peers on social media (online) and offline. They will live with the consciousness that God watches everything they do. Therefore, if they make a commitment of a relationship with Him, it will be a relationship that is void of pretence, both in offline networking and offline social media.

3.5.3. Moratorium

The moratorium stage of identity formation is when young people are undergoing the process of exploration (Jordán-Conde *et al.* 2014:356; Waterman 1993:149). Waterman (1993:149) reasons that, at this stage of identity formation, young people search for commitments that define how they want others to identify them. Jacober (2014:98) adds that, at the moratorium

stage, young people involve themselves in the process of exploration in order to identify their self-identity, but are not willing to be committed to the course of discovering their self-identity. Unlike the diffusion stage, when they are not willing to explore, the moratorium stage depicts that they are willing to discover their identity, except becoming committed to identifying their self-identity.

This is a very critical stage for parents, youth workers, coaches and Christian communities to influence young people's self-understanding of their identity, because at this stage they question everything they have been told and taught. Just as was noted by Jacober (2014:98) and Cannister (2013:26), young people are more likely to respond to the Christian faith if their exploration is met with commitment. As they explore and ask different questions about why they should believe what their Christian parents believe, Weber (2014:105) submits that Christianity should be entrusted to them as a faith commitment and not necessarily the management of behaviour.

The adolescent or teenager's ontological state is "a young person revealed to him-or herself as he or she grows toward adulthood, and a time when they advance their identity by discovering their gifts and abilities" (Root & Dean 2011:125). Besides being equipped with techniques and perspective to succeed in youth ministry, youth workers also need to be oriented to see and feel their nothingness.

3.5.4. Achievement

Young people at this phase of life now have a sense of self-identity, having questioned, explored, experimented and made a commitment from an informed position, and the Christian religion is intrinsic in young people (Weber, 2014:105). This is a stage when young people are able to discover their self-identity after exploration and commitment (Jacoer 2014:98; Jordán-Conde *et al.* 2014:356; Waterman 1993:149). Waterman (1993:149) and Jacober (2014:98) argue that the stage of achievement is when young people, having explored and gone through the process of establishing identity commitment, are now able to form an identity of themselves that is true to who they actually are, and how others should see them to be.

In the achievement phase, it is pertinent for Christian youth to develop a Christian identity that is biblical and theological. Root and Dean (2011:14) argue for the relevance of young

people inculcating theological reflection about life and God (theological depth) in order to turn from the consumer habits of society, immoral information and entertainment and focus on being young people who are identified with God's transformative, redemptive agenda. Root and Dean (2011:14) further argue that, to achieve this theological depth, Christian young people will need to be equipped with the faith, hope and love needed to recognise God's forgiveness and embrace the life God intends for them.

Engaging theological depth will enable young people to discover moments, contexts, situations and practices in which God intersects with humans and transforms human effort into something holy and life giving (Root & Dean 2011:17). This will have the propensity to make young people vessels of divine grace and living testament of God's mercies and love for humanity.

Engaging with theological depth will enable young people to develop a healthy biblical and theological Christian identity that understands the incarnation of God. The balance of the gospel of God with us is to bring us not magic but accompaniment, not 'healing' (a quick solution to a problem) but salvation (intimacy with God and one another) (Root & Dean 2011:141). Young people will then yearn for the Jesus whom they know feels their pain, cares for them and loves them, irrespective of their ugly situations and struggles with the influence of SM, consequently manifesting His miracles in their lives that will lead to praise and a pleading with God to bring God's future, to bring to an end, to make what looks abnormal in a generation, normal for all people. In other words it will make the pursuit of a holy and righteous God normal in the lives of Christian young people.

Achievement is the zenith of identity formation for all young people – when they can define who they are and what they want others around them to identify them with. However, despite the fact that they are able to discover their identities, external influences from others around them still have the propensity to influence them, but their surety of who they are becomes their gauge and foundation as they interface with parents, family members, society and especially SM.

3.6. Processes of Discovering Self-Identity Formation

Waterman's engagement with Marcia and Erikson's theories of self-identity formation from a sociological and psychological paradigm advances seven processes nuggets to help young

people develop a healthy self-identity. These nuggets by Waterman offer youth ministry a guide to consciously interfacing with young people during their struggles and uncertainties in the process of identity formation (Cannister 2013:27). This interface can take place in online and offline interaction (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008:1817).

Waterman (1993:155) recommends seven processes through which young people can discover and be guided in their identity formation process.

- In order for young people to form a healthy identity of themselves they must engage in a good pursuit to discover their talents and potential. During the pursuit of their identity, the youth ministry can guide them through this discovery, especially at the critical stage of moratorium.
- It is important to understand that the recognition of personal identity takes place in the realm of ethics and as well psychology. It means that young people understand the extent to which they will deploy their talents and potential.

A definite choice of purpose is critical to deploying talents and potential. When young people are developing their talents, third parties like youth ministry are vital to engaging with young people on possible platforms, like social media, where young people like to interact and disseminate information about themselves.

- Care needs to be taken in accepting how others define who young people are. Young people have the responsibility to consciously not accept every definition of themselves given to them by others (third parties), irrespective of who the others are – parents, teachers, mentors, friends, media, and other sources that disseminate messages about who they ought to be and what they ought to be doing.

Although parents, teachers, mentors, friends, the youth ministry and social media hand to young people social expectations that may constructively influence their identity formation, they are not responsible for discovering for the young people their identity, because their observations about young people's talents and potential may be wrong, thus young people are responsible to discover their talents and potential by themselves, although with some guidance.

Third parties like the youth ministry need to be cautious not to impose their own identity on young people, because they might constitute incorrect guidance of young people's self-identity formation. Young people should own the development of their identity – not a third party.

- Mentors – a role model figure – have significant influence on young people's formation of identity (as noted in the introduction to Chapter 1 of this research study). Caution is required, however, because the role model or mentor's potential and talents sometimes may not be the same as the young person who is understudying them. Also, their circumstances and upbringing may not be the same, thus even if the mentors or role models have the same talents and potential as the young person, their deployment of the talents and potential may not be the same.
- The identity formation of young people follows a process of discovery, the employing of discovered potentials and talents, and risk. It enables young people to build their own ideologies, life goals and values.
- The exploration of a wide range of options is pertinent because, in so doing, there is a greater likeliness that consideration will be giving to areas where their talents and potential lie. The youth ministry and Christian community should encourage young people through the exploration phase of the moratorium stage, rather than to confine them to the foreclosure stage.
- Young people need to know and live with the understanding that identity formation is not the absolute essence of life, although it is pertinent. The more engrossed they are in trying to discover their identity as their main essence of living, the more frustrated they could be, thus identity formation is a lifelong discovery and not the attainment of a goal. Erikson's psychosociological theory notes that, even when they are older than 65 years (ego integrity vs. despair), people still discover certain aspects of their self-identity (1969:140).

3.7. Christian Identity Formation

The Christian identity of young people is both discovered and developed. The discovery of their Christian identity entails that young people understand themselves as the people God

says they are (Jacobson 2014:100). Christian identity as developed entails that young people's identity is subjected to different influences as explained in the understanding of Erikson psychosocial theories and also subject to the influence of some social institutions, such as parents, family members, churches, teachers, youth ministers, coaches, SM, etc. Regarding identity as developed, Cannister (2013:29) argues that our identity as Christians is constantly in formation, consciously or un-consciously. Cannister (2013:25) and Nel (2000:101) adds that engagement with Erickson's and Marcia's identity development theory helps to understand how the identity of young people is developed.

Christian identities as discovered are in the light of God's purpose and the identity developed is informed in the light of identity theories. Jacobson (2014:100) further stresses that Christian youth need to understand identity theories and the philosophical perspective of self as being autonomous so as to develop their identity; however, a theological understanding should inform young people's self-identity because both human development and self-identity cannot be exhaustively understood in exclusivity of God. God is the creator of human; therefore a theological understanding of human is important to discovering self-identity. One theological reflection of human is that, human has the potential of being co-heirs in Christ and participating in Christ suffering is important to understanding self-identity (Jacobson 2014:101).

Another theological understanding of Christian self-identity as argued by Nel (2000:101) is that Christian identity is the essence of Christians becoming who God says they already are. Thus, Christian self-identity can be discovered as God orchestrates it to be. Suggesting that Christian young people can discover their self-identity by enquiring to know who or what God says they are. Christian identity can therefore be shaped by the understanding of God as depicted in the word of God. In Gen 1:26-28; 2:7, 18, 21-22 the bible explains that man was made in the image of God. In Gen. 1:29, 2:19 humanity was created to have dominion over God's creation. Man in the image of God and representing God on earth is a great honour and a rare privilege that informs the Christian identity. More so, in Gal. 2:20 the Bible speaks of the Christian identity as been dead to flesh and alive in Christ. Implying that a Christian is dead to sin and alive in pursuing God's purpose.

Besides discovering Christian identity through what God has said, social institutions can also help facilitate the discovery of Christian identity. Strommen and Hardel (2000:38) argue that Christian families can inform young people's Christian identity, and advise Christian families

to create and promote a healthy Christian atmosphere for the children and youth in the family. Healthy behaviours of love, care and integrity should be part of the normal daily way of life. Unhealthy behaviours in families should be corrected by promoting parental harmony. The reason for this is that unhealthy behaviours experienced in one's family of origin, such as wounded memories, hurtful remembrances, unmet personal needs, unfulfilled ambitions and feelings of failure, can influence young people's Christian identity and their disposition toward the Christian faith (Strommen and Hardel 2000:38).

Therefore, a Christian youth should understand identity from a holistic perspective. Holistic perspective in the sense of developing the whole person. Developing the whole person by discovering self-identity as God orchestrates it and developed as being influenced by family, society and social media (Jacobson 2014:105). Elton (2014:171) emphasises that Christian young people should understand their identities as children of God who are God's subjects and agents of change. As argued by Jacobson (2014:105) and Elton (2014:171), the self-identity of Christian youth is influenced by parents, family, society and social media, but their prime understanding of identity should be rooted in the knowledge of themselves as God's subjects and agents of change in society.

Young people's relationship with God should not be dissonant from their Christian identity. Dean (2010:16) observed that most young people's relationship with God is devoid of their identity formation. She made this submission on the basis of research conducted among young people by the National Study of Youth and Religion in America (2010:4). She further argues that even those who were born in Christian families and Christian communities rarely nurture a Christian identity in themselves (Dean 2010:16). Elton (2014:168) argues for the need for ministry leaders like youth ministry leaders to guide young people to develop their Christian identity, and says that "if ministry leaders are to help nurture their identity as children of God and help them discover a faith that speaks into the current culture, it will be important to help them shift from viewing themselves as objects within a consumer society to seeing themselves as subjects and agents of God's love" (ibid).

Christian identity can be discovered through storytelling. Jacobson (2014:97) submits in relation to Christian identity among young people that identity is what young people discover and create in telling their stories to themselves and to others within their social influence. The stories of young people in relation to God's stories enable them to discover their Christian identity (Cannister 2013:24).

Youth ministry can help young people interpret their stories theologically. Dean and Root (2011:14) argue for youth ministry to help young people interpret their stories in God's stories, which means that youth ministry are involved in the translating, growing and equipping of young people with the faith, hope and love needed to recognise God's forgiveness and to embrace the life that God has purposed for them. Dean and Root (2011:17) further argue that youth ministry needs theological depth in order to relate to God's transformative, redemptive agenda and to undertake theological reflection on life and God, because through theological depth, youth ministers will help young people to discover moments, contexts, situations and practices in which God intersects with humans and transforms human effort into an identity of holiness and life giving agents. This will have the propensity to give young people an identity of being God's vessels of divine grace and living testaments to God's mercy and love for humanity.

3.8. Construction of Self-Identity through Social Media

The SM is a domain for information that influences the self-identity formation of young people. In relation to my primary research question, on how SM informs the self-identity formation of young people, Jacober (2014:104) argues from a Christian youth ministry perspective that SM offer young people the opportunity to create their own identities by reflecting on others' identities and creating their identities to afford others the leverage of reflecting on their identities. Jacober confirms that this is happening at a far faster pace in history than the way identity was influenced by society in the past (ibid).

Looking at how SM have become part and parcel of daily living, Qualman (2011:262) argues that we do not have a choice on whether we use SM; the question is how we use social media and what influence we have through SM. This assertion by Qualman answers my primary research question, "how does SM influence the self-identity of young people?" SM offers a source of how young people's self-identity is influenced by information dissemination. The argument therefore becomes how SM is to be engaged and not whether young people should engage SM or not. Young people engaging SM for different reasons seems a certainty, thus, the concern is what and how to approach SM.

SM offer young people a public, interactive space for engagement with friends and intended friends. Jacober (2014:105) opined that the SM are considered by some to be a new mall, town square or public sphere, where young people hang out to have an impact on and

influence the development of each other's self-identity formation. This new mall, town square or public sphere where young people establish both online and an offline friendship offers them arenas and a location to develop their identities. With the advent of SM and other information and communication technologies, the town square and public sphere for young people's interaction and networking are beyond a geographical location; they are global and boundless. Since the public has an influence on young people's identity formation, and the public sphere is beyond geographical location, young people's self-identity formation is more globally determined than confined to parents, family members and the immediate society.

Another way of knowing that SM is a source of self-identity formation is that the software application²⁶ that young people download and access often depicts their self-identity. Gardner and Davis (2013:60) argue that the app icon that young people download on their technology points out the young person's identity, because this act conveys the young person desirability. It comprises a unique combination of knowing their interests, habits, values and social connections, which point to their self-identity. The app that young people access more frequently and devote much of their time to readily indicates their identities of who they are and what they are committed to be known by.

SM is creating a different paradigm of self-identity formation for young people, especially because identity can be developed through whatever influence platform and media (Castells 2004:7). For some young people, the people they call family members are both online and offline network friends. That is, family members can be of biological descent or SM networked friends. Castells' (ibid) argument suggest that whatsoever provides medium and platform for people to build relationship, have the potential to create an environment of influence. Since SM offers young people platform and medium to network on the digital continent environment, it can also have the potential to influence their self-identity formation.

3.9. Conclusion

Identity is developed and constructed. The self-construction of identity is premised on different factors that do not occur overnight. It is what defines a person and how other people see the person. Since identity formation is constructed, the discussion in this chapter has been

²⁶ Application hereafter will be referred to as app. or application.

on why identities are constructed, the process of identity formation, and how SM influences that process.

This chapter engaged with Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity formation in conversation with the biblical understanding of identity formation. Although it was an interdisciplinary discourse on self, identity, identity formation and the role that social media play in influencing self-identity formation, a premium was giving to the biblical understanding of these concepts, because this research work is situated in the biblical argument for self-identity. Self in its autonomy is not independent of the creator God, and the discovery of identity is in cognisance of the development of a Christian identity in integration with Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity.

In Chapter 4 this research study will investigate one of the secondary research questions (question 4), namely "what are the practical theological challenges and possibilities SNS pose for youth ministry?" This links to what Qualman (2011:262) said in his assertion that the concern is about the purpose for which we use social media. In Chapter 4 I also point out the purpose for which the youth ministry can use social media to influence young people.

In Chapter 4, this research will investigate, from a practical theology perspective engaging Osmer's normative and pragmatic tasks, how the engagement of youth ministry with young people on social media can influence young people's self-identity. Chapter 4 will note the challenges that SM pose to young people, and the opportunities with which SM avail the youth ministry to influence the self-identity formation of young people, especially Christian young people.

Chapter 4

Youth Ministry Engaging Social Media

4.1. Introduction

This chapter adopts the normative and pragmatic tasks proposed by Osmer's (2008:4) practical theological tasks. This task seeks to ask 'what ought to be going on' and 'how might we respond'? Previous chapters reflected on various interdisciplinary perspectives whereas focus is now placed on theological perspectives. This chapter discusses possible youth ministry approaches on how young people's self-identity is influenced through their network of friends and peers on SM. Before investigating the possible approaches of youth ministry that can potentially engage SM, this chapter firstly investigates a deeper (than the definition proposed in chapter one) understanding of youth, youth ministry and different approaches to youth ministry.

Secondly, through the practical theological task, this chapter focuses on how youth ministry can be proactive in using SM through disseminating information and telling theological and biblical stories. In an attempt to be proactive on SM, youth ministry may need to develop apps that will engage young people on SM. To achieve proactive presence on SM, youth ministry may need to influence young people through offline relationship and encourage them to influence their circle of SM network users.

This study explores how youth ministry can equip young people with a theological and biblical understanding of their self-identity as Christians. This Christian identity entails young people missionally reach out to their peers, friends and family on social networks, with the gospel message in obedience to the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). This implies that this study focuses on how Christian young people, through the influence of youth ministry, can extend their self-identity on SM platforms. Young people extending their Christian praxis on SM entails that they disseminate information that have biblical and theological content.

This research investigates how youth ministry can create an inspirational presence through an online relationship on SM. This online relationship could have the potential to develop into an offline relationship. Likewise, an offline relationship could also have the potential to develop into an online relationship with the missional goal of sharing information on the

digital continent of SM. These relationships could have the propensity to influence young people's self-identity.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter explores the opportunity that SM presents to youth ministry and how youth ministry can engage young people on SM. This chapter elaborates on the discussion begun in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3 this research discussed how self-identity is discovered and developed. This chapter's emphasis is on how youth ministry can guide young people to engage in SM through a rooted understanding of their self-identity as Christians.

4.2. Youth / Young People

There is no simple definition of youth. Cloete (2012:2) describes youth as a distinct life phase and social cohort in society with a particular lifestyle or cultural identity. This youthful phase of life depicts a phase of life that characterises a desire for relationship with God and humanity. The youth therefore are a particular group of people with a particular social unit of identity, relationship, lifestyle and culture that informs how they reason, behave and live their lives. Maiko (2007:3) defines youth as people in their developmental and nurturing phase of life. Youth are thus understood as navigating through developmental phase of life- physical, spiritual, sexual, and cognitive growth. Wamuyu (2013:41) describes youth as people undergoing a social process and are actively involved in making the process meaningful. Therefore, Youth are a category of people who are undergoing a developmental phase of life. During this developmental phase of life, youth are accountable in making this phase meaningful through their choices.

Adeogun (2015:213) argues that in grouping youth, countries vary considerably. For example, in Uganda, youth is from age 12 to 30 years, while in Nigeria, it is between 18 and 35 years (Adeogun 2015:213). Hershey (1986:7) in consonant with Nigerian Adeogun's grouping, group youth within the age of 18 to 35 years. Badejo *et al.* (2011:284) concur with Adeogun's grouping of youth in Nigeria when they say that Nigerian youth are within the ages of 18 to 35 years. Wamuyu (2013:40) from a Kenyan perspective argues that, youth are individuals who have attained the age of 18 years but have not reached the age of 35 years. This Kenyan categorization is similar to Nigerian categorization of youth. In contrast, Porter, Blaufuss and Owusu (2007:3) categorise young people (male and female) between the ages of 14 and 30. Therefore, there are variance and uncertainty in age classification of youth.

This research choose to adopt Adeogun and Badejo *et al.* definition of youth because it correlates with my observation of Nigerian youth, and it correlate with Nigeria National youth policy²⁷ (2009:6). Nigerian youth at 18 years starts higher institution of learning (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) and gain employment and get married between age 30 and 35 years (Onuekwusi & Effiong 2002:95; Oyefusi 2010:327; Porter *et al.* 2008:16). Responsibilities such as marriage and transition from dependence to independence defines youth categorization in Africa (Wamuyu 2013:41; ECWA Men's Fellowship Handbook 2010:12). This is another reason why the youth focused on in this study are not strictly confined to Erikson age grouping. The processes during the various life stages, however are important to follow.

According to Ubi (2007:2) youth is a developmental phase where a young person develops from childhood and transcends into adulthood. Connoting that youth undergo different phases of life as they develop in all ramification of life. In developing from childhood into adulthood, youth's perception of God, relationship, and social institutions are influenced by parents and faith community (Beckwit 2004:60, 78). These influences prepare them for work and other relationships. Onuekwusi and Effiong (2009:96) further elucidate that youth is a phase of life that is from childhood and entry into the world of work.

Nel (2000:77), explaining youth from a congregational practical theological paradigm, argues that the youth are a unique group of people with a distinctive character. He (*ibid*) further states that, although the youth are unique and distinct from other members of the congregation, they are, however, not apart from the rest of the congregation. Thus, youth are a particular group of people who are unique and distinct in a given community.

The youth are part of the whole congregation. The faith life of the youth is not apart from the faith life of other members of God's Church, This then means that the youth and adult have the same potential to share a life of faith with God (Nel 2000:78). The reason for this understanding is that the youth share in the relationship with God as God's covenant people, just as other members' of the Church (Nel 2000:78). The youth are a wholesome part of the Church and the full responsibility of the Church congregation and Christian community (Nel 2000:79).

²⁷ Second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2009.

Demographically, Nigeria, just like most African countries is a youthful continent because it has a large number of youth. More than 15 years ago Practical theologian, Dean Borgman (1998:1)²⁸ argues that

Africa is a youthful continent. Much of its population is under 16 years of age. In 1970, Africa had seven cities with more than a million inhabitants. By 2000, more than 60 African cities will have over a million people – and five will have more than five million inhabitants! Those cities – where church and youth ministry are often weakest – will be filled with young people. Africa entered the 1990s with more than 500 million people; of these, considerably more than 300 million were youth under 24 years of age!

Borgman claims suggest that Africa is a young people's continent in terms of population. Two decades after Borgman's claim, the United Nations (UN) confirmed that the population of youth in Africa is growing at a faster rate. Of the 10 youngest populations in the world, according to the United Nations (UN) in 2012, eight were African countries. The eight countries were Uganda, Chad, Niger, Angola, Somalia, Zambia, Mali and Malawi. The UN report has it that 66% of the total population in these African countries are youth. In an updated report from the UN on African urban population growth, Nigeria had a steady urban youth population growth of 4.66% between 2010 and 2015, which suggests that, inasmuch as Africa is a youthful continent, more youth are attracted to living in cities, as epitomised in Nigeria's urban influx growth (Knoetze, 2015:1; United Nations 2015; Wu, 2015:np).

The above-mentioned statistics show that many young people in Africa are migrating to urban cities. This implies that cities like Abuja, Nigeria have a large population of young people. In Chapter 2 this research investigated the statistics of how Nigerian youth are SM activist who engage the SM, especially Facebook for social networking. As noted in chapter 2, statistics reveal that Nigeria is the 8th fastest growing country, with more than an increase of 14.09% in the population using Facebook (Socialbakers 2014).

Nigeria (having a large population of young people on SM) has a potential for youth ministry influence on SM. This should be a clarion call for youth ministry to engage with this population of Nigerian youth in influencing their self-identity. SM offers youth ministry a technological platform to influence this population of young people.

²⁸ Borgman made the submission that Africa is a youthful continent after over two decades of networking in youth ministry with African youth ministers.

This research is guided by the concept that youth are unique and distinct people with a peculiar culture that is universal, irrespective of geographical location and primary identity. The universality of the youth as people with a distinct culture is informed by their engagement on SM media. As explained in Chapter 2, the interconnectedness of youth on SM is a potential reason why youth are distinct with a peculiar youth culture- irrespective of geographical location.

4.3. Defining Youth Ministry

Youth ministry involves guiding and influencing the youth to discern God's will for their lives, community and creation through a personal relationship with God (Borgman 2013:10; Lewis 2009:19; Root & Dean 2011:99). Yaconelli (2003:6) argues that the act of discerning and guiding youth towards a personal relationship with God is an arduous task in youth ministry, especially because the youth ministry is not about the youth minister but about God. Therefore, the onus on discernment of God's will makes the task of youth ministry very challenging, as it entails guiding young people to knowing God's will for their lives by constructing their own practical theological and ethical principles that will guide them in their interaction with their society (Beckwith 1997:7). This interaction with society can be face-to-face or through network users' interface on SM (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks 2014:247; Jin 2013: 2463; Lee 2014:254).

One aspect of youth ministry highlights the agency of youth through it being a ministry to youth by the youth and for the youth (Nel 2000:100; Maiko 2007:6; Schultz & Schultz 1987:16). Nel (2000:100) affirms that youth ministry, by definition, is "a ministry to, but also with and through (by means of) the youth", who are at the phase of discovering and developing their identity²⁹. This infers that youth ministry is ministering to young people by young people – the ministry is done through young people. Schultz and Schultz (1987:16, 18, 108) argue that, in youth ministry, young people do the ministry to themselves as a goal, thus take responsibility and ownership of the ministry.

One goal of youth ministry as described by Nel (2000:101) is helping young people discover their identity as Christians. Young people's Christian identity is God given, but requires discovery. Nel (ibid) adds that the given identity is the identity of being God's creation as

²⁹ Chapter 3 of this study investigates how self-identity is developed through Erickson's psychosocial theories.

God's chosen ones to share in God's redemptive ministry to God's creation. Youth ministry presupposes that youth workers are in the translating, growing and healing business, for they are called to stop young people from dying: their vocation is to help young people choose the God-given life as depicted in Deuteronomy 30:19 by equipping them with the faith, hope and love needed to recognise God's forgiveness and embrace the life and Christian identity that God intends for them (Root & Dean 2011:14).

Commenting on how youth ministry can guide young people to discover their Christian self-identity, Nel (2000:102) says that, as a Christian young person discovers their identity in God, they become involved in helping their friends, peers and contemporaries to discover their own identity. The establishment of youth ministry becomes a practice of young people helping other young people to discover their identities. Nel (2000:103) further affirms that the conception of youth ministry as helping young people to discover their God-given identity so that they, in turn, can influence their peers to discover theirs is reciprocal. He elucidates that young people are created by God as self-reliant, yet dependent, beings who serve as God's co-workers on earth. As God's co-workers, those who have discovered their identity help those who are still searching to find their identity, especially young people in their moratorium stage of life.

In achieving this goal of helping young people discover their God-given identity, Root and Dean (2011:73) say that if "youth ministry is to address fragmented, overwhelmed teenagers as human beings, and not as objects to be won and counted for the Church, then we must orient twenty first century youth ministry unapologetically toward the cross". The significance of the cross demonstrates that Jesus died for all humanity. Therefore, young people should be treated as human beings for whom Jesus died on the cross.

Orienting young people towards the cross can help them discover their God-given identity as human beings whom Jesus loved and gave His life for on the cross. The cross is an emblem of God's forgiveness, grace, love and indefatigable care for humanity. Higgs says that pointing young people to the cross is important, and argues that the message of the cross shows how God demonstrates His love for the world and invites all into a relationship with Him. Even more so, youth ministry entails cultivating a strategic collaboration and networking with people who are not in faith with Jesus (Higgs 2003:22).

Youth ministry is a distinct term used by the Church for youth work. Ward (1997:2) understands youth ministry as a terminology, a tradition and a discipline used by the Church to distinguish it from youth workers, who work in secular settings. Ward's concept of youth ministry suggests that youth ministry is a term for youth workers who work among young people with a Christian perspective, distinct from other secularised youth work and community courses. There are other institutions and organisations that are involved in youth work within communities and in global space, but youth ministry refers to work done among young people that is informed by biblical and theological reflections. Ward (1997:3) further conceptualises youth ministry as

An attempt to express that there is an approach to youth work which operates within a different code to that developed within secular youth work which is nevertheless also professional. This method of work should be called "ministry" because its closest partner remains the clergy who also refer to their practice as ministry. Some have expressed this relationship more explicitly by adopting the title 'youth pastor'.

Ward's understanding suggests that youth ministry is a Church-oriented term that designates ministry and work done within the church and community on the basis of God's normative task. The values, approaches and worldview that are taught and proposed to young people are pre-informed by biblical understanding and theological reflection. Higgs (2003:74) adds that the working of God and outpouring of the Holy Spirit give youth ministry an unprecedented opportunity to influence young people in many ways. One of the many ways that young people can be influenced is on SM.

Youth ministry is also God's ministry through the Church. According to Nel (2000:77), the youth ministry is a comprehensive ministry of the Church. Youth ministry is an integral part of the Church. Nel (2000:78) further argues that, since youth ministry is God's ministry through the Church, youth ministry should be incorporated into every stream and decision-making process of the Church. He (ibid) argues this proposition against the backdrop of the context in which youth ministry is relegated to a small fraction of the Church to which little (or no) attention is given to it by the Church.

4.4. Approaches to Youth Ministry

There are different approaches to youth ministry propounded by different youth ministry scholars, educators and theologians. Root and Dean (2011:37, 44) suggest the development of a theological framework for Christian youth that will guide their interaction with society and prepare them to live out the gospel among their peers, and in their family, community, church and government. They (Root and Dean 2011:100) suggest a hermeneutical approach to Christian praxis that will guide young people into interpreting life from God's text (Bible). Dean (2001:33) and Elton (2014:175) suggests a theologising youth ministry and incarnational approach where youth ministry guides young people with theological understanding of God's dealings with humanity. Hershey (1986:11) argues for an intentional approach where youth ministry is done deliberately and not an aimless ministry among young people. Strommen and Hardel (2000:72, 73) recommend a personal relationship with God where young people are nurtured and fostered to develop a personal relationship with God. Devries (2008:57, 60) proposes sustainability in youth ministry where youth ministry is structured over a period of years and not expecting an instantaneous and sporadic impact in youth ministry. Nel (2000:85) advances an inclusive congregational approach where young people are seen and treated as part of the church and not an independent arm of the church; Ward (1997:1) proposes the outside-in and inside-out approach (further explored below); and Chiroma³⁰ (2008:18) advocates for mentorship as an approach to youth ministry (further explored later).

Youth ministry needs to explore approaches that can influence young people. Higgs (2003:128) argues that youth ministry needs to develop approaches to engaging with young people who live in cities. Abuja, as the federal capital of Nigeria, is situated in the centre of Nigeria. Abuja is a metropolitan and cosmopolitan city where young people from all over the country like to live or visit. As a youth pastor in Abuja, I have seen young people come from different parts of Nigeria to look for employment, visit relations and friends, or to live with their parents.

³⁰ Nathan Chiroma is a faculty member of my denomination at the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary. In his MTh research study at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, he advocates that the Church engages mentoring as an approach to influencing young people in Church and nurturing the leadership potential in them to influence their own peers, friends and, by implication, their own generation. He conducted empirical research, sampling the opinions of 90 Nigerian youth (although he administered 100 questionnaire) in the age range of 16 to 60 years. He conducted this study from a Nigerian premise and proposed contributions to the field of practical theology academically and as a working tool for the Nigerian Church, as the Church has to make an appropriate response to and choices regarding youth development among young people in the Church (Chiroma 2008:18, 23, 25 & 30).

Youth ministry is God's ministry of influence to young people (Higgs 2003:128). The question now becomes, how can youth ministry strategize approaches to influence young people? By implication, what approach should be appropriated in influencing young people in cities like Abuja? These questions inform the discussion on why different approaches to youth ministry should be considered.

My experience as a youth pastor in Abuja confirms Higgs's (2003:74) argument that most youth like to live in cities or aspire to live in cities. Thus, the nature of the city determines the approach to adopt for youth ministry. Elucidating on the need to make a choice or choices on approach (models) contextually, Nel (2000:169) argues that the model of (approach to) youth ministry needs to be contextually applicable to the people. This implies that each context determines which youth ministry model or approach is the appropriate one for engaging with their young people.

In focusing on this dual approach to youth ministry, this study will synergise Ward (1997:1) outside-in approach with the mentorship model (Chiroma 2008:18) and the inside-out approach with the incarnational model (Dean 2001:52; Elton 2014:175) because these approaches and models are contextual to youth ministry in cities like Abuja, where relationship is the premise for youth ministry (Badejo *et al.* 2011:285; Borgman 2004:1).

In appropriating Ward and Chiroma's suggestions for an approach to youth ministry, the outside-in approach is the youth ministry approach, while the mentorship of young people is the model through which the outside-in approach could be implemented. This is because the concept of the mentorship model within the Christian practice is a model of influencing young people who are in the Church, which means that the outside-in approach could entail the practice of mentoring young people in the Church and inviting the youth into the Church to be mentored with the Christian ethos.

In the same manner, the inside-out approach is discussed as a youth ministry approach, while incarnation is the model through which the inside-out approach could be implemented. This is because the concept of the incarnation model is a method of affecting the inside-out approach to youth ministry, meaning that the inside-out approach cannot be done without the youth minister and Christian young people incarnating in relationship to wherever the un-churched and non-Christians hang out, converse, converge or network.

4.4.1. Outside-In Approach

The outside-in approach of youth ministry is an approach that entails the Church and Christian youth ministers focus their attention of influencing young people who are in the Church (Ward 1997:7; Higgs 2003:22). Young people who already are members of the local Church and universal Church are the people to be encouraged, equipped and motivated through this approach. In relation to equipping young people, Taylor (2012:88) argues that the healthy values of integrity, respect, hard work and compassion for their generation should be taught to young people because these values shape their self-identity.

Ward (1997:7) and Higgs (2003:22) argue further that the group identity of young people who categorise the outside-in approach are mostly young people who were born in Christian homes, underwent Sunday school and baptismal classes, and have grown up in Church activities. Ward (1997:7) argues further that the outside-in approach ensures that young people's religious identity is formed by their relationship with God and their engagement in religious activities through the influence of their parents, caregivers and sometimes family relations. A relationship with God is one of the core pursuits in the outside-in approach.

Building a relationship with God is significant in youth ministry (Hershey 1986:10; Ward 1997:26). Ward (1997:26) elucidates that guiding young people to develop a relationship with God that underscores an understanding of God's mission. Guiding young people to in this regard is significant because youth ministry is involved in God's mission (Morgan 2014:1). Ward (1997:26) adds that youth ministry is grounded in the missional nature of God. In the light of this, Nel (2000) says that, as youth grow in their relationship with God, their identity will be more informed by God's mission. This will help them to define their identity in the light of God's word and they will begin to see themselves as God sees them. It also will help them see themselves with the certainty of who God says they are, as it will clearly transform their values and their engagement with people in the society (Nel 2000:121).

The concept of the outside-in approach prepares young people to embark on an inside-out approach. Ward (1997:8) reinforced the view that the outside-in approach prepares young people to engage with their friends who are non-Christian at school and in other social activities with an evangelistic endeavour. This suggests that social activities such as SM become a digital continent for missional activities.

The outside-in approach requires that pastors, Christian educators and theologians orient, train and equip young people who are already members of the church to influence the self-identity of their friends and other people with whom they share a group and cultural identity. Ward (1997:7) agrees that the outside-in approach equips young people in Church as they are encouraged and built up in their faith through a combination of social events and programmes such as bible teaching, prayer and worship. In building up their faith, bible teaching, prayer meetings, and worship facilitate their experience and understanding of God. This experience and understanding have the potential to equip them with biblical and theological reflection of God and how to disseminate the core and life transforming biblical messages.

Similarly, the outside-in approach also entails incorporating and equipping for evangelistic mission those who are won for Christ from ‘outside’ of the Church. Nel (2000:120) renders it as saying that the youth ministry should consciously incorporate young people who are won from the ‘world’ into growth within the faith community. This growth, Beckwith argues, should be in every facet of their lives – physical, spiritual, cognitive and health (2004:85). Beckwith (2004:85) argues that children and young people alike should consciously belong to certain groups within the faith community and participate in their faith community. This, she says, will enable them to cultivate healthy spiritual development that can guide them in understanding who they are.

The outside-in approach should include equipping young people who are engaged in SM networks to constructively influence their Christian friends and non-Christian friends, family (Webber, Singleton, Joyce & Dorissa, 2010:210). The digital continent offers a platform for such young people to share and disseminate information on SM that have the potential to influence their SM network user’s self-identity. Since self-identity formation is a process that is influenced by external factors such as family, friends, environment and social network, the outside-in approach to youth ministry is vital for preparing young people to consciously and deliberately engage in SM with the mission of influencing their network counterpart’s identity.

One model for the outside-in approach is mentorship. This would then include mentoring young people within the Church as a model of preparing them for the outside-in approach. Root and Dean (2011:196) affirm that passing on the essentials of the Christian faith and

tradition to young people through mentorship³¹, while maintaining a good relationship with them, is potent. It is also helpful in mentorship that the youth minister brings to the notice of the young person areas of influence.

Mentoring is influencing a person towards pursuing his or her God-given purpose in life. Sanders (2004:5) defines the concept of mentorship as “the facilitation of the lifelong development process whereby individuals move through various stages of human, emotional, spiritual, educational and intellectual development”. Mentoring is a relationship that is holistic in content, as it engages various stages of human life. It is a relationship that entails grooming an individual to attain maturity in all ramifications of his/her life.

Youth ministry therefore uses a mentorship relationship with young people in the Church to guide them through the various stages of their human development holistically. Through this guidance, young people will discover their God-given identity and develop to fulfil God’s purpose for their lives. Myers (2015) with this highlighting notes that the mentorship relationship offers the Church a transformative platform to influence young people on a one-on-one basis.

Clarifying the concept of mentorship, Paul Lloyd Warner (2006) argues that mentorship is a relationship between a mentor and a mentee. The “mentor is a teacher, presumably wiser, with a great amount of knowledge, who can impart his or her erudition to an individual usually in private. A relationship is thus developed between teacher and pupil that become sacred” (Warner 2006: np). This implies that mentorship is a relationship between a youth minister, who serves the role of a mentor, and young people who are being taught, trained and equipped for an outward-in approach to youth ministry, reaching out to peers and friends with the message of the gospel.

God is the ultimate mentor who dwells in the mentor (youth minister) through the Holy Spirit, who teaches and guides mentors in how to influence young people by inculcating them with the thrust of character and integrity to influence their peers (John 14:17 & 26; Rom

³¹ Mentoring comes from a Greek word meaning enduring, which connotes a sustained relationship between an individual (the mentor), usually older and always more experienced, who helps and guides a younger person through development (the mentee or protégé). This guidance is not done for personal gain, especially in the Christian context. Jeff Myers adds that the mentorship relationship between Christians is a powerful way of exerting a life-on-life influence on younger people so that they can be equipped for productive service (Jeff Myers, <http://www.allaboutgod.com/christian-mentor.htm>. Accessed: June 20, 2015).

8:26). Thus, the virtues in human mentors are by-products of an instilled nature of God through the Holy Spirit.

Mallison (1998:28) notes that

the foundation of all Christian mentoring is who God has revealed himself to be. God takes the initiative in all ministries in his name. Therefore, effective ministry involves making ourselves available to him to be guided to where he is already at work. Then we are but channels through whom he works.

Mallison (*ibid*) further observes that all human relationships will be secondary to the development of a growing relationship with God. To develop this mentoring relationship with God, the youth ministry will need to guide young people through the practices of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, obedience to the scriptures, solitude, worship, service, fellowship, etc. This infers that God is the ultimate mentor, while youth ministers are God's representatives who mentor young people in the Church so that they (the young people) can be equipped to share their Christian faith with their peers using every means possible.

It is pertinent to mention that the word mentoring is not written in the Bible, but the concept of mentoring can be deduced (Lewis 2009:42). Chiroma (2008:59) further affirms that mentoring was a way of life for the people of the Bible, which means that mentorship was, and still is, a means of passing on skills and wisdom from one generation to another. Therefore, mentoring has a biblical inclination and admonition.

Young people who are exploring what to believe and why they should believe in what they are told to believe is a fundamental reason why the mentorship model is vital in engaging young people in the Church. During the foreclosure phase of identity formation, young people believe what they are told, taught and expected to be identified with without questioning or further exploration (Cannister 2013:26). This suggests that, at the phase of foreclosure, young people are zealous and committed to Church activities as a ritualistic exercise that lacks exploration. Through the model of mentorship, the youth ministry can engage young people in discussions and relationships in which young people are allowed to ask questions and doubt their beliefs and 'scripts' handed to them by religious institutions and their families during the foreclosure phase of their identity formation.

The reason for this being that young people need to know why they believe what they believe so that, when they engage their friends in discussion about the Christian faith, they can explore and make a commitment to the Christian faith during the moratorium phase of their identity formation based on a well-informed position. Jacober (2014:98) and Cannister (2013:26) add that young people are more likely to respond to the Christian faith if their commitment is met with exploration. Root and Dean (2011:196) argue that commitment and exploration generate a mutual relationship that can lead to what they call “deep connection through mutual exploration”.

4.4.2. Inside-Out Approach

The second approach to youth ministry suggested by Ward is the inside-out approach. Ward (1997:11) explains that the focus of this approach is to evangelise those who are ‘outside’ the Church. These are people who live in urban and rural areas and are socially fairly distant from local congregation. To work inside-out means to step out of a predominantly Christian group, who have been mentored through the outside-in approach, to consciously serve as youth workers who reach out to individuals, groups of people and communities that are socially and culturally distant from Church (Ward 1997:12). This signifies that the thrust of inside out is to share the gospel message to those outside the Christian assembly.

The onus of sharing the gospel through evangelistic outreach lies with Christians whose identity has been influenced through the outside-in approach. Ward (1997:12) stresses that disciples in each generation over the last 150 years have made a concerted effort to share the gospel message with those who are outside the confines of the Church. Biblical narratives account that Jesus sent his disciple to share the gospel message with their generation (Matt. 10:5-15). Thus, each generation has the onus to share the message of the gospel of Jesus birth, earthly ministry, death, and resurrection with those who are non-Christians and are not members of Christian assembly (outside the Church).

The premise of the incarnation model is that of God manifesting Himself through His Son who came to this world in order to save mankind from depravity and restore human dignity in a relationship with Him (Jn. 1:1-3, Jn. 3:16). The incarnation of Jesus is one model of reaching out to non-Christians. Ward (1997:13) argues that the incarnation of Jesus is an example of how the inside-out approach is administered in youth ministry. He further explains that, in Jesus, we see that God became a human being and built relationship with

human beings so that he could influence human beings (Ward 1997:13). The incarnation of Jesus is a model for the inside-out approach of youth ministry; it entails that young people are equipped to reach out to their peers and friends wherever they are. Reaching out to non-Christian young people wherever they are is what invites Christian young people to use the platform of SM to influence their network of friends in their engagement with and conversations on SM.

The incarnation model of the inside-out approach fosters a non-judgemental relationship with non-Christians. Ward (1997:19) expounds that building a non-judgemental relationship is pertinent to the incarnational model. It entails that the youth ministers and Christian youths who are equipped to reach out to non-Christians in their network of friends and on the digital continent will need to accept young people as they are and be willing to understand young people from their own perspective, and not with assumptive instincts and predispositions, but with the message of the love of God as exemplified on the cross. Root and Dean (2011:175) argue that the theology of the cross³² can be communicated to young people at outdoor meetings, not necessarily inside the four walls of the church. More so, during outdoor trips, young people are challenged to face the reality of crisis in their lives through deep reflection and trust God to speak to them and address their crisis.

Youth ministers and Christian young people who engage non-Christian young people in a relationship will need to assume the position of a learner. Ward (1997:20) argues that behaviour and values that are biblical are the goal of the incarnational model, thus youth ministers and Christian youth will need to be learners as they relate with non-Christian youth whom they intend to influence. A learner's attitude that is non-judgemental will be effective in establishing a relationship with non-Christians. The essence of assuming the disposition of a learner is to tolerate both the good and the bad behaviour of the non-Christian youth (Ward 1997:19).

However, Ward (1997:19) cautioned that adopting a learner's attitude in the incarnational model like Jesus Christ does not mean that the youth minister and Christian youth should compromise biblical truth through sin and at the expense of their integrity in order to make the non-Christian comfortable. To this, Root and Dean (2011:151) add that sin leads to death and the dehumanisation of humanity, which implies that youth ministry should "point the

³² The cross is the way God reveals God-self most fully, for it is on the cross that we see how fully God seeks to be with and for humanity.

young people to the objective social reality of dehumanization and broken community that they feel and in which they participate: the state of sin and death". It is thus important to teach young people about the consequences that sinful behaviour could lead to.

What we can deduce from Jesus as the model of the incarnational approach for the inside-out approach is that Jesus rebuked sin but loved the sinner (Ward 1997:19). Jesus was incarnated in human form to influence humanity unto salvation, godly values and behaviour; in fulfilling this mission He established friendship with sinners, but He did not condone their sinful behaviour and attitudes. This implies that the youth ministry and Christian youth should incarnate by relating to non-Christian youth or those 'outside' the Church, without compromising biblical truth and the integrity of the Christian identity (ibid).

Dean (2010:87) encourages youth ministers to engage with the incarnational model of youth ministry as a privilege and with gratitude. She argues that engaging young people in the ministry of bearing fruit for God's purpose in society is the hallmark of Christian maturity, the missionary principle of the gospel and a show of gratitude to God.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the SM technological platform is beyond a fixed geographical location. In Chapter 3, this research investigated how young people's self-identity is greatly influenced by their relationships and interface on SM, thus an evangelistic missional engagement of sharing the gospel on SM could give the youth ministry and Christian young people the opportunity to influence their generation beyond geographical location. Youth ministry and Christian young people who have been equipped and trained through mentorship into a relationship with God and concern for humanity could incarnate into SM in order to influence their network relationships. These relationships are with peers who live beyond their immediate location. Youth ministry equipping young people to influence their peers and youth ministry incarnating itself on SM in a quest to influence young people has a theological mandate.

4.5. Theological Reflection on engaging social media

The word theology³³ simplistically means the study and appropriation of God's word. Stephen (2013:252) elucidates that etymologically, the word theology comprises two

³³ Theology is God-centred and God-focused. Borgman (2004:1) argues that theology reflects on God's work in creation, the Israelites' exodus from Egypt through the wilderness into the promised land, God's covenant with

compound words that stem from the Greek word ‘theos’ which means god, and ‘logos’, which means study, word, teaching. In transliteration, Theology means “god study”, “god teaching” or “god word”, “god teaching”, “god philosophy”. In the modern usage of the word in the Christian context, theology is the study of God. In addition, Stephen (2013:252) buttressed that theology is the process by which the Christian faith seeks to study God and express God to society.

Stephen (2013:254) argues that the existing media on the internet are tools for fulfilling the great commission. The biblical passage of “go and preach the gospel” (Matt. 20:18) and the command to witness the gospel to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8) are imperatives for the message of God to be evangelized to all in the physical world including the online environment. The end of the earth seems to suggest that the message should be shared and preached to the end of the earth (wherever humanity is found). This also suggests that the gospel message can be shared with all who interface with network users on SM.

Despite the fact that SM offers a platform for fulfilling the theological mandate of connecting with network users and sharing the gospel message, Cloete (2012:1) observes that the fields of sociology and communication have done more studies on how to proactively engage the technological medium of digital media. She argues for a proactive representation of theological reflection on digital media like Facebook (ibid). Cloete (ibid) postulation on the need for a proactive theological reflection on digital media like Facebook answers Osmer (2008:139) practical theological task that asks how practical theologian should respond to the problem in the society. Cloete (2012:1) suggest that practical theological response to problems in the society should be proactive. Thus, she argues for proactive response from practical theologian in engaging young people on digital Facebook (Cloete 2012:1).

A proactive response on SM suggests that the onus of sharing God’s message on SM lies with Christians. Since SM provides tools and platforms on which any information can be shared, and the great commission for all Christians is to share their Christian conviction (gospel) to the ends of the earth and share the gospel message, Christians should be involved in sharing the gospel message with their network of friends on SM. In engaging SM to share the gospel

Israel, the incarnational birth, the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the second coming of Jesus, and the final judgement unto eternity. Borgman (2004:1) further elucidates that theology is a reflection of the revealed word of God in the Bible and how the revealed word can be understood and appropriated today. These suggest that theology is God’s perspective on life and every event that happens under the sun (in the world).

message, Mark (2013:251) opined that sharing the gospel should be done through the framework of Jesus' earthly life, death and resurrection.

Motivating the Catholic churches worldwide to engage in evangelism (sharing the gospel message) on SM, Gibson (2014:17) refers to the Vatican's press release and reports that the Vatican's media chief and head of the Pontifical Council for social communications, Archbishop Claudio Celli, argued that SM offers Catholic churches the opportunity to evangelise the gospel and share theological reflections about life. In another related development, the Vatican's media chief argued that, if the Catholic Church did not get involved in evangelism through SM, the Church would end up talking to itself rather than sharing the gospel message with people outside and inside of the Church who need to hear the gospel message. He used the analogy of fish within and outside the aquarium (Gibson *ibid*). He argued that the Church often forgets that most of the fish that they need to catch are outside the aquarium; the Church is the aquarium, the fish are the souls of people who need to hear and share the gospel message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. SM offers the Church the opportunity to share the gospel message and theological reflection on God with people within the Church and people outside the Church.

SM is a broader platform for the Christian community to share information about faith, God and the message of God's hope. Gibson (2014:18) refers to SM as a "digital continent". SM is a digital continent because it is a space where different users in different geographical locations converge to share information, hang out together, and network with offline and online friends. SM as a digital continent connotes that SM affords user, who are especially young people, a limitless network space to share information, communicate and interface with other users. Cloete (2012:3) adds that theological reflection on media is thus important, because it affords human beings the platform to connect and establish relationships that engage in the sharing of values with each other.

SM is a digital continent for whatever purposes the network users' wish to use it for (Gardner & Davis, 2013:91; Gibson, 2014:18; Ostrowski, 2006:1). According to Gibson (2014:18) and Ostrowski (2006:1), this digital continent is a territory for mission by the Christian community. Gibson (2014:18) argues that the Christian territory can appropriate the great commission on digital continent. The great commission is a call to all Christians to evangelise all nations of the earth. In the great commission mandate, Christians are told to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son,

and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Christians are commanded to take the gospel message to all nations. The digital continent exists inter-nations and intra-nations (Gibson 2014:18). The digital continent has provided a platform for the Christian community to evangelise to all nations of the earth without being physically present in those nations.

Youth ministry can create online applications (apps) that will engage young people’s interest. This developed app. could help broaden young people’s awareness on the digital continent and expose them to experience identities beyond their geographical environment (Gardner & Davis, 2013:90; Gibson 2014:18). The app created by the youth ministry can serve as a tool on the digital continent through which the youth ministry disseminates information that is biblical and theological, and that has the potency to influence how they see themselves in light of their Christian identity. Gardner and Davis (2013:91) elucidate that such a SM app will provide young people with a safety net to discuss their views freely without being misled. The reason for this is that, through the app, there will be a connection between young people’s identities and the information disseminated by the app producer – which in the context of this research is youth ministry.

Therefore, app development on SM can afford youth ministry the ministerial platform to create the kind of environment they desire. Gardner and Davis (2013:180) elucidate that app creation on social media provides the producer the chance to create the kind of product they wish to create. This implies that the youth ministry can develop an app that disseminates information on Bible narratives, daily verses, and stories about Bible characters that will influence the young people who subscribe and download the app. Sharing the gospel through a SM app is a means of fulfilling the great commission, as commanded in Matt. 28:20.

Challenging the faith community to share the gospel message to the ends of the earth, Gibson (2014:18) reports on the Baptist Church communique about SM at a conference of the Baptist Church pastors, where Nathan White, the web minister for the Virginia Baptist Mission Board, argued that the pastors and members of the Baptist Church could not afford not to be on Facebook and other SM sites, because that is where people converge to communicate and interact. In the same manner, Gibson (2014:18) reported on the submission on SM by Aaron Weaver, a communication manager for the cooperative Baptist fellowship. Weaver explained why Baptist pastors and members are encouraged to evangelise on SM, as they (pastors and members) would engage with users on SM with the gospel message, and would be able to share their passion with their SM network users, and share their Christian

stories with other friends. This accounts for the reason why youth ministry has to be theological in order to evangelise young people on SM with biblical understanding and theological reflection.

4.5.1. Youth Ministry as Theological Task

Root and Dean (2011:46) argue that youth ministry is a theological task. It is a task that seeks to participate in God's own ministry by moving from experience to reflection and action. This means that youth ministry entails constructing theology that examines how divine actions intersect with humanity and how humanity can express gratitude to God's divine intersection (Root & Dean 2011: 47). Constructing a theology that proclaims God's revelation as theology (the kerygmatic emphasis of theology) is God revealing Himself to humanity in the way God wants humanity to know Him (Root & Dean 2011: 47). A theology that takes into cognisance the Trinitarian God; is a theology that makes a case for God's revelation in context (the apologetic emphasis in theology), which entails relating God's revelation to humanity and understanding the context of the young people to whom God is revealing Himself (Knoetze 2015:1; Nel 2000:101).

Historically, since the 1980s there has been a passive involvement of churches in encouraging a theological perspective on issues of life among young people and, instead of the Church seeking for a remedy, Christians in American society "blamed the Church adolescent haemorrhage on everything from inadequate leadership, poor educational models and dwindling denominational support to demographic shifts, economic cycles and, of course, the onslaught of secular culture" (Root & Dean 2011:28). Pre-dating the evolution of youth ministry theology to the late 1970s, Borgman (2004:1) observed that not much was known on the theology of youth ministry until late 1997, when books like 'When Kumbaya is not enough: A practical theology for youth ministry' was published.

Youth ministry is a theological task that requires theological reflection on every facet of life. Borgman (2004:1) argues that engaging youth ministry with theological reflection entails that youth ministry responds to today's world and the youth cultures of every generation from the normative perspective of God. This means that youth ministry responding to today's world and the youth culture of this generation, has the potential to answer any or all of these questions: 'What has God said in the Bible regarding issues like this?', 'How does God want this issue resolved or how does God want issues like this to be resolved?', 'What is God

teaching people through these events?', 'How can theology infer God's word into man's daily life by interpreting life through God's perspective?' (Borgman 2004:2). Borgman (ibid), in illuminating why the theology of youth ministry needs to raise these questions before knowing how to respond to issues, argues further that the theology of youth ministry is rooted in what God has said and draws inferences from what God has said.

Borgman's argument suggests that a theology of youth ministry is a reflection of God's wisdom and perspective. It is not void of God's reflection; rather, it is informed by an interpretation of God's word and God's proffered wisdom for engaging with life events. However, Borgman (2004:2; 2006:3) adds that, despite the fact that the theology of youth ministry is primarily informed by God's perspective on events and life, youth ministry theology also draws from human experience, social science, philosophy and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

The question therefore is whether youth workers need to be theologically trained before fulfilling the responsibilities of a youth worker, or whether he or she can fulfil this responsibility as laity without going through theological training? The position of Root and Dean (2011:17) on this issue is that youth leaders need theological depth in order to turn from consumer habits and an entertainment focus to being youth workers who have a transformative, redemptive agenda and undertake theological reflection on life and God. Thus, Root & Dean (ibid) argue that practical theology is strategic because "youth leaders will discover moments, contexts, situations and practices in which God intersects with humans and transforms human effort into something holy and life giving". This has the propensity of making young people vessels of divine grace and living testaments of God's mercy and love for humanity.

The new rhetoric of youth ministry is rhetoric of hope that has expanded the scope of youth ministry into accepting a relational and contextualised approach to youth ministry. Youth ministry therefore is not regarded merely as a part of a Christian education department, but of practical theology. There is a move from traditional youth culture to a global, postmodern movement and the development of a curriculum of programmes for communities of spiritual practice that needs a holistic and theological approach, with young people playing an irrepressible and irreplaceable role in the Church mission and community (Root & Dean 2011:37).

“God’s ministry in creation, covenant incarnation (including Jesus’³⁴ crucifixion and resurrection) and Pentecost, it is obvious that God is not a theologian, but (the!) Minister. God is committed to be the Minister, and theology is the reflection on and articulation of God’s ministry” (Root & Dean 2011: 40). This means that theology is only constructive when it is done in the context of God’s Ministry in the world. This perspective, of seeing youth ministry as a theological task undertaking God’s Ministry, entails that the youth minister’s continuous experiences and reflects on God to help him or her cultivate a healthy theology that guides young people in their journey of life.

Nel (2000:9) asserts that, from the outset, youth ministry must be biblical and theologically sourced in how the Bible narratives address issues, because in youth ministry increasing attention is being given to the youth, to know them, listen to them, study their needs and respond to such needs. The narratives of Bible stories depict how God’s children engaged with their own challenges and show the godly principles, values and perceptions that informed their not allowing their challenges to determine how they act and behave. Rather, their godly principles, values and perception of God determined how they responded to challenges.

Youth ministry appropriates stories of biblical narratives as a theological approach to guide young people in discovering their Christian identity and as a means of persuasion is significant for educating young people how to respond to their own challenges. Stories with theological reflections narrate characters in the Bible who surmount challenges because they understood their self-identity in God.

4.5.2. The Use of Stories as Theological Task in Youth Ministry

Telling biblical stories in youth ministry is essential in ministering to young people. Jacober (2014:100) argues that theology offers a framework from which to understand stories regarding Christian identity. Arguing for the significance of storytelling in the approach of youth ministry among young people, Jacober (2014:103) adds that Christian identity in Christ is not earned, but rather is revealed through God’s stories documented all over the scriptures. This means that story telling in youth ministry communicates how God’s people in the past

³⁴ Nel (2000:101) concurs with Root and Dean that youth ministry is God’s ministry in Christ Jesus, but expands further that, in youth ministry, young people are guided to discover their identity in Christ Jesus. Their identity in His death and resurrection gives an identity of a new reality to Christians. This requires a depth of theological axioms for understanding and interpretation.

influenced their society amidst seemingly difficult situations and opposition. Joseph's story as a young person in biblical history will be elaborated in this study.

Influencing people through story telling is not strange or new in Africa. Africans are familiar with the concept of telling stories to teach values, good morals, and wisdom. Temple and Harché de Yuném (1995:444) explain how Africans influence children and youth values through storytelling. They explained how in northern Uganda and Zimbabwe, educators influence the values of children and young people by composing stories of past events, characters, and traditions. McMahon, Watson, Chetty, and Hoelson (2012:731) concur that in African storytelling is used to communicate values. They also add that Africans use storytelling to establish connections and foster relationship. As people share their stories with one another, it affords them the opportunity to connect with each other and share lessons on how to make meanings out of life events and situation.

Atkinson (1985:51) further buttress that in Southern African communities story telling is an attitude that is used to communicate and teach ideas in the minds of successive generations. Ideas communicated through story telling have the potential for continuity of good values and reduce future vices. In his opinion, storytelling is an African way of life (ibid). Therefore, Africans are familiar with deducing lessons and being persuaded through storytelling. Nel (2000:13) explains that the stories in the Bible are examples of God's people whose account illuminates today's Christian on how to navigate through life. Dean (2010:141) buttressed the significance of story says that young people will need to be highly devoted as their testimonies, stories, and consistent conversation with Jesus enable them to grow in an understanding and love of Jesus as their aim for transformation, and by living a life that seeks to discover themselves in God's echo (sacramental identity). This shows why

Amit³⁵ (2001:1) argues that the stories recorded in the Bible are used as a means of persuasion. In the biblical account of the Joseph's story; Judah persuaded Joseph³⁶ not to harm Benjamin by telling Joseph their family story. The telling of their family story to Joseph led to Joseph revealing himself to his brothers as their brother.

³⁵ Amit Yairah wrote her book, *Reading Biblical narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* based on a series of lectures given in Israel. She introduces the reader to the subtle ways of the biblical narrators, covering issues of character and the plot of stories. Amit is a Professor of Biblical Studies at Tel Aviv University in Israel, and the author of *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (Brill 2000), *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Brill, 1999), and *History and Ideology in the Bible: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*. <http://fortresspress.com/author/yairah-amit>. Accessed June 1, 2015.

³⁶ At this time, Joseph was a prime minister in Egypt. Joseph threatened to harm Benjamin, their brother (his brother as well), in an attempt to see if his brothers had changed from the character that made them to sell him into slavery (Gen. 44:18-25, 45:1-3).

Biblical literature seeks to convince its audience, readers and listeners alike (Amit 2001:2). Stories were used in the Bible to persuade the listener, as depicted in the story of Joseph and his brother (Gen. 44). This research employs the story of Joseph to persuade today's Christian young people to understand that a discovery of their self-identity in God has the potential to inform how they navigate information. The story of Joseph is also employed as an example of how an understanding of self-identity could guide the Nigerian Christian youth in making wise choices. The biblical account (Gen. 44:18-25, 45:1-3) of the Joseph's story is a reference of a young man who was faced with the challenge of committing fornication but he declined because this would discredit his self-identity in God. As with most rumours, Joseph's story spread rapidly and widely. Amit (2001:16) argues that a good story can be irresistibly persuasive. This, (Joseph's story) is an example of a Biblical story that could serve as information to share on SM for network users to appreciate that young people can persuade their network of friends and relations on SM with constructive information sharing that will guide their self-identity formation. Young people's understanding of their self-identity in God should inform what information they access and what SM invitation that they accept.

Joseph's story is an account that can be analysed in different units. Amit (2001:15) cites Perry and Sternberg's (1970:632) argument that biblical stories can be analysed in within the boundaries of units. Old Testament scholars like Amit (2001:16), Fretheim (1994:609), Wenham (1994:372) and Petramalo (2007:104), concurring with Perry and Sternberg's argument, stressed that biblical stories can be analysed in terms of the narrative or analyse a biblical story as a whole account. For example, the narrative of Joseph's begins in Gen. 37 and continues to Gen. 50; it can be analysed in units of boundaries or as a whole story (Amit 2001:16; Petramalo 2007:104). In analysing Joseph's story as a unit (particular unit within the whole story), Amit (2001:16) and Petramalo (2007:103) outlined the story of Joseph with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39) as a particular unit within the whole story. Joseph's story with Potiphar's wife is the bordered unit that this research uses to explain how Christian young people's understanding of their self-identity in God can guide them in making wise choices over the invitation and information that are disseminated on SM (as was the case with the rapid and widespread rumours of Joseph).

As depicted in Appendixes I, II and III (page 136-137), Nigeria's young people are driven by their religious identity, but what cannot be said easily is whether the religiosity emanates

from distinctive features of character and conduct such as that of Joseph. As noted by Dean (2010:4) concerning American youth in her book, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenager Is Telling the American Church*, these young people are assumed to be religious Christians because of their religious activities, and their profession of Christian words and phrases, but in the real sense of Christian praxis (practical lifestyle, ideology and doctrinal beliefs) they are not Christians. Some Nigerian youth are most likely not different from many American youth in terms of a religious identity that may lack the testimony of Joseph. Potiphar noticed and observed the conduct of Joseph and noticed that God's presence was with Joseph (Gen. 39:2-3).

Interpreting from the research in the National Study of Youth and Religion in America, Dean (2010:5, 6) argues that American young people are "unwittingly being formed into improper faith that poses as Christianity, but in fact it lacks the spirituality and missional clarity necessary for Christian discipleship". The spirituality in Joseph reflects in his character while serving in Potiphar's house. His spirituality also shows when he refused to grant the request by Potiphar's wife that he lies with her (Gen 39:10). Engaging with Joseph's story as a means of persuasion, youth ministry can persuade young people to engage their network of friends on SM with a sense of godliness. This means that the disseminated information should reflect the ideology and praxis of God's holy desires.

Young people's holy desires for God can be an influencer in their engagement and interactions on SM. As argued by Nel (2000:102), one of the principal tasks of youth ministry is guiding young people to discover their identity. Therefore, if youth ministry can guide young people to inculcate in their social praxis the ideology of God's holy desire, it will help them (young people) to discover the self-identity of being God's holy people whose lives should replicate God's holy nature.

God's presence in Joseph's life as an Israelite could have influenced his self-identity (Wallace 2001:35). His self-identity therefore determines what he accepts and what he refused (Gen 29:7, 9, 10 & 12). Just like Joseph refused Potiphar's wife's sexual advances because of his identity, youth ministry can persuade young people to scrutinise and dissect the information disseminated in their networking on the digital continent with the premise of their self-identity. The concept will enable young people to know what to accept and what not to accept on SM. This concept then becomes a litmus test for them to sieve all the information accessible on SM.

Beside his giftedness, attractiveness and character, the story attests that Pharaoh saw that the Lord was with Joseph (Gen. 39:3). The presence of the Lord with Joseph is one of the cardinal aspects that distinguished the young man (Gen. 39:2,5, 8-9, 21, 23). He is thus modelled as a youth whose life and relationship with God deserve attention; Joseph is referred to several times as a young man rhapsodised in God's presence. This testimony in his narrative also makes his story to be a dependable narrative with which to persuade young people in Nigeria.

Potiphar's wife disseminated information to Joseph and Joseph got the information but responded to the information differently. Joseph had no control over who (Potiphar's wife) disseminated the information, but he had control over his own response to the information she disseminated. In a like manner, SM are application sites where users network together by disseminating personal information, inviting and attracting other people to have access to the information disseminated (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012:63). Just as Joseph did not have control over what Potiphar's wife said to him, so also young people seem not to have control over the information disseminated on SM, except that as SM users, young people have control over how they allow the information to influence their self-identity. Joseph's story shows that he did not allow the information to make him do what was inconsistent with his self-identity as God's own.

Joseph told Potiphar's wife that it would be a sin against God for him to grant her request. Petramalo (2007:106) and Wallace (2001:33) argue that Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife should be understood as a theological reason not to do what is not consistent with God's ordinance. Wallace (2001:35) elucidates that Joseph understood his identity as an Israelite; he understood that God was with him; he understood that God was the God of his fathers; and within the scope of his own personal experience he knew the ways, custom and culture of his God.

Joseph's understanding of his Israelite identity in God can be deduced from his response to Potiphar's wife when he said "... How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against my God?" (Gen. 39:9b). Joseph's response suggests that his identity informed his disposition to surmount the challenge of yielding to Potiphar's wife's information of sleeping with her. As argued by Amit (2001:1), stories in the Bible can be used as a means of persuasion, and Joseph's story can be a model to persuade young people to engage SM with a theological understanding of God's presence with them as depicted in Joseph's story (Gen. 39:2, 5, 8-9,

21, 23; cf. Ps. 139:7, 21, Matt. 28:20) and, as argued by Wallace (2001:35), an understanding of God's ways, custom and culture.

4.6. Challenges Posed by Social Media to Youth and Youth Ministry

SM poses challenges to young people and youth ministry. Commenting on the challenges of SM, Stephen (2013:254) argues that one of the challenges of what he calls the new media, which include SM and other internet-mediated media, is that the new media disconnects people from face-to-face relationships, physical community, interpersonal relationships and worshipping together. Stephen (2013:254) further reasons that the new media also offer users access to different religious ideas and teachings and tends to supplant the spiritual life and worldview of the users. These challenges, he said, are of theological concern because online networking creates an environment of information dissemination among users and between users that has no recourse to other users. Thus, all kinds of information that influence young people's understanding of God, society and humanity are shared in the SM environment.

The Vatican, however, encourages Catholic Churches to evangelise on SM, but acknowledges the challenges that SM poses to users (Gibson 2014:17). This suggests that, although SM is instrumental as an environment to disseminate information that is theological and biblical in order to influence social network users, it also poses challenges to network users, as explained in Chapter 2. In a press release by the Vatican on the Church's World Communication Day celebration held in Brooklyn in America, it also was acknowledged that SM can be used as a pulpit for personal attacks by network users and to cause divisiveness within the Church community (ibid).

SM provides an alternative religious affiliation. Rachel (2013:200) argues that SM users are provided with established and alternative religious traditions, so that the user feels less obliged to interact face to face within a religious affiliation. Cloete (2015:5) observed that, inasmuch as SM offers an opportunity to evangelise online to network users, it also poses the challenge of keeping young people in an online engagement with different online religious views and away from a physical relationship with their church's members. This challenge is not only peculiar to young people; it also is a challenge to theological information that is disseminated by individuals. Cloete (2015a:5) stresses further that the practice of online religion, in which different religious experiences and information are disseminated by

different network users, poses a theological challenge to religious authorities like pastors. This connotes that pastors and theological scholars may not be the authorities and custodians of biblical interpretation.

The concept of online religion that poses a challenge to theological information also posits the challenge of dependence on the Church as the source of biblical understanding. Cloete (2015a:5) argues that the Church as the primary source for biblical, religious and theological information is being challenged. The challenge undermines the dependency on and plausibility of the Church for young people. SM become an information-generating platform for young people.

Young people accessing religious information online have the potential to influence their understanding of who they are and to discover their self-identity in line with the kind of information they access. Thus, they may not need the Church to interpret the biblical and theological understanding of who they are. This seems to suggest that they can self-define their identity, as SM serves as the source of their identity formation. It poses the challenge about which decisions young people make amidst the volume of different religious views. The relevance of the physical Church becomes a challenge for theologians and youth ministries alike.

4.7. Opportunities Offered by Social Media to Youth Ministry

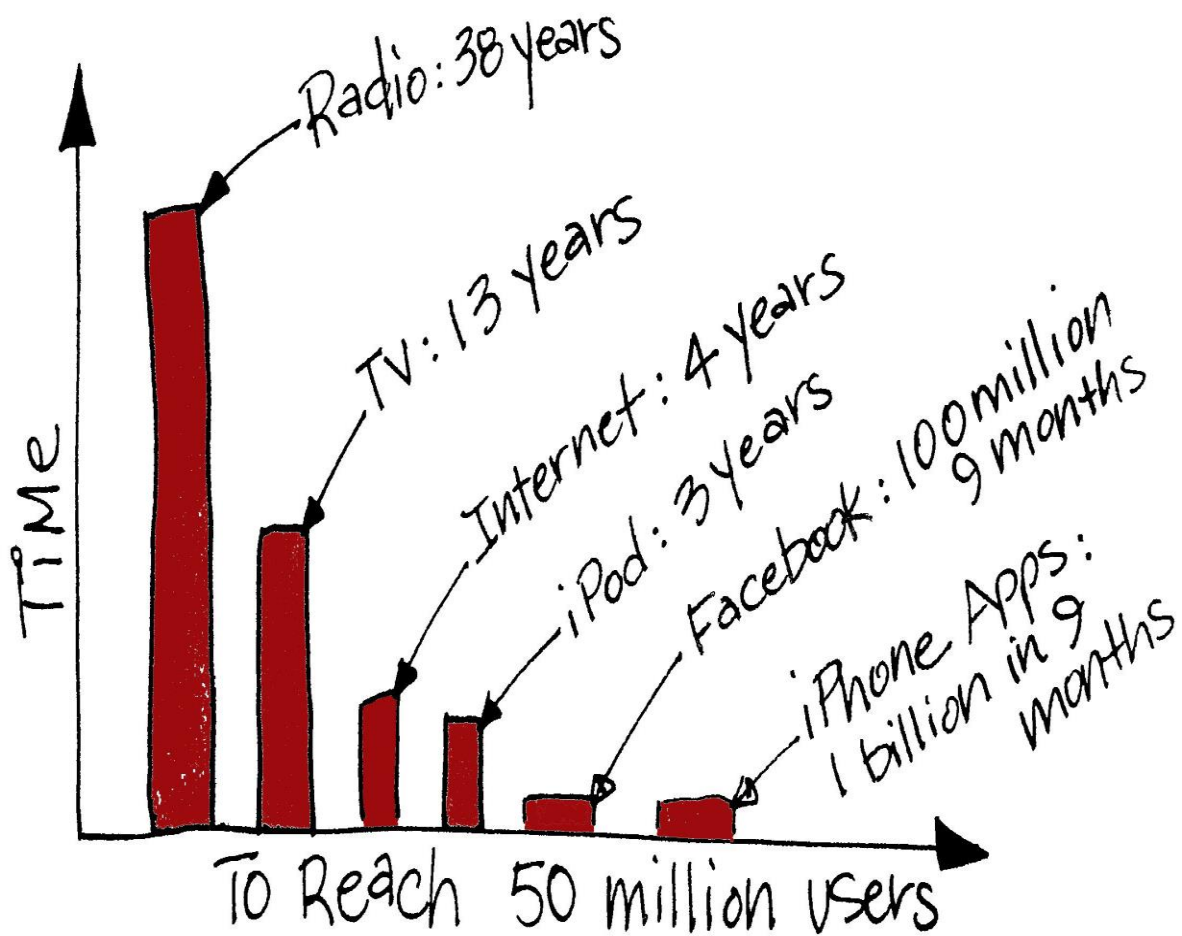
Information about network users is just a click away on SM, especially with the advent of devices such as cell phones, handheld tablets, mini computers and laptops, and other increasingly innovative communication gadgets. These gadgets meet the need of users to enhance their knowledge through disseminated information and communicate with other users (Knoetze, 2015:2). Taylor (2012:19) adds that, inasmuch as SM poses challenges to young people and exposes them to a variety of threats, it also offers them heightened opportunities.

The opportunity for youth ministry to engage young people on SM for the purpose of influencing their ideas about themselves, how they see themselves and what value they have for human dignity through information and the communication of ideas, values and beliefs is inevitable.

SM offers opportunities for youth ministry to be a source of information dissemination. Murley and Teusner (2009:239) note that “the church must emerge from its context and be incarnate in this locality, but the internet provides a global space for encouragement, experiment, inspiration, and challenges between and beyond these geographically dispersed communities. Through it, the communities can become global”. Communication technology on the internet offers a global space to digital media users and internet users for whatsoever usage; since SM accounts for most of internet users’ online activity, youth ministry can incarnate itself in SM in order to have access to influencing young people beyond geographical space to global space (Cloete 2015b:3). Youth ministry can persuade young people not to appropriate into their identity formation information shared on SM that is contrary to their Christian identity.

To exemplify the global space that SM on the internet offers youth ministry to influence young people, Menardi³⁷ gives an example from Catholic youth ministry research. Menardi (2012:24) says that the following observations were made in empirical research conducted by a Catholic youth researcher:

³⁷ Elaine Menardi is a tech geek and involved in the Catholic ministry as a social media strategist who solves problems and makes ideas happen, especially ideas about how the youth ministry can engage young people on SM. She calls these idea the theology of social media. She is also reputed to have the prime directive of connecting the Body of Christ online (Menardi 2012:7).



The above diagram shows the number of years it took each type of media to reach 50 million users:

- Radio: 38 years
- Television: 13 years
- Internet: four years
- iPod: three years
- Facebook: 100 million users in nine months
- iPhone apps: 1 billion downloads in nine months

As shown in the above diagram, it took radio evangelization 38 years to reach an audience of 50 million users, whereas it took only nine months for the Facebook platform to reach double the amount of users.

This diagram shows the viral nature of SM and how SM can be regarded as a digital continent and a global space for youth ministry. The reason why Facebook is a platform on which evangelisation can reach out to more network users is because it is used by both young and old people. Menardi (2012:4) argues that, in this generation, people of all ages hang out on SM to connect and build friendship. SM is not just a connecting platform for people that are part of the 20-something crowd and younger; the second fastest-growing age group on Facebook is 55+ years old (Menardi 2012:4).

Menardi (2012:3) argues that the concept of youth ministry engaging SM from an opportunity paradigm means that SM offers youth ministry the opportunity to connect with people that they may have never seen in person, so they can build a network of relationships that potentially could result in a regular, face-to-face relationship. This implies that SM offers youth ministry a platform to connect on two different premises. One premise is to connect with young people who are offline friends – youth fellowship leaders, mentee’s and young people who are ‘churchgoers’. The second premise is young people whom they do not know face to face, but with whom they can establish an online friendship, either because they are friends of their own network friends or unchurched young people whom they may know in the neighbourhood. SM offers the platform for influencing such third party friendship.

Menardi (2012:4) further argues that the reason for the second premise is that young people update their experiences and activities on SM daily, and also provide information about their ideologies and beliefs on SM. The updates give an idea of who they are and how youth ministry can engage them in discussion. However, the relationship established through the second premise can transcend into offline friendship of a face-to-face relationship. Cloete (2015:6) argues that cohorts of young people shares their updates with their network friends by choice and need, unlike the offline relationship that is most likely engineered by geographical location. This implies that, by youth ministry establishing an online relationship with young people on SM, there is the opportunity that it will culminate in an offline, face-to-face relationship.

Cloete (2015b:1) argues that youth are desirous of a relationship with God and humanity. Implying that youth possibly engages SM to establishing relationship with an online community with whom they share common interest. Young people construct their religious identity through their engagement on SM. SM offers a platform for young people to influence other network users’ self-identity, and Elton, hence calls on Christian communities to help

young people to discover who they are and whose they are – God’s (2014:175). However, it should be borne in mind that the onus of guiding young people through the identity formation stages is on the parents, as well as on faith communities. SM offers the Christian community the opportunity to influence young people in their pursuit of a spiritual construct.

SM offers a platform for young people to influence other network users’ self-identity resulting in Elton (2014:175), urging Christian communities to help young people to discover who they are and whose they are in Christ. The onus of guiding young people through the identity formation stages is on both the parents and on Christian communities and not on one party exclusively. SM offers these role players the opportunity to influence young people in their pursuit of a spiritual construct.

SM offers a platform to share Jesus’ stories and how Jesus’ stories have helped shaped our own stories. Menardi (2012:4) elucidates that SM connects people with others so that they can share their own stories. Jesus told stories that changed people’s hearts and minds, and that made them love him (Matt. 13:24-30, Mk 4:1-8, 26-29, Lk 15: 1-7). Over the years, the Church has retold these stories in creative ways to engage people’s imaginations and influence them through information and communication that have the potency to transform their self-identity and perception of life. This suggests that youth ministry has a good opportunity to tell the Bible stories anew through the platform of SM.

In Nigeria, most ministers of the gospel (youth ministers inclusive) are not knowledgeable of other disciplines because some seminaries do not have it in their curriculum; therefore students are not exposed to other disciplines. The onus therefore is on the minister to figure out other disciplines when he/she is in the field of ministry. Telling stories in communication with young people as SM users entails that the youth ministry get involved within the context of young people on SM and share Jesus’ stories with them. Menardi (2012:5) adds that, since young people like sharing their daily experiences on SM, the youth ministry will have an opportunity to share in young people’s lives by listening to their stories and interpreting their stories in terms of God’s stories.

Connection with young people on SM is pertinent to evangelisation. In distinguishing the difference between connection and communication, Menardi (2012:45) argues that communication only disseminates information, but connection entails initiating a relationship and engaging in conversation. This suggests that connection on SM offers youth ministry the

opportunity to connect with young people and establish a relationship that gives young people prospects to share their deeper issues and questions about life with youth ministers. The youth ministry can respond to these issues of concern and proffer appropriate suggestions in consonance with God's narrative.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed that youth ministry, as a field of practical theology needs to use theological tools and reflection in ministering to young people. Reason because without theology, we have no way to describe our experiences with God, no way to prevent the ministry from developing into social science or social service, no way to point ministry beyond ourselves toward Christ. It is pertinent for youth ministry to develop theological tenets that will be essential for youth ministers to have some conception of how to relate to different disciplines.

Furthermore, accounting for the emphasis on theological reflection in youth ministry, I emphasise in this chapter the significance of biblical understanding and theological reflection in engaging young people in youth ministry, either face to face or on SM. The reason for this is that an awareness of the need for theology in youth ministry is not pronounced in Nigeria, as Churches see it as a waste of time. Theologians are seen as people who are out of touch with reality, thus they cannot be effective in providing solutions to young people's problems, challenges and struggles.

This chapter investigated the challenges that SM as a source of information poses to youth ministry and also offers opportunities that SM offers to youth ministry. Youth ministry can influence young people through offline relationship that will equip them to influence their online network of friends. Youth ministry can further influence young people on SM by disseminating information that is biblical and theological which have the potential to influence their self-identity.

Chapter 5 provides a reflection on the research problem, methodology exercised in this study, a summary of research findings, and offer recommendations for further research. It also serves as the conclusion of this study.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This study set out to explore the concept of social media as a source of self-identity formation among young people between the ages of 18 and 35 in Abuja, Nigeria. The reasons and motivation for exploration were to investigate how young people's networking on social media influences their self-identity formation. The study also sought to know whether social media's influence on young people's identity formation can be constructive in terms of a positive effect in their engagement with other network users with whom they share a commonality of values, ideologies and religious beliefs.

The study investigated whether youth ministry as a field of practical theology can equip young people in the Church so that they can influence their friends on social media. Secondly, the study examined how youth ministry can engage young people on social media to influence their self-identity formation with biblical and theological reflection.

5.2. Reflection on the Research Problem and Question

Chapter one introduced the challenge that social media poses to young people through varying confusing platforms that influence their self-identity formation. The research investigated whether social media influences these young people's self-identity formation and also how social media can serve as a source of self-identity formation. The study was positioned within the context of Abuja; Nigeria through a shared concern about the impact social media is having on the self-identity of young people. The research question investigated was; how do social media influence the self-identity formation of young people?

5.3. Reflection on Methodology

In this research I adopted the use of conceptual analysis which engaged with the on-going academic scholarly work with regard to social media and its implications for youth ministry. This research was a non-empirical literature study. The reason for this was to provide

literature for further research (empirical and non-empirical) focussed on social media in cities like Abuja, in Africa.

The Bible and theological reflections served as primary normative source for engaging with the literature on social media and its implications for youth ministry, with particular interest in interpreting the conceptual understanding of social media, self-identity formation, and its implications for youth and youth ministry in Abuja, Nigeria. Practical theology was the domain in which this research was conducted. Within this field, interdisciplinary research is conducted to understand and guide studies on how theology interacts with other discipline yet maintaining its theological lucidity of Christian practice. In situating this research in practical theology, this research engaged Osmer's theological framework which asks the questions: what is going on? Why is this going on? What normative form ought the faith community respond? and what proactive response by the faith community (Osmer, 2005:xv; 2008:4).

5.4. Summary of the Research Findings

The literature study for this research depicts that the government of Nigeria has limited control over the content and volume of information disseminated on social media, but that young people have control over what information they, as young people, allow to influence their self-identity. This study has revealed that, during the moratorium phase of their lives, young people can be guided to discover and develop a healthy self-identity that will help them to control themselves in relation to the information they access and integrate into their ideologies and values, and disseminate with to network users (first aim of this research study).

This study reveals that social media influences the self-identity formation of young people. This inadvertently paints social media as a medium for the delivery or inculcation of youth culture. Seeing that Youth Culture thrives on the inert quest for self-identity in the heart of a young person. Social media creates a digital environment for young people to find answers to their quest for developing self-identity (in answer to the primary research question).

This study also reveals that social media comprise a complex communicative platform and medium³⁸ for information dissemination, depending on the users (Cloete 2012:1). The social media user determines what kind of information is disseminated on social media, which implies that the values, ideologies and beliefs of the network users determine the type of information they store on social media. If the interest of the users is religious- whatever religious opinion they subscribe to, they will disseminate religious information on social media; the same goes for users with political interest- whatever political ideology they subscribe to, social interests, and cultural identity (answering the secondary research question and second aim of this research study).

This study has also confirmed that social media is global in nature, and an integral part of young people's lives, with numerous users who use it for whatsoever purpose (Qualman 2011:12). The most preferred and popular categories of social media among young people in Abuja is social networking sites like Facebook, which has become a global phenomenon with multiple usage for whatsoever purpose (Couldry 2009:16; Marwick & Ellison 2012:378; Pirraglia & Kravitz 2012:165; Qualman 2011:12; Taiwo 2007:76; The City Reporters 2013:6; Tony 2001:26). Facebook is giving social media network users the opportunity to share their daily lives with network friends with minimal effort and time. This study also reveals that social networking among young people affords them the leverage to stay connected with friends by building their own community of network friends. However, this multiple usage informs the challenges of allowing uncensored information and networking among young people, which is influencing their understanding of authentic self-identity(answering the primary research question and first research aim).

This study discovered that social media creates a digital continent that has brought the world together in one space. The space that social media creates is irrespective of geographical location. The implication is that social media is synchronizing the world into a digital continent where people can assess and engage information from wherever they are geographically located. On social media platforms, the boundaries of continent and nations are removed. Africa, Europe, Asia, and the rest of the world all have global space on social media to share and connect with people of their own interest. Therefore a young person can

³⁸Technological media and network sites [networking sites] that serve as information and web-based services that allow individuals and corporations to construct a private and public identity (Boyd & Ellison 2007:211; Qualman 2011:64).

be African by birth but European by ideologies and belief (answering the third secondary research question).

The data drawn from this literature study have also shown that, if young people are influenced through the offline relationship of the mentorship model and the outward-in approach of youth ministry, they will disseminate information on social media that has constructive Christian character values. Therefore, young people have the opportunity to influence their friends and network users on social media with a biblical and theological understanding of self-identity (answering the third and fourth secondary research question).

This study has confirmed that young people are committed to being busy on social media because it affords them a social environment in which to share their daily updates and life experiences with friends of the same interest all over the globe. Young people therefore are not addicted to social media because of the device or technology, but rather because of these opportunities that it offers them. Social media types like social networking sites are regarded as the voice of the people and the social watchdog, because they set the agenda and provide citizens a platform on which to share their identity and personal disposition on societal issues. This research, however, discovered that some young people also engage with social media with a depersonalised identity, through which they share information with others that is not true about their identity (themselves). Some other young people use social media for self-disclosure, self-identification, and to aid gossip, defamation of character and spread rumours (argument from the primary research question).

This study further revealed that youth culture is a behavioural practice that occurs mostly among the youth. This suggests that youth culture, as evident in the behaviour of the youth, includes certain customs, behaviours, attitudes, norms, values, languages (*slanguage*) and expected ways of doing things (Hofstede *et al.* 2010:6). The electronic technology of social media creates in the youth an insatiable longing for change in patterns on a continuous basis. Today's electronic technologies feed on this insatiable longing and appetite of young people for new youth cultural expression and experience (Schultze *et al.* 1991:4). This study confirmed that to ignore the influence of social media on youth culture and on the self-identity of a generation is to risk irrelevance, because the social media is a powerful shaper of young people's culture and a source for young people's self-identify formation (second secondary research question).

This study has also shown that young people's self-identity can be discovered and developed. Discovery entails the understanding of who God has made them to be (Cannister 2013:29; Jacober, 2014:100) and the discovery of their Christian identity entails that young people understand themselves as the people God says they are (second secondary aim of study).

Another salient contribution of this study is the discovery that self-identity formation is a process by which young people form an identity for themselves through different phases of their lives: from childhood to adulthood. This study investigated whether self-identity formation can be developed. In his psychosocial development theory, psychologist Erik Erikson developed eight (8) stages of human development that influence young people's self-identity formation: Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 years); Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt; Initiative vs. Guilt; Industry (competence) vs. Inferiority; Identity vs. Role Confusion; Intimacy vs. Isolation (18-40 years); Generativity vs. Stagnation (40-65 years); Ego Integrity vs. Despair (65 and above). Psychologist James Marcia (1966) gained his primary understanding of the stages of self-identity formation from Eric Erikson's psychosocial theory. Observing the gap in Erikson's theory on how people can develop their identities during these struggles of identity resolution and identity confusion (identity crisis), Marcia expanded on Erikson's psychosocial theory in 1966 on the basis of a psychological paradigm and propounded four identity stages as approaches to the task of identity formation. The four approaches are diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement (second secondary research question).

This understanding is a clarion call for youth ministry to train and equip young people in the Church to consciously influence the self-identity formation of their network of users by disseminating information, along with the demand on youth ministry to incarnate into the social media and influence young people's perception of themselves. This study found that Christian youth and youth ministry should disseminate information that is biblical and theological, as well as practical stories of young people in the Bible who were outstanding because they knew their self-identity and had conquered the menace of their challenges. An example of such stories in the Bible is Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife in Gen. 39:1-12. The essence of explaining Joseph's story is to use his narrative as an account to persuade young people to allow their identity, giftedness and character to inform their engagement and interaction with other network users within their scope of friendship and relationship on social media (fourth secondary research question, third and fourth aim of research study).

This study investigates the theological mandate of the media, which beckons a proactive representation of theological reflection in digital media like Facebook (Cloete 2012:1). It is unarguable that social media offers the faith community the opportunity to share the gospel message and theological reflection about God to people within the Church and people outside the Church. Though sharing the gospel on social media does not suggest that it will automatically create a healthy self-identity formation due to the complexity of social media platform, but it has the potential to provide a broader platform for the Christian community to share information about faith, God and the message of God's hope to humanity that can influence their self-identity formation (fourth aim of research study).

5.5. Recommendations

The technological platform of social media as a source of self-identity formation is extensive and dynamic. In addition to this research study, I recommend more research that illustrate how social media informs self-identity formation to form literature and empirical research for youth ministry's engagement in social media with young people in cities like Abuja, Nigeria and beyond.

- ❖ It is recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria does not enact policies that will regulate young people's usage of social media because such policies have the potential to cause chaos and revolt by young people, as discovered in this research study (chapter 2).
- ❖ It is also recommended that various agencies of the Nigerian Government should be more concerned about how to influence young people's self-identity, by building offline relationship that can translate into online relationships (chapter 2).
- ❖ Youth ministers should be computer literate. Computer literacy should not be optional for those involved in youth ministry, because to engage with young people on social media, youth ministry will need to be computer literate in order to effectively navigate and disseminate information on social media (chapter 4).

- ❖ The Christian community youth ministry should be proactive on social media in order to engage young people's self-identity formation, since self-identity formation is discovered and developed (chapter 4).
- ❖ I recommend that the Church should establish in their congregations youth ministry that is theological and biblical. Theological and biblical in the sense of youth ministry been able to discern how to connect young people in God's will and guide them to discover their self-identity in God. This recommendation is against the backdrop that youth ministry can use Biblical stories to teach young people how to conquer the challenges that confront them. Whether the challenges are online or offline (chapter 4).
- ❖ It is recommended that youth ministry and Government agencies should construct apps that inform young people of healthy values, ideologies and characters (chapter 3).
- ❖ The youth ministry curriculum in universities and theological seminaries should include interdisciplinary courses like psychology and sociology, because these disciplines help youth ministry to understand how and why human beings behave the way they do within a particular environment (chapter 3).
- ❖ I recommend that the youth ministry in Abuja becomes more proactive in networking and connecting with young people on Social media, instead of waiting for young people to come to the physical building we call, the church (chapter 4).

5.5.1. Recommendations for Further Studies

It is recommended that further studies be undertaken in the following areas of study:

- ❖ How can young people and youth ministry translate online friendships on social media into offline relationships?
- ❖ How does youth ministry build an online community on the digital continent of different social media platforms like Facebook, twitter, MyChurch?
- ❖ Comparative studies are needed on the significance of theological training in youth ministry that engages social media.

- ❖ How do social networking sites like Facebook influence older people who are according to Erikson Psychosocial theory within generativity vs. stagnation (40-65 years) and Ego Integrity vs Despair (age 65 and above)?

5.6. Conclusion

Social media arose from technology that has created a digital continent for information dissemination, networking and connection between offline and online friends. As a technological medium, it is generating a platform for young people to create a global youth culture by connecting with other network users and sharing their daily life experiences, thoughts and religious beliefs.

In connecting with other network users, young people's self-identity formation is being influenced by this network of friends with whom they hang out and to whom they relate on social media. Since self-identity formation is discovered and developed, young people discover and develop their self-identity formation with information disseminated through various social institutions like social media.

Youth ministry as a discipline of practical theology has the opportunity to guide young people in discovering a healthy self-identity that is biblical and theologically reflects who God says they are. Also, youth ministry can guide young people through their different phases of life, as propounded by Erikson's psychosocial theories and Marcia's phases of identity formation, to develop a healthy self-identity that informs what information they access, internalize and disseminate on social media.

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Appendix I:

A Nigerian Christian youth who wrote Rom. 8:38 on his haircut to show his religious identity. This passage of scriptures is Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) theme for year 2015.



Appendix II:

A friend in Nigeria who is a member of Living Faith Church tabernacle popularly called Winners chapel³⁹ showing her religious identity through her denominational affiliation.



³⁹ Winners Chapel is one of the fastest growing Churches in Nigeria. The Church is spread all over Nigeria. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith_Tabernacle. Accessed 2 May, 2015.

Appendix III:

A Youth pastor in Dunamis Gospel International⁴⁰ showing his religious identity through his denominational affiliation



⁴⁰ Dunamis Gospel Church International is one of the fastest growing Churches in Abuja. <http://www.dunamisgospel.org/>. Accessed: 2 May 2015.