

**Communicating the Gospel in a Digital Age: A Case Study of
the Dioceses of Kampala and Namirembe in the Anglican
Church of Uganda**

By

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**Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
(Practical Theology) in the Faculty of Theology**



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December 2022

Declaration

I declare by signing and submitting this work as my original research work. I have never submitted it in part or whole at any university for any qualification including a degree. I am the sole author and publication of the work by Stellenbosch University will not affect or violate any third party.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my heavenly Father who accorded me this opportunity. This work is dedicated to my family, my parents, my husband, and my children who have supported me from the start to the end. They have supported me, endured my late nights of study, and cried with me when the going became tough.

Acknowledgements

In the words of my mentors at OCRPL, Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, Rev Dr Chris Sugden and Rev Dr Joshva John, research work is impossible to be carried out solely and in solitude. This research is made possible by the support of great people without which this study would have been impossible.

I sincerely express my heartfelt gratitude to the Almighty God my Father, my Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for working through me. I am forever grateful for life, strength, wisdom, mentors, and financial support on this academic journey. Therefore, will lay down all the crowns to continue worshipping, knowing and serving you, my Father, and friend.

Special appreciation to the Church of Uganda and the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, The Most Rev Dr Stephen Samuel Kazimba Mugalu for granting me this opportunity to study and the study leave that was accorded to me during this Journey. Thank you for believing in me. To my family, my parents Mr Kalungi Nsaale, Ms Alice Namagembe and Ms Sarah Nabuyondo for loving me and always cheering me on. To my husband Rev Prof John Kitayimbwa for the counsel, conversations, support and talks about the topic, may God bless you. To my beloved children, Liam Kitz, Litsa Kitz and Liora Kitz (who came while on the PhD journey) you are my darlings and my World. Thank you for loving me, sacrificing a lot so that mummy can study, and always praying for me. To all my other children and siblings, thank you for your support and prayers.

Prof Cloete Anita, my supervisor, you have mentored me in numerous ways. Your hard work, analytical skills, passion for academic excellence, passion for mentoring youth and academic-mindedness has left me speechless. Given an opportunity to choose a mentor again, I would choose you again. I am glad to have you in my life and I know this is the beginning of great work on the academic journey together. My family and I are forever grateful to God for you and your family.

I take this opportunity to thank the Faculty of Theology and the warm staff members that welcomed us (OCRPL) to the University and always made our time at the University memorable and fun. Especially, I want to thank Prof Len Hansen, who has always been a run to during this journey, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. Prof Len Hansen, I am forever grateful for the time you gave to me, listening to me and directing me to the faculty members for assistance. To Ms

Bonita Robyn and Mr Shirle Cornelissen for the administrative help in the course of the academic journey, thank you.

Special appreciation to Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL) for giving me the offer to pursue this degree. I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to OCRPL for the scholarship and mentorship; both academic and spiritual. I am grateful to God for OCRPL grafting me into a vibrant family of scholars. Special appreciation goes to Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, and the Barnabas Fund for the love, financial support, the analytical and critical skills you have passed on to me. Further appreciation goes to all my mentors namely; Dr Vinney Samuel, Rev Dr Chris Sugden, Rev Dr Joshva John, Dr Ruth Samuels, Dr Prasad Phillips, Dr GC Van Emmenes and Mr Andre Lombard. I have learnt a lot from you. Your commitment to God and His mission is so challenging and worthy to emulate. May God bless OCRPL and Barnabase Fund.

Special appreciation to the OCRPL family of scholars, and church ministers. I thank you for the support dear colleagues and friends. Specifically, I thank Apostle Samuel Gakpetor, Dr Basilius Kaseru and Dr Arthur Bagonza for their support and guidance on this journey. Apostle Samuel Gakpetor for always helping me to read through my work. May God bless you, my dear friends.

My prayer for you is, *Romans 15:13: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'* *And Psalm 20:1: 'May the Lord answer you when you are in distress and may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.'*

Abstract

In response to the influx of digital media use in daily life and church work, with a specific interest in the Anglican Church of Uganda (COU), this study explores and examines the communication of the gospel in the digital age: a case study of Namirembe and Kampala Dioceses in the Anglican Church of Uganda. The Church across the globe is integrating digital media into ministry and especially in the communication of the gospel. Through different digital media gadgets, platforms and applications via the internet, spiritual information is shared and accessed. In the COU's Vision 2025 document, the COU encourages its priests and leaders to integrate digital media into church work to communicate the gospel and Christian values. However, the church leaders' attitudes towards digital media use are not known. There is a gap in knowledge, and great need for theological guidance, approaches, training, and strategy for digital media use to communicate the gospel. To address the situation at hand, there was a need to do research to understand the digital communication situation and to engage in theological reflection on the digital media communication of the gospel. The research study set out to explore the COU's understanding, attitude and approaches towards the use of digital media to communicate the gospel. To carry out the study, I made use of both literature and empirical elements to respond to the research question. As a study in practical theology, I employed Osmer's Practical Theology framework.

This qualitative case study design research set out to obtain in-depth and detailed information from the selected samples to understand the situation. To collect the data, I employed focus group discussions and Individual interviews with the selected participants. The Data analysis followed inductive coding via Atlas-ti computer software. In the findings, it was discovered that although the majority of the church leaders showed a positive attitude towards digital media use, they integrated it amidst technological, economic, social, and theological challenges. Participants expressed a need for an urgent technological and theological training to guide the users. I argue that the gospel message and theologies ought to be communicated via online faith communities using a blend of media converged into digital media while also applying theological approaches based on a theologically informed strategy. To communicate the gospel in the digital age, the study provides a theological reflection on possible approaches to digital communication of the gospel. It also proposes a theologically informed digital communication strategy, which may be employed in training church leaders and may also be applied in digital communication of the gospel.

Abstrak

In antwoord op die groei in digitale mediagebruik in die daaglikse lewe en werk van die kerk, spesifiek dié van die Anglikaanse Kerk van Uganda (AKU), ondersoek hierdie studie die kommunikasie van die evangelie in die digitale era in 'n gevallestudie van die bisdomme van Namirembe en Kampala in die Anglikaanse Kerk van Uganda. Wêreldwyd integreer die Kerk digitale media in hulle bediening en veral in die kommunikasie van die evangelie. Met behulp van verskillende digitale mediatoestelle, -platforms en -toepassings word geestelike inligting via die internet versprei en tot toegang gekry. In die AKU se Visie 2025, word priesters en kerkleiers ook aangemoedig om digitale media te integreer in die werk van die kerk om die evangelie en Christelike waardes te versprei. Tog is nie veel bekend oor die houding van kerkleiers jeens digitale media nie en is daar 'n tekort aan noodsaaklike literatuur oor, teologiese leiding, benaderings tot, opleiding in en strategieë met die oog op die gebruik van digitale media in die kommunikasie van die evangelie. Om hierdie situasie aan te spreek was dit nodig om die digitale kommunikasiekonteks na te vors en teologies na te dink oor die kommunikasie van die evangelie via digitale media. Hierdie navorsing was dus daarop gemik om die AKU se verstaan van, houding jeens en benadering tot die gebruik van digitale media in die kommunisering van die evangelie te ondersoek. Hiervoor en om die navorsingsvraag te beantwoord, het ek gebruik gemaak van beide literatuur en empiriese komponente in die studie. As 'n prakties-teologiese studie, het ek die prakties-teologiese raamwerk van Osmer gebruik.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie met sy gevallestudie navorsingsontwerp het ten doel gehad om gedetailleerde en in-diepte inligting te versamel vanuit geselekteerde voorbeelde ten einde die situasie te verstaan. Fokusgroepe en individuele onderhoude is gebruik om data vanaf geselekteerde deelnemers te versamel. Data-analise is gedoen via induktiewe kodering met behulp van ATLAS-ti rekenaarsagteware. Die bevinding het getoon dat, alhoewel die meerderheid kerkleiers 'n positiewe houding jeens die gebruik van digitale media het, hulle dit integreer te midde van ekonomiese, sosiale, en tegnologiese uitdagings. Hulle het ook deurgaans die dringende behoefte uitgespreek na tegnologiese opleiding en teologiese leiding. Ek argumenteer dat die evangelie en teologie gekommunikeer moet word aan aanlyn geloofsgemeenskappe met behulp van 'n mengsel van vorme van digitale media. Dit moet egter gepaardgaan met teologiese benaderings wat 'n teologies-ingeligte strategie volg. Die studie bied dus teologiese nadenke oor

moontlike benaderings tot die kommunikasie van die evangelie in die digitale era. Dit stel ook 'n teologies-ingeligte digitale mediastrategie voor wat gebruik kan word in die opleiding van kerkleiers en wat toegepas kan word in die digitale kommunikasie van die evangelie.

Abbreviations and Key Terms

ACOU	Anglican Church of Uganda
All Saints'	All Saints' Cathedral Kampala
CA	Cultivation Analysis Theory
CMS	Church Missionary Society
COU	Church of Uganda
DK	Diocese of Kampala
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ID	In-Depth
IT	Information Technology
KI	Key Informants
Nateete	Martyrs' Church Nateete
ND	Namirembe Diocese
Part	Participant
STL	St. Luke's COU Ntinda
STP	St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe
REC	Research Ethical Clearance
UGT	Uses and Gratification Theory
UNCST	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

List of Figures, Tables and Addenda

Figure (Fig)	Table	Addendum	Label	Page
1.1			Inductive Coding Process	16
1.2			Osmer Practical Theology Framework	18
2.1			Digital media landscape	36
3.2			Reason for Digital media use	85
	6.1		Gender of Participants	140
	6.2		Age of Participants	140
6.1			Themes in the communication of the gospel	141
6.2			Themes in digital media use	153
	6.3		Media Tools and Their Frequency	155
6.3			Theme in theological motivation	173
6.4			Theme in Approaches to digital communication	187
7.1			Theologically Informed digital communication strategy	210
		A	ADDENDUM A: Permission to conduct the study in the Church of Uganda	252
		B	ADDENDUM B: Ethical Clearance certificate from Stellenbosch University	253
		C	ADDENDUM C: Ethical Clearance certificate from Uganda Christian University on behalf of Uganda National Council Science and Technology (UNCST) to undertake the study	256
		D	ADDENDUM D: Interview Guide for In-Depth Interviews	258
		E	ADDENDUM E: Focus Group Discussion Guide	260
		F	Turnitin Digital Receipt	262
		G	Originality Report	263

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vi
Abstrak	vii
Abbreviations and Key Terms	ix
List of Figures, Tables and Addenda	x
Table of Contents	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction to Digital Communication of the Gospel	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background and Motivation for the Study	2
1.2.1 Church of Uganda	2
1.2.2 Literature Study	4
1.2.2.1 Communication in Digital Media	4
1.3 Problem Statement	8
1.4 Justification of the study	9
1.5 Research Question	10
1.6 Aims of the Study	10
1.7 Research Design and Methodology	10
1.7.1 Research Methodology	11
1.7.2 Research Sampling	11
1.7.2.1 Research Sample Size	12
1.7.3 Data Collection Methods	13
1.7.3.1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	14
1.7.3.2 In-depth Interviews	15
1.7.4 Data Analysis	15
1.8 Practical Theology Framework	16
1.8.1 Descriptive-empirical Task	18
1.8.2 Interpretive Task	19
1.8.3 Normative Task	20
1.8.4 Pragmatic task	21
1.9 Practical Theological Contribution of the Research	23
1.10 Limitations of the Study	24
1.11 Ethical Clearance	25

1.12	Definition of Terms-----	25
Chapter 2: The Historical Overview of Communication Media-----		28
2.1	Introduction-----	28
2.2	The Communication Process -----	28
2.3	An Overview of Communication Medium in Ugandan Society -----	30
2.4	An Overview of the Media Used in Gospel Communication-----	36
2.5	Oral Communication of the Gospel-----	38
2.6	Written Communication of the Gospel-----	40
2.7	Mass Print Communication of the Gospel -----	43
2.8	Broadcasting Medium of the Gospel-----	45
2.9	Digital Media Communication of the Gospel -----	47
2.9.1	Social Media in Gospel Communication-----	50
2.10	Conclusion -----	53
Chapter 3: Critical Discussion of Specific Media Theories-----		55
3.1	Introduction-----	55
3.2	Complexities of Digital Communication-----	55
3.3	Communication Media Theories -----	62
3.3.1	James Carey’s Ritual Theory -----	62
3.3.2	Media Ritual Theory-----	68
3.3.3	Mediatisation Theory-----	74
3.3.4	The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)-----	84
3.3.5	Cultivation Analysis Theory (CA) -----	87
3.4	Conclusion -----	91
Chapter 4: Communication as an Integral Aspect of Practical Theology and Ministry -----		93
4.1	Introduction-----	93
4.2	Understanding the Communicative Aspect of the Gospel-----	94
4.3	Practical Theology as A Communicative Action -----	96
4.4	Theological View on the Practice of Communication-----	99
4.4.1	The Communicative Nature of the Trinity -----	104
4.4.2	The Communicative Nature of the Incarnation -----	107
4.4.3	The Communicative Nature of the Church -----	109
4.5	Theological Approaches to Digital Communication -----	112
4.5.1	Trinitarian Approach to Digital communication-----	113
4.5.2	Incarnation Approach to Digital Communication-----	114
4.5.3	Interactive Approach to Digital Communication-----	115
4.5.4	Visual Aids Approach to Digital Communication-----	116
4.6	Time and Space in Digital communication of the Gospel-----	117
4.7	Practical Theology Reflection on Digital Communication of the Gospel -----	123

4.8	Conclusion	125
Chapter 5: Research Methodology		128
5.1	Introduction	128
Research Design and Methodology		128
5.1.1	Research Design	128
5.1.2	Research Qualitative Methodology	129
5.2	Research Context	129
5.3	Background of the Units of Analysis	130
5.3.1	Namirembe Diocese	131
5.3.2	Diocese of Kampala	132
5.3.3	The Diocesan Priest Interviews	133
5.3.4	The Parish Priests	133
5.3.5	The Fellowship Leaders	134
5.3.6	Criteria for Inclusion	134
5.4	Research Sampling	135
5.4.1	Process of Sampling the Study Population	135
5.5	The Research Process	135
5.6	Trustworthiness of the Data Collection	136
5.7	Data Recording	137
5.8	Quality of Transcription Process	137
5.9	Data Analysis	137
5.10	Conclusion	138
Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings		139
6.1	Introduction	139
6.2	Reflection on the Research Context	139
6.2.1	Codes Used for the Study	140
6.2.2	Gender of Study Participants	140
6.2.3	Age of Study Participants	140
6.3	Study Findings	141
6.3.1	Understanding of Concepts by Participants	141
6.3.1.1	Understanding of the Communication of the Gospel	141
6.3.1.1.1	Understanding of the Gospel Message Communicated	142
6.3.1.1.2	Traditional Methods of Communication	144
6.3.1.1.3	Digital Media Use	145
6.3.1.1.4	Attitude Towards Digital Media Use	148
6.3.1.1.5	Convergence of Media in Communication	151
6.3.1.1.6	Conclusion Relating to Communication of the Gospel	152
6.3.1.2	Understanding of the Digital Media Use by the Church	153
6.3.1.2.1	Platforms Used for the Gospel	153
6.3.1.2.2	Digital Presence of Church ministers	157
6.3.1.2.3	Digital Media Online Communities	159
6.3.1.2.4	Digital Media Ministry Activities	160
6.3.1.2.5	Digital Media Infrastructure for the Church	162

6.3.1.2.6	Benefits of Digital Media Use for Gospel Communication-----	164
6.3.1.2.7	Challenges with Digital Media Use-----	167
6.3.1.2.8	Digital Media Training -----	170
6.3.1.2.9	Adapting to the culture -----	171
6.3.1.2.10	Conclusion Relating to Digital Media Use -----	172
6.3.1.3	Understanding the Theological Motivation for Digital Media Communication-----	173
6.3.1.3.1	The Great Commission -----	173
6.3.1.3.2	Interactive Communication -----	175
6.3.1.3.3	Church’s Incarnational Presence in the Media Space -----	177
6.3.1.3.4	Online Faith Community-----	179
6.3.1.3.5	Online Sacraments and Rituals -----	180
6.3.1.3.6	The Church and Authority -----	182
6.3.1.3.7	Authenticity -----	184
6.3.1.3.8	Conclusion Relating to Theological Motivation for Digital Media Use -----	186
6.3.1.4	Understanding of the Approaches to Digital Communication -----	186
6.3.1.4.1	One-directional Communication Approach-----	187
6.3.1.4.2	Interactive Communication Approach -----	189
6.3.1.4.3	Small-Group Methods -----	191
6.3.1.4.4	Visual Aids and Images -----	193
6.3.1.4.5	Asynchronous and Synchronous Delivery -----	194
6.3.1.4.6	Conclusion Relating to Digital Media Approaches -----	196
6.3.1.5	Most Effective Communication Approach in the Digital Age-----	197
6.4	Conclusion -----	201
Chapter 7: A Theologically Informed Digital Communication Strategy for Communicating the Gospel in the Digital Age -----		203
7.1	Introduction-----	203
7.2	Revisiting the Research Question -----	203
7.2.1	Aim 1: Historical Overview of Communication Media-----	203
7.2.2	Aim 2: Critical Discussion of Specific Media Theories-----	204
7.2.3	Aim 3: Towards an Understanding of Communication as an Integral Aspect of Practical Theology and Ministry 206	
7.2.4	Aim 4: To Ascertain the COU’s Understanding, Attitude and Approach towards Digital Communication -----	206
7.2.4.1	Communication of the Gospel-----	207
7.2.4.2	Digital Media Use -----	207
7.2.4.3	Theological Motivation for Digital Media Use -----	208
7.2.4.4	Approaches to Digital Communication -----	208
7.2.5	Aim 5: To identify the most effective digital media approach used by the COU to communicate the gospel to reach different age groups -----	209
7.2.6	Aim 6: To Present a Practical Theologically-Informed Communication Guideline to Improve the Use of Digital Media in Communicating the Gospel by the COU -----	210
7.3	Theologically Informed Digital Media Communication Strategy -----	210
7.3.1	Digital Evangelists’ Training for Digital Communication-----	211
7.3.2	Digital Faith Platforms for Digital Communication -----	212
7.3.3	Digital/Online Faith Community Guided by the Trinity-----	213
7.3.4	Digital Present Priest Informed by the Incarnation-----	216
7.3.5	Digital Christian Influencers in Digital Communication-----	218
7.3.6	Digital Christian Content Packaging and Design-----	219
7.3.7	Digital Interactions for Digital Communication-----	220

7.3.8	Building Digital Media Infrastructure -----	222
7.3.9	Digital Witnessing with Multimedia-----	222
7.3.10	Convergence of Media for Digital Communication-----	223
7.3.11	Online and Offline Church Relationship-----	225
7.4	Theological Focus and Contribution of the Study-----	226
7.5	Limitations of the Study -----	227
7.6	Recommendations for Further Research-----	228
	<i>Bibliography</i>-----	230
	<i>ADDENDUM A: Permission to conduct the study in Church of Uganda</i>-----	252
	<i>ADDENDUM B: Ethical Clearance certificate from Stellenbosch University</i> -----	253
	<i>ADDENDUM C: Ethical Clearance certificate from Uganda Christian University on behalf of Uganda National Council Science and Technology (UNCST) to undertake the study</i> -----	256
	<i>ADDENDUM D: Interview Guide for In-Depth Interviews</i>-----	258
	<i>ADDENDUM E: Focus Group Discussion Guide</i>-----	260
	<i>ADDENDUM F: Turnitin Digital Receipt</i>-----	262
	<i>ADDENDUM G: Originality Receipt</i> -----	263

Chapter 1: Introduction to Digital Communication of the Gospel

1.1 Introduction

Digital media penetration in everyday life has not left the Church of Christ behind. This study explores the Church of Uganda's (COU) understanding, attitude and approaches towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel. Digital media practice and the Church's communication practice of the gospel are closely related. The Church's use of digital media to communicate the gospel is evidence of the relationship¹. Throughout the world, the Church is employing digital media tools to address new challenges of the digital age and achieve its communication mandate. The need to adapt digital media technologies to communicate the gospel was made very apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when many churches throughout the world were forced to remain physically closed for an extended period. To date, some congregants that left the Church then have not returned to attend physical church. It is, therefore, crucially important that the Church can employ all means possible to reach out to all people.

The Great Commission, as outlined in Mathew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15², is primarily a communication task. It is, therefore, important that the Church can adapt and optimally use the media of the time when responding to the Great Commission by communicating the gospel to all people in the world. Throughout history, the advancement in media technology has always informed the best methods of communicating the gospel (Blondheim & Rosenberg, 2017: 44–45). This is no different in our time. Although studies have explored digital religion and spiritual activities in the digital media space, the Church's perspective, attitude and approaches to digital media use within the COU have yet to be investigated. In this study, the researcher sought to fill that gap. To explore the digital communication of the gospel within the COU, the discussion starts with the general background, the historical overview of the communication of the gospel, the media theories, theological discussion and the empirical aspect of the study. The reason for

¹ Churches are integrating digital media tools to reach the people who might never come to church with the word of God. The digital age that has seen the influx of digital media technologies avails to churches wider opportunities to spread the gospel message on different social media platforms since many church going is no longer the cultural norm. (Lewis, 2014)

² Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-19). He said to them, "Go into all the World and preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15).

exploring the COU's understanding, attitude and approaches to digital media use is to call upon leaders to embrace and integrate the right use of digital media and information communication technologies (ICTs) into the preaching of the gospel. Within the COU's vision document (COU-Vision 2025, 2016: 17), COU encourages all church leaders to use digital media to communicate and advance the gospel message. This research is done with the view of providing data for future comprehensive guidelines to improve the use of digital media within the COU.

1.2 Background and Motivation for the Study

1.2.1 Church of Uganda

As an institution, the Church as a community of believers exists to communicate the gospel message within the community and the entire World (Ajibade, 2017: 45; Soukup, 2002: 28). Since its advent in the Acts of the Apostles, the Church has spread the gospel using the communication media of the time and new digital ICTs (Blondheim & Rosenberg, 2017: 48–49). In the early Church, the disciples communicated the gospel orally (through face-to-face encounters) and in written modes (through letters). The ways through which the gospel message has been preserved and shared by the Church have evolved with the advancement of modes of communication.

The communication of the gospel in Uganda began with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) that responded to Kabaka Mutesa, the King of Buganda's legendary letter (Niringiye, 2016: 29). Upon their arrival in June 1877, the evangelical missionaries with CMS motivated by low church principles with emphasis on evangelism communicated the gospel to the citizens, and later, together with the converted people, they traversed the entire country communicating the gospel (Ferryman, 1903: 276–291). The Church of Uganda refers to the coming of missionaries that introduced the presence of Anglicanism as its origin. When the missionaries arrived, the oral communication mode was employed in spreading the message by using proverbs, stories, riddles, songs, legends and folktales (Kizza, 2010: 11–14). Christianity expanded from central region-Buganda to other regions through oral testimonies of the converts together with missionaries (Hovil, 2005: 71). As they continued to spread the gospel, the missionaries also employed the written mode of communication through reading, teaching and translating the Bible into local languages (Ajibade, 2017: 7–9). The combination of oral and written modes of communication

advanced the proclamation of the gospel. As the communication of the gospel advanced in the nation, the Church of Uganda was established.

The Church of Uganda³ (COU) was officially established as an independent institution in 1961. It was established on evangelical theology and a low liturgical style that emphasises the mission and proclamation of the gospel, thereby encouraging many to seek a relationship with Jesus Christ (Miranda, 2007: 26). Since then, the COU has described herself as a Jesus-loving, Bible-believing, Spirit-filled Anglican Church engaged in the communication of the gospel in today's world⁴. In addition, the COU has a significant position in the country to share the gospel message and offer spiritual guidance as a major denomination, mainline church and state church. Nevertheless, from its inception, the COU has experienced shifts in the communication of the gospel from the use of only oral to digital media technologies. The shifts have been due to technological innovations and advancements. Technological advancements have facilitated multiple communication approaches inclusive of oral media, print media, broadcast media, and now digital media. Using the different media of communication, the COU communicated the gospel and she grew from a single diocese to 37 dioceses in 58 years. However, in the last National Census, the COU was reported to have experienced a drop in membership. According to the Uganda National Census of 2014, 32% of the population identified themselves as belonging to the Anglican church (COU) as compared to 36.7% in 2002 (UBOS, 2016: 19). Although the COU continues to communicate the gospel in the digital age, it has been declining and one wonders whether the COU's digital media communication approaches contribute towards this decline in membership. Therefore, understanding the approaches to optimally use digital media to reach all people with the gospel is an urgent need.

³ The Church of the Province of Uganda (Church of Uganda) is a member church of the Anglican Communion. Currently there are 37 dioceses which make up the Church of Uganda, each headed by a bishop. Each diocese is divided into archdeaconries, each headed by a senior priest known as an archdeacon. The archdeaconries are further subdivided into parishes, headed by a parish priest. Parishes are subdivided into sub-parishes, headed by lay leaders. As of the 2014 Census, 32% of Ugandans consider themselves affiliated with the church, down from 36.7% at the 2002 Census.

⁴ <http://churchofuganda.org/>

1.2.2 Literature Study

1.2.2.1 Communication in Digital Media

Communication, according to Black and Bryant (1995:27), is the process through which participants generate and share information to reach a mutual understanding. Communication is viewed as a dynamic, symbolic process in which people in the dialogue make meaning and express their feelings in which they understand, share values, live and behave in society (Fortner, 2006: 281). James Carey (2009: 18–19) in his Ritual Theory states that communication is not simply the transmission of information but a conversation, and an interaction. To communicate is to share, interact and converse. It involves the exchange of ideas and messages from sender to receiver and vice versa (Soler-Adillon, Sora, Freixa & Ribas, 2016: 196). Communication requires collaboration among people, allowing dialogue, and building solidarity and interaction in a communication culture (Imbelli, 1995: 279). Generally, communication modes have undergone significant developments across generations: in addition to oral tradition messages were written scripts, printed material via the printing press, electronic messages via broadcasting media in the 20th century, and digital messages via digital media in the 21st century (Lytle, 2013; Wise, 2014).

Fox and Woolf (2018: 7) advance McLuhan's argument that communication media technologies extend man and the message globally beyond space and time. Media technological advancements have contributed to the shifts in communication modes. Key technological innovations have often defined the most efficient ways of communication. For example, the invention of the printing press in 1450 and broadcasting media in 1920 led to a paradigm shift in communicating in general and also in communicating the Gospel (Lytle, 2013:xx). Whereas the invention of the printing press led to the massive production of Bibles and other Christian materials, the advent of the broadcasting media, on the other hand, led to radios and televisions being used to communicate the gospel. This was in 1921 when the first Sunday service was broadcasted on the radio (Lytle, 2013).

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has availed online information, which accelerated in 2000 and revolutionised the way people and organisations communicate. This has given rise to what is known as modern-day, internet-facilitated digital communication, in the first quarter of the 21st century. No longer is the information only

communicated on paper, but also in digital form, through avenues such as the CD, DVDs, films, emails, podcasts, blogs, and via social networking technologies. Internet and web-based technologies have led to new communication approaches, challenging institutions and businesses to devise new strategies to remain relevant (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014: 4–6). Internet-facilitated digital media technologies enable institutions and individuals to present their information online.

The 21st century has ushered in more efficient communication technologies, allowing for the emergence of smartphones and wireless internet technologies (Anderson, 2013: 536). In Africa, the usage of such smartphones has not been a preserve of the rich only. Even in very poor African communities, the use of smartphones is not uncommon. Uganda, as a country, has not been left behind. Ugandans are active users of smart mobile phones and personal computers for communication, all facilitated by good internet connectivity. The government has spread internet accessibility in most parts of the nation including rural areas (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014: 12). The wide spread of the internet, increased use of interactive technologies, connection to interactive applications and mobile communication have revolutionised the way Ugandans communicate and access information. Out of 48.8 million people in Uganda, 28.1 million are active on digital media through mobile connections⁵, and 13.92 million Ugandans use the internet to communicate in daily life⁶. Therefore, the availability and accessibility to smart phones has advanced digital communication among people.

Digital communication, particularly through digital media technologies, has become a part of everyday life (Lundby, 2012: 30). The active engagement in digital communication can be viewed as a response to the human desire to communicate, interact and connect with others (Schultze, 2000: 20–22). The wide use of digital communication has made information easily accessible and available to users. According to Loveheim (2008: 214), digital media is important for searching for religious information and activities. Religion is transformed through the new online ways of numerous expressions, the use of aesthetical and different experiments (Cloete, 2016: 5). To the

⁵ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-uganda#:~:text=There%20were%2028.01%20million%20mobile,60.3%25%20of%20the%20total%20population.>

uganda#:~:text=There%20were%2028.01%20million%20mobile,60.3%25%20of%20the%20total%20population.

⁶ [www. Datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-Uganda](http://www.Datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-Uganda) accessed on 1 July 2022

Church, digital communication technologies provide new ways of communicating the gospel, with an opportunity to enable people to engage with the information in their search for God and life meanings (Raja, 2011: 160), thus, the church's increasing use of digital media to share the gospel has the potential to provide spiritual guidance to the people searching online.

Digital communication through advanced interactive digital media and interactive technology such as laptops, tablets and smartphones occupies everyday life (Cheong, 2012: 25). In Uganda, digital communication is growing due to the wide use of smart mobile telephones, improved mobile networks and broader internet coverage across villages (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014). More and more people use the internet and web-based media daily to communicate and transact business (2014: 9). Considering the Ugandan population, 45.9% use the internet to communicate in daily life⁷. The widespread internet-facilitated digital media use in Uganda calls for special attention. The use of digital media for religion is growing rapidly in Africa, making research in the field crucial to highlight themes such as religious consumerism and new forms of religious expression (Hackett, Madore & Millet-Mouity, 2018: 126–129) since a good number of people engage digital media to participate in online worship and search for religious information.

Digital media are various platforms and gadgets through which electronically, digitised content in the form of text, audio, video, and photo is communicated across borders to different people over the internet or computer networks in a machine-readable format.⁸ Digital media tends to combine the functions of old and new media technologies (print, radio, TV, phone, email and social networks) and present a product in a convergent form (Peter, Lewis & Bruce, 2013). Digital media is characterised by the convergence of video, voice and data on digital platforms (Raja, 2011: 131). However, the use of digital media is not a replacement for other forms of media, but a complement and supplement to older forms of face-to-face media (Hackett et al., 2018: 125). Digital media connects the users, especially the youth, who need relational and spiritual connection (Cloete, 2015: 5). Therefore, the influence of digital media content extends far beyond geographical boundaries (Haron, 2011: 32) and brings people together in friendship.

⁷ Central intelligence Agency (29 June 2018). The World Factbook: Uganda: Communication: Telephone System. Washington, DC: The World Factbook. Accessed on 9 November 2019.

⁸ Igi-global.com, IGI Global Disseminator of Knowledge. Digital Media. Accessed on 28 December 2019.

In this digital age, digital communication is inescapable, and, thus poses great challenges and opportunities to the church and its ministry (Campbell, 2013). Therefore, the users of digital media for communication ought to consider it carefully and employ appropriate approaches. This calls upon church communicators and theologians to offer relevant information on how to use it (Soukup, 2002: 26). Further, Soukup (2002: 28) asserts that the priests who are the communicators of the religious message need to use all media of communication at their disposal appropriately to communicate the gospel. Church and religious leaders that employ digital communication to deliver religious information to meet the spiritual needs of online users easily connect with people in search of spiritual support (Wyche, Hayes, Harvel & Grinter, 2006: 206).

The Church of Uganda, in its pursuit to communicate the gospel to all people faces the challenge of improving its digital communication approaches to reach digital media users. With the improvement in communication due to the advancement in technology and digital media, one wonders whether the Church of Uganda is adequately using digital media to communicate the gospel. Wise (2014:168) argues that churches everywhere ought to understand the context of communication and effectively utilise the media to share the Christian story. As the COU printed religious material such as Bibles and Christian literature due to the invention of the printing press, the Church of Uganda ought to strategically and intentionally fill the digital media space with the gospel using newer technologies, with a clear understanding, the right attitude and appropriate approaches towards digital media communication.

The Church of Uganda recognises the presence and importance of media in communicating the gospel. It acknowledges that several religious communicators use new media practices and genres to share religious experiences and strengthen religious traditions (Sommer, 2010). However, as the COU continues to communicate the gospel, it experiences challenges, such as geographical barriers⁹ and a lack of information on how to use digital media to communicate the gospel. Its priests lack adequate knowledge to use digital media appropriately¹⁰. Although the COU engages

⁹ <https://churchofuganda.org> >about >history. Accessed on 1 December 2019.

¹⁰ <https://recowacerao.org/the-role-of-the-media-in-evangelisation-opportunities-and-challenges/> Accessed on 2 December 2019.

in digital media, it admits the need for relevant information, approaches and strategies to engage effectively. In her Vision 2025 document (COU-Vision 2025, 2016: 17), the COU aspires strategically to:

- *initiate the development of a communications policy for the COU and strategies for effective communication between the Church and its key stakeholders.*
- *initiate a capacity-building programme in ICT for the entire Province; and*
- *intentionally embrace digital media such as social media to enhance her visibility and use it to advance the gospel and Christian values.*

Therefore, it is essential for the COU to continually seek new information, knowledge and approaches to communicate the gospel in the digital age, to present the gospel message for all people to engage with and drive meaning to life. However, there is a significant gap in the literature in this field of study, especially in the African context. There are few or no academic writings on communicating the gospel in digital media and through the Church of Uganda, thus, the research explores the COU's understanding, attitudes, and approaches towards digital media in communicating the gospel in the digital age.

1.3 Problem Statement

Digital communication has penetrated everyday life. This allows digital media users to access information from numerous sources. There is a rapid growth of digitalised content, internet and web-based use in daily life and gospel communication in Uganda. Out of 48.8 million people in Uganda, 28.1 million are active on digital media through mobile connection¹¹, and 13.92 million Ugandans use the internet to communicate in daily life¹². Digital communication is facilitated by the widespread use of electronic tools, mobile smartphones, and social networking platforms that connect people through digital media (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014: 12). The COU acknowledges the impact of digital media on people, uses it to communicate the gospel, and in her vision document calls upon all the church leaders to integrate digital media to advance the gospel and the Christian values among digital media users (COU-Vision 2016:17). On 18 March 2020, the President of Uganda banned religious gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and

¹¹ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-uganda#:~:text=There%20were%2028.01%20million%20mobile,60.3%25%20of%20the%20total%20population.>

¹² [www. Datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-Uganda](http://www.Datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-Uganda) accessed on 1 July 2022

religious leaders were encouraged to use digital media to preach¹³. Throughout the lockdown, some churches amidst technological challenges remained in touch with parishioners and shared the gospel through digital platforms. Although the COU leaders are encouraged to use digital media for the gospel, the leaders' attitudes about digital media usage are unknown. The leaders also lack the necessary literature and knowledge in the field, appropriate approaches, methods, and strategies to guide the church communicators and Christians in the COU on how to use digital media effectively and engage with digital media users. It is, thus crucial to study the COU's understanding, attitudes and approaches to communicating the gospel in the digital media in the light of practical theology to facilitate the COU's gospel imperative in the Great Commission.

1.4 Justification of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine the use of digital media to communicate the gospel, and understand the leaders' attitudes and approaches towards digital media within the Church of Uganda. While several churches and gospel communicators are using digital media to disseminate the gospel message, there is an increased lack of knowledge about the appropriate use of digital media and a strategy to guide the communication process. In the digital age, several parishes and chaplaincies are using digital media, but no clear strategy is in place to guide digital media users. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown of churches, the Church communicators unadvisedly engaged in digital media use, but they acknowledge their inadequacy in the effective use of the media.

The shift in communication technology has facilitated the adoption of digital media in everyday life resulting in increased societal and organisational transformation. As the mediatisation of communication, information and the gospel advances, digital media users acknowledge being in dire need of relevant knowledge, training and information to fill the existing gap on how they can appropriately use digital media for gospel communication. Therefore, the results of the study provide insight into the effective and relevant use of digital media and also offer a proposed practical theology guide to the priests and church leaders as they communicate the gospel through the Church of Uganda.

¹³ www.mediacentre.go.ug/media/president-museveni-covid19-guidelines-corona-virus accessed 23 March 2020

1.5 Research Question

What is the Church of Uganda's understanding, attitude and approach towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel in the digital age?

1.6 Aims of the Study

- a. To provide a historical overview of mediums used in communication in general and the gospel specifically.
- b. To present a critical discussion of specific media theories to introduce the complexity of communication facilitated by digital media.
- c. To discuss communication as an integral aspect of practical theology and ministry.
- d. To ascertain the COU's understanding, attitude and approach towards digital media in communicating the gospel.
- e. To identify the most effective digital media approach used by the COU to communicate the gospel appropriately to reach different age groups of its members.
- f. To present a practical theologically informed communication guideline to improve the use of digital media in communicating the gospel by the Church of Uganda.

1.7 Research Design and Methodology

This research study was a descriptive qualitative case study that explored the understanding, attitudes and approaches of the COU's use of digital media to communicate the gospel by considering two cases of Kampala and Namirembe Dioceses. The Qualitative Case Study design was employed in the empirical study to explore the communication practice in the digital age with the Data Collection procedure. Qualitative case study research focuses on an in-depth study and detailed description of the phenomena under study (Zainal, 2007: 2). Learning from Duff, I employed a case study to generate a deeper and detailed understanding of the COU's digital media use to clearly describe an accurate account of the COU's understanding and experience with digital media. As a case study research, selected parishes from the COU were studied for in-depth investigation of leaders' understanding, attitudes, and approaches towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel. The parishes selected were the basis for a thorough, holistic, and in-depth exploration of the aspect under study (Ranjit, 2011: 123). The case study enabled me to look at the deeper understandings, attitudes and approaches of digital media use and describe it in

detail. Bell (2005:10) states that it is risky to consider the results as reflective of all cases. However, the Case Study research enabled a comprehensive and intensive analysis of the selected cases concerning a particular phenomenon and allows generalisation (Schoch, 2020: 246).

1.7.1 Research Methodology

To explore and examine the research question, and research aims, the study was carried out by engaging in theoretical (literature) and empirical study. The study employed a qualitative methodology, which, as an interpretative, and naturalistic approach, helps to clearly describe the situation thus aiding the interpretation process (Swinton & Mowat, 2016: 33). The qualitative research methodology study employed a family of methods for data collection, which included Individual interviews and focus group discussions. Qualitative methods enabled a clear description of the understanding, attitudes and approaches towards digital communication. It brought out the perspectives of the participants, both Priests and Fellowship Leaders.

1.7.2 Research Sampling

The goal is to get a representative sample of the population to understand the selected cases in depth (Bryman, 2016: 9). The study sample was from the dioceses and parishes under the COU. The dioceses and parishes were purposely selected for the thorough, holistic, and in-depth exploration of the aspect under study, which was studied intensively (Ranjit, 2011: 124). Purposive sampling helped in selecting the sample cases and respondents who were able to engage with the research questions (Schoch, 2020: 246), possessed insightful information and were knowledgeable of the situation under study (Patton, 2002: 15). With purposive sampling, I relied on personal judgment and conscious choice putting into consideration the insight from informants about the traits and knowledge of the participant possesses (Tongco, 2007: 147). Purposeful sampling enabled me to select individuals for the in-depth study of the phenomenon, particularly those with insightful and relevant information. The parish with at least 10 active fellowships, taking different age groups and gender into consideration, were selected.

In the selected diocese and parishes, the focus was on diocesan senior priests, parish priests and fellowship leaders responsible for communicating the gospel and equipped with insightful information about the topic under study. The fellowship leaders considered were both male and

female, active members of the parish, engaged in communicating the gospel and active digital media users. The fellowship leaders that participated in the study belonged to either of the fellowships, such as Mothers' Union, Fathers' Union, Children, Youth, General fellowship, Married, Missions, Discipleship, Christian Women's Fellowship and Christian Men's Fellowships. Therefore, the parishes considered were those found in Kampala and Wakiso districts, which have very good network coverage and internet infrastructure (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014: 15). The two dioceses, which are Kampala and Namirembe, operate differently; the former is urban and the latter is both rural and urban, but both actively use digital media in communication among members. Also, in both dioceses, priests and fellowship leaders are active users of digital media for communicating Bible messages among members and were knowledgeable about the topic.

1.7.2.1 Research Sample Size

From each of the two dioceses, two parishes with relevant and insightful information concerning the topic were sampled. As a case study design geared to study the phenomena comprehensively, the sample size ought to be manageable (Sarfo, Debrah, Gbordzoe & Afful, 2021: 60). In selecting the sample size of the study, I was mindful that qualitative sampling has got to be large enough to help gain insightful information, but small enough to avoid excessive information (Mason, 2010: 1; Sarfo et al., 2021: 62). A key consideration in selecting the sample was ensuring that theoretical saturation is guaranteed. Bremborg (2014: 314) states that saturation, a point of no new information, is achieved between 10 and 30 interviews, while Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 24) state that saturation is achieved between 5 and 25 interviews. In determining sample size, Hennink and Kaiser (2022: 2) argue that to access saturation with a focus group, about four to eight focus group discussions are required. Hennink and Kaiser further argue that the number per FGD should not exceed 10 participants.

In this study, the sample size was a representation of church leaders from the COU parishes that met the criteria. To acquire the data, six in-depth interviews and four focus groups discussions (FGD) were conducted. During the FGD each FGD had 10 participants. As proposed by Hennink and Kaiser (2022:3), four FGDs each with 10 participants were conducted to meet the minimum requirement for theoretical saturation. In addition, six in-depth interviews of individuals were

conducted. Even without the FGD, the interviews fall well within the number proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) for meeting theoretical saturation. Therefore, in combining six in-depth interviews and four FGDs, the requirement for theoretical saturation as required for qualitative research was met. The total number of individuals engaged through the FGDs and interviews was 46, drawn from four parishes within Namirembe Diocese and the Diocese of Kampala. With the selected samples, theoretical saturation was satisfied while considering that qualitative sampling is to be large enough to attain insightful information and small enough to avoid excess. This sample population was sufficient to obtain the understanding and experiences relevant to the subject under study. The participants included both male and female church leaders that satisfied the criteria for inclusion in the study.

1.7.3 Data Collection Methods

This empirical qualitative study required the collection of data from the different sampled participants. The collection of data entailed gathering the participants' experiences, attitudes, opinions and feelings (Hossain, 2011: 150). The qualitative methods of data collection in the study included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. As a practical theology study, employing the Osmer (2008:37) model, the descriptive-empirical task was followed in gathering information to describe the communication situation of the church. The data collection methods, including interviews and focus groups employed, enabled me to know what is happening in the COU. These methods of data collection enabled the study to respond to the research question. I employed a triangulation approach in data collection. The triangulation approach is a method employed in qualitative studies to check and establish validity in the research work (Guion, 2002: 1). Data triangulation allowed me to bring together different participants to know the outcomes that are uniform from the different participants (Guion 2002: 2). The data triangulation was considered since different sources for data were employed in data collection. Data triangulation helped in acquiring data from different stakeholders, including diocesan senior priests, parish priests and fellowship leaders to increase the credibility of the findings. Data from different categories of participants enabled me to establish whether the findings were true and reflected the real-life situation (Denzin, 2010: 50). Data was collected from the different participants using in-depth interviews and FGDs. Among the participants for in-depth interviews, the diocesan senior priests, and the supervisors of parish priests were approached as Key informants. Therefore, in the

study, I triangulated by considering the data from the diocesan priests, parish priests and fellowship leaders, looked at their point of view, analysed and then emerged the uniform findings by bringing them together to describe and explain the communication practice by the COU.

1.7.3.1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

In this method, the researcher gathers a small number of participants to talk about the topic under study (Hossain, 2011: 153). Hossain (2011) further states that the guide for the discussion is often prepared in advance and the researcher guides the discussion. In this study, 10 fellowship leaders from each parish were invited to the FGD. Obikeze (1990: 25) states that seven to 10 members were recommended per FGD. The ideal size for FGD is five to 10, not exceeding 10 participants (Daymon & Holloway, 2005: 186). However, the group should be manageable and able to provide enough information. Hennink (2022:4) and Hossain (2011) further argue that the FGD number is kept small so that every participant gets an opportunity to express his/her opinion. The FGD helped me to explore people's attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue (Ranjit 2011:125) per parish making up four FGDs.

Before engaging in FGD, the participants for FGD were screened to select knowledgeable and insightful leaders from each fellowship. The screening was done by asking knowledgeable people about possible participants (Yin, 2018: 4). The parish priests were asked to provide a list of fellowship leaders who were knowledgeable about the topic of interest. Among the participants were fellowship leaders of the Mothers' Union, Fathers' Union, Christian Women's Fellowship, Christian Men's Fellowship, Cell, Discipleship, Youth, Children, General fellowship, and Choir were gathered to participate in the FGD.

During the FGD, the guiding questions were followed. These guiding questions were categorised into four groups following the aims to address the research questions, which included the Communication of the gospel, Digital media use, Theological motivation and Digital media approaches. In each category, there were guiding questions, as indicated in Addendum E¹⁴. This enabled me to conduct one FGD per parish from each of the four parishes under study. In total,

¹⁴ Addendum E which contains the Focus Group Guide for discussions with the participants

there were four FGDs during the study. Each FGD consisted of 10 fellowship leaders both male and female per parish, thus making a total of 40 fellowship leaders in the FGD.

1.7.3.2 In-depth Interviews

The interviews are conducted with participants interviewed individually to gain detailed information (Hossain, 2011). The sample size for the in-depth interviews was six (6) priests. The six priests were made up of four priests from the four parishes under study, and two diocesan senior priests from the two dioceses. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide¹⁵. During interviews, I used the interview guide to acquire up-to-date information, which was derived from participants' experience (Bryman, 2016:8). Semi-structured interview guides allowed the interviewer to follow predetermined questions, but with room to probe further with supplementary questions that helped me attain clarification. Therefore, the total sample size was made up of 46 respondents of which 40 leaders participated in FGD and 6 in interviews. The 46 respondents assisted me to undertake the study, attained theoretical saturation and acquired meaningful information which was used to respond to the study research question.

1.7.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of unstructured data (Bryman, 2016:11). The data analysis requires the researcher to be true to the participants and try to hear their voices to interpret and report (Austin & Sutton 2021:230). The data collected from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were transcribed and uploaded into ATLAS.ti, which was used to analyse the collected data. ATLAS.ti is a computer-aided data analysis software that helps in the management, organisation and analysis of qualitative data (Creswell John, 2014: 201). It is a qualitative data analysis software designed to organise, manage and analyse textual, visual and audio data (Alvira-Hammond, 2012: 5). Using this software, the main themes were drawn out, categorised, and dominant ideas identified. The connected ideas within the data were brought together, interpreted, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made. The data were inductively coded using thematic analysis - a tool in research that identifies the key words, themes and concepts from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 2). By this, the researcher quantifies

¹⁵ Addendum D contains semi-Interview guide questions that were followed during the interview process of the in-depth interviews.

and analyses the presence, meanings and relationships of identified themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). The inductive coding allowed the creation of new themes from data (Joffe and Yardley 2004: 57) that were helpful for the area of the research study. I considered Braun and Clarke's (2012: 5) six steps, by carefully reading and understanding the transcribed data, generating the codes and quotation, grouping similar codes in families, deriving dominant themes from family codes, reviewing and clearly defining the themes and presentation findings done. Figure 1.1 shows the inductive coding employed to generate themes from the collected data.

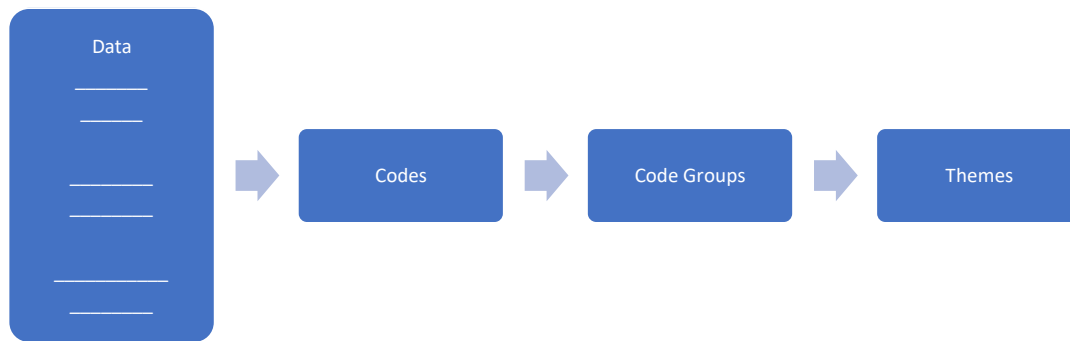


Figure 1.1 The inductive coding as employed in the data analysis process

1.8 Practical Theology Framework

Practical Theology is one of the departments in theology with its origin traced back to Schleiermacher (Anderson, 2001:24). This branch of theology has several practical connotations and requires a clear understanding to guide any practice in the world. Practical Theology starts when practice moves to theory and then returns to practice (Marbaniang, 2012). Unlike other fields of Theology, Practical Theology is concerned with human experiences and practices, and critically reflects creatively on the church and the world practices in line with normative sources, then grounds everything in transformative action (Hovil, 2005: 46). Practical Theology also enables the critical reflection about God and the outworking of faith in everyday life. Cahalan (2005:80) argues that practical theology emerges when church and world practices and meanings are questioned and challenged, which compels the theologians to examine the practice in light of scripture, traditions and social science knowledge to form a faithful and substantive response. Cahalan further states that the theology is marked by a hermeneutic of practical reason, dialogue and understanding. Practical theology offers to the Christians the way practices such as communication are to be done

in life depending on the context. It is considered with disciplined reflection and engagement in practices (Cahalen 2005:80) and seeks to address the disconnect between religious or church practice and theology (Latini, 2011: 98). This area of theology deals with crises in practice in which ministers, congregations and churches make the Christian traditions relevant in people's lives and societies (Herman & Schoeman 2015:9). Practical Theology as a discipline is critical in the transformation, forming and informing the practice of the Church and the world and bridging the gap between theology and practice (Schuringa, 2019: 1).

There are models of practical theology regarding the scope of conversation between theology and practices that require inquiry (Kim, 2007: 420). Practical Theology is approached in several models and different approaches to engaging in the hermeneutical process of the phenomena under study to motivate the church towards action (Masango, 2011: 12). Although not limited to these, the models include the Browning, EDNA, DECIDE, LIM and Osmer models¹⁶. To Osmer (2008: 2), Practical Theology allows reflection on practices and experiences in dialogue with other disciplines in social science as it engages the normative resources of the Christian faith (Osmer, 2011: 2). Ward (2017: 23) stresses that ordinary believers engage in practical theology as they integrate the gospel in daily life. Osmer (2008: 4) argues that Practical Theology attends to four tasks along the lines of the hermeneutical circle, which aids the process of understanding and interpreting the situation at hand. Osmer's four tasks of Practical Theology include the Descriptive task, Interpretive task, Normative task and Pragmatic task. This study explores the four tasks to critically examine the understanding, attitudes and approaches of the COU's use of digital media. The four tasks act as framework for theological discussion following the tasks' guiding questions. To Osmer (2008), Practical Theology research requires that I responds to the questions in the different tasks. The Osmer model of practical theology, which advocates for the four tasks, is more suitable for this study.

¹⁶ Browning is a model concerned with practical reasoning to relate theory and practice to show the interaction of Practical Theology with the church and the world (Browning, 1991:7). The EDNA model is concerned with Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative and Action, which is concerned with explaining practical situation to bring transformative action (Woodbridge, 2014:90). DECIDE model studies all the fields of theology to understand how they relate with the situation at hand (Schrier, 2010:111). LIM model explores the situation to identify the problem in real world (Cowan, 2000; Smith, 2008).

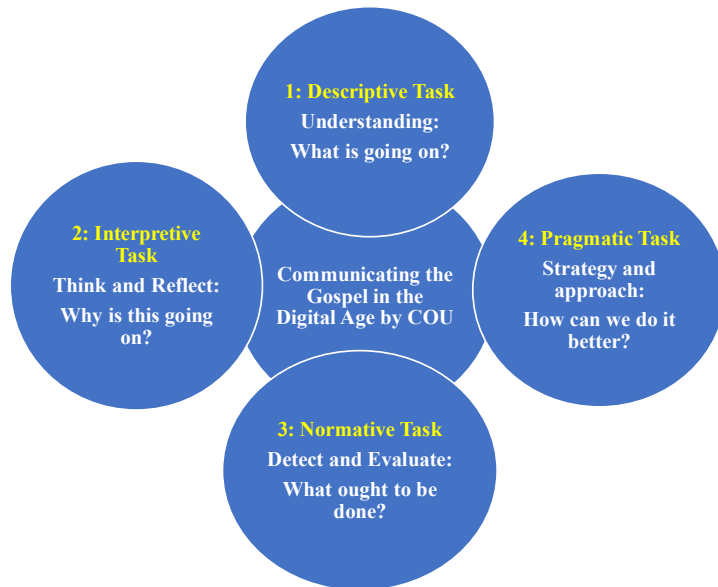


Fig 1.1 Osmer's Practical Theology model

1.8.1 Descriptive-empirical Task

The Descriptive Task is to explore what is going on (Osmer, 2008:32). This seeks to find out what is happening in the church, Christian and community life. Descriptive research helps in drawing or painting a clear and accurate picture of what is happening (Dannelley, 2013). Osmer further argues that the descriptive-empirical task allows for the priestly presence to understand what is going on in church, community and individual lives. The ministry of presence and listening ability in this task allow one to get to the root of what is happening in the church and community (Osmer, 2008 33–34). Osmer advances his argument that the priestly presence allows for listening to understand the situation. It begins with a situation in the everyday life of the believer and church that requires to be interpreted. In this case, I investigated what was happening to know the COU's understandings, attitudes and approaches to using digital media in communicating the gospel. Osmer (2008: 41) wrestles with the question of how the church can best communicate the gospel to the youth. Therefore, the descriptive-empirical task, guided by literature discussion and qualitative empirical aspects of the study, was to acquire the insight to understand the communication situation in context and to bring about transformation in the communication practice in the COU in the digital age.

1.8.2 Interpretive Task

The Interpretive Task is to explore why this is going on. Osmer (2008: 82) argues that the Interpretive Task is concerned with identifying the underlining facts by drawing on theories from other fields. This task allows one to engage the mind to acquire spiritual wisdom concerning a situation, which allows reasoning and spiritual discernment to interpret a situation. This task employs existing social science theories from literature to understand the situation (Osmer 2008:83). The process of drawing on the theories of Social Science is important in trying to make sense of what is discovered and to understand and explain why things are happening (Swinton & Mowat, 2016: 41). The interpretive task, therefore, seeks to think, reflect and reason to understand why the observed phenomenon in the descriptive task is happening to discern and determine the most effective means to bring about transformation (Osmer 2008: 33).

According to Osmer (2011: 83), this process requires the interplay of key three features such as thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgment. Different communicative theories were explored in understanding human interactions, behaviour, and actions through digital media. In this study, I engaged different theories, including the Uses and Gratifications theory (John. Greene & Burleson, 2008), Ritual View (Carey, 2009), Mediated Rituals (Couldry, 2003), Mediatiation (Hjarvard, 2017) and Cultivation Analysis theory on the participants' responses to understand why and how digital media is used. The theories helped to understand people's attitudes and approaches to the COU's digital media use. The theories guided in understanding the interpretation of why people effectively or actively seek and use specific media to meet a specific need.

Although the scientific theories of communication are critical to interpreting the situation, Osmer (2011: 1) advocates for the biblical interpretation of the situation also. The importance of biblical interpretation of scripture to attain God's wisdom concerning digital media use cannot be overstated (Claydon, 2005: 15). Therefore, since Practical Theology in interpretation draws on both scientific and biblical theories to interpret everyday life or church practice to offer a relevant solution to the situation, digital media use requires a biblical interpretation. Therefore, the normative task comes in handy to interpret the situation considering the wisdom and discernment from scripture to present new theological knowledge within the digital age context.

1.8.3 Normative Task

The Normative Task is to explore the prophetic voice of what ought to be done (Osmer, 2008: 133). This requires the theologian to engage in a thorough theological reflection by studying historical context, literature, scripture, theology and existing Christian traditions to understand how to respond to the situation in communicating the gospel (Osmer: 2011:24). The Normative engages biblical standards to know the extent to which the Church has left the normal practice as presented in scripture (Woodbridge, 2014: 96). Woodbridge further states that the task involves digging deep into scripture, praying for the situation, and listening to their stories to know how to offer guidance. As the study is being approached from the evangelical perspective, emphasis is placed on the Normative task.

The Normative is concerned with knowing what God wants us to do in a particular situation. The Normative Task is the prophetic discernment to understand the mind and will of God concerning a situation (Osmer, 2008: 135). This is the process of using theological conceptions to understand events, and construct ethical norms to guide our practices, reaction and scholarship. It determines norms and values to use to cause a change in a certain situation and suggests certain recommendations (Fallis, 2007). This task requires the use of Christian norms, which are principles and rules for conduct as informed by the Bible and Christian traditions, which further seek to discern the will of God in the situation at hand (Smith, 2003). Therefore, discovering the will of God concerning digital media from scripture is important to guide the church.

To respond to the research question, I explored the biblical teachings, and religious practices from the perspective of Christian theology, ethics and God's mind on communication to draw out theological principles to respond to the digital media communication process of the gospel by the COU. Good communication practice entailed the normative task to understand the mind of God concerning the communication of the faith, gospel, and ministry practices to guide the church (Osmer 2008:153). To understand the normative task concerning the communication practice, God's self-communication, communicative theologies, biblical narratives and the church's experiences both past and present were central, plus the knowledge of God. The God-given wisdom was accessed through scripture concerning the communication practice in society. The scriptures present wisdom on how the Church can continue in the communication task.

1.8.4 Pragmatic task

The pragmatic task is to answer how we can do it better. This is to use theological reflection to guide and offer approaches and strategies likely to improve the current situation to the desirable one (Osmer, 2005, 2008, 2011). The task is intended to bring about the most effective action which will bring about positive change in a situation. After critical reflection and interpretation concerning a situation at hand, the theologian is to suggest a new approach to practice to assume change for the congregation (2008:4). Smith et.al (2008) agree with Osmer that practical theology calls for one to understand the situation, formulate a practical theological framework and practically respond to a present situation. However, Smith highlights Osmer's focus on congregation leaders and less on practical theology students as a weakness. Nevertheless, Osmer's model is meaningful, pragmatic, and scholarly recognised.

Osmer (2008:4) emphasises how to lead a congregation through change. In this step, the points from previous tasks and theological reflections in the normative task were employed to offer approaches and suggestions. Practical Theology is concerned with bringing about transformation since it brings the world and its practices into greater agreement with the word of God (Cowan 2000). Based on the Interpretive and Normative interpretation of a particular study, Practical Theology motivates the change of a given present situation. According to the Pragmatic Task, with a critical mind concerning how communication ought to be approached, I proposed approaches to digital communication that are applicable within the context of the COU and the digital age.

One of the aims of the study is to offer church leaders' guidance to experience change in the digital media communication of the gospel. This task seeks to answer how we might respond. The Pragmatic Task in Osmer's model presents the final product from the described practice, interpreted theories, normative engagement and adjusted practice to the church and the world to bring about the possible and relevant change in the conduct of the church's digital communication practice. This task is concerned with providing the possible strategy informed by the previous tasks to bring transformation in the practice and guide the church as it progresses in a practice such as digital communication of the gospel.

The motivation for Osmer's theoretical framework is that Osmer's model includes models of good practice in the normative task that bridges the gap between Normative and Pragmatic tasks (Smith 2010). Osmer's (2011) framework applies in qualitative research, which seeks to gather information from human experience, interpret the data from people by entering into dialogue with social science, engage theology and provide action plans that can guide the congregation, theologian and leaders through a particular situation. The Osmer model allows a thorough study and understanding of the situation before interpreting it and allows a biblical reflection in the normative task to understand the biblical perspective on a situation. In addition, the Osmer model is widely used by several scholars in practical Theology. Although critics such as Woodbridge (2014: 92) and Smith (2010: 112) state that Osmer's model is liberal, lacks deep focus on scripture and needs to engage deeply in scripture, its normative task enables the researcher to engage with the scripture and the traditional Christian norms to guide the praxis. Smith et.al (2008) agrees with Osmer that Practical Theology calls for one to understand the situation, formulate a practical theological framework and practically respond to a present situation.

Osmer (2008: 23) agrees with Gadamer who introduced the concept of hermeneutical experience, which is concerned with the interpretation of the situation as open to learning resulting in new information. The hermeneutical perspective is concerned with blending theological insights and social science theories to interpret the situation at hand, which enables empirical studies to explain the reality of the phenomenon (Strong, 2011). Osmer's hermeneutical approach model that promotes the four core tasks is widely employed in empirical research. The four tasks offered by Osmer that allow a scientific-theoretical approach make it easy for empirical studies (Hennie 2017: 10). The model aids in empirical research, helps in gathering information, and provides new knowledge by entering into dialogue with social science and theology about the practice to provide transformative action and for the practice to guide the congregation, theologian and leaders (Osmer, 2011: 5). The Osmer model starts with understanding the practice at hand and allows the researcher to describe the situation, then endeavours to interpret the situation by bringing to the scene both scientific and biblical theories to provide a new approach to the practice, thus guiding the Church leaders. As a qualitative study, Osmer's hermeneutical approach aids and facilitates the qualitative empirical components.

Another reason for choosing the Osmer model is that it allows one to answer the research question and attain the aims. The aims of the study are concerned with understanding what is happening. Why is it happening? What ought to be done and how ought the church to respond? Concerning communication in the digital age, therefore, the Osmer model is important since it allows first, to carefully study and understand the digital communication practices of the church, interpret the current practices and study in detail the situation to guide the church communicators on how to effectively, faithfully and relevantly communicate the gospel in the digital age. There is, therefore, a relationship between Descriptive and Interpretive, since Descriptive provides the foundation and basis for interpretation, and guides the Theoretical, Normative and Pragmatic approaches. The Descriptive provides the Normative research with information concerning how the situation is and how it ought to be according to the theoretical and biblical norms. The Descriptive is correlated with the pragmatic since the prevailing situation will lead to the revision resulting in the new practice.

1.9 Practical Theological Contribution of the Research

The study contributes both practically and academically and contributes to the development of new literature in practical theology, digital media, and communication studies. Academically, the study attempts to meet the gap in knowledge of practical theology to bring the understandings, attitudes, and approaches to digital media use. According to Grethlein (2016:149), practical theology firstly is always oriented towards contemporary life to realign the practices with God's will about the situation. Secondly, it is a theory of the communication of the gospel, which can guide the communication practice to continue in dialogue, talks and preaching of the gospel. Thirdly, practical theology is concerned with bringing change in the living conditions and how the gospel is communicated by incorporating media technology into forms of communication and socialisation (Grethlein, 2016 pg184-185). Grethlein in his book *An Introduction to Practical Theology: History, Theory, and the Communication of the Gospel in the Present* never reflects on the possible way and approaches in which media may be used to communicate the gospel. Therefore, theological reflection on the digital media communication practice done in this study provides knowledge in the field of Practical Theology. This study attempts to inform the discipline of practical theology on the digital media use to share the gospel, arguing for the formation of online faith communities through which communication of the gospel may be done, using

theological communication approaches via a theologically informed digital communication strategy, which may maximise the benefits and reduce the challenges of digital media use.

Practically, the study contributes to the COU a theologically informed digital communication strategy, and theological communication approaches to digital communication, and suggests the need for theological and technological training for gospel communicators with the necessary skills. In the communication of the gospel through media, Lundby (2012:45) and Sogaard (1993:5) argue for continuous training for Christians in the effective use of digital technologies. Animante et al. (2021: 107) also argue that the church is to provide continuous training for church leaders in the interface with and functional features for social media, which often changes. Therefore, the study agrees with the scholars' argument for further training but goes further to provide a theologically informed guideline that may inform a certain part of training. The theologically informed approaches that the study posits when used may advance the gospel message, and the church's visibility and voice in the digital media space.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

The study has limitations; it is only focusing on the denomination of the Anglican Church of Uganda, though there are numerous denominational Churches in Uganda. Within the COU, the study is limited to two dioceses, which are dioceses in cosmopolitan cities and are normally considered models for other dioceses. In the two dioceses, I was limited to four parishes, two parishes from each diocese, which are considered very active with digital media usage for ministry. Nevertheless, the study findings will be applied to the entire COU and the Church at large.

Another limitation is that the study focuses exclusively on priests and fellowship leaders in the COU. The church leaders considered are those with the responsibility to communicate the gospel in the parish, fellowships within the parish and communities. Further, focusing on leaders might limit the amount of information from church members, however, the leaders were representative of church members.

1.11 Ethical Clearance

The study involves humans as participants and required ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University's ethical committee, which was obtained¹⁷. To obtain ethical clearance, the Stellenbosch University ethical clearance form was filled out. This required submitting an approved proposal alongside different documents such as the instruments that were to be used in collecting the data¹⁸. Before submitting it to the ethical committee of the University, I acquired clearance from the COU's provincial office¹⁹. The administrative clearance from the COU was attached to the ethical clearance application and then submitted to Stellenbosch University. The administrative clearance was presented to the priests in the parishes before I started interviewing participants. I applied for ethical clearance at Uganda Christian University REC, the representative of the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). UNCST offered permission through Uganda Christian University to conduct research in the country.²⁰

To collect the data, I made appointments with the participants, in which participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw as they wished. During data collection, I clearly explained the purpose of the study, and how the data was to be used, stored, and the participants were assured of confidentiality. The participants were assured that the data was for academic purposes with minimal risks. The recorded information was to only be accessed by me and discarded after two years when the research was closed.

1.12 Definition of Terms

- 1.2.1 **Church:** This is a community of the people of God gathering together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to worship and share the gospel message (Niringiye, 2014: 24), an example being the Anglican Church of Uganda.
- 1.2.2 **Communication:** This is viewed as a dynamic, symbolic process in which people in the dialogue make meaning and express their feelings in which they understand, share values,

¹⁷ Addendum B presents the Ethical clearance certificate from Stellenbosch University page 245.

¹⁸ Addendum D and E contain the research Focus Group Discussion and Interview guides that were followed in collecting data from the participants pages 250-252

¹⁹ Addendum A permission from the Provincial office of Church of Uganda to collect data from the selected Dioceses of Church of Uganda page 244

²⁰ Addendum C presents the Ethical clearance permission from Uganda Christian University for UNCST page 248

live and behave in society (Fortner, 2006). Communication is not simply the transmission of information but a conversation, and interaction among the parties (Carey, 2009). To communicate is to share, interact and converse.

- 1.2.3 **Digital Age:** This refers to the period in which personal computers and other subsequent technologies were introduced to provide users with the ability to easily and quickly send information. It includes online and social media (IGI Global Disseminator of Knowledge, igi-global.com). The digital age is due to the digital revolution of the late 20th century which has seen technological advancement in communication media (Lewis, 2014).
- 1.2.4 **Digital communication:** This is the way we use computers, phones, and other electronic devices to send and receive digital messages to one another (Peter et al., 2013: 2). Digital communication is the principal medium for communication in the 21st century blending digital, radio, TV, email, social networking sites, news, Bibles, books and all digital tools. It is the communication that takes place on digital media platforms, which are facilitated by the internet, particularly through digital media applications and platforms.
- 1.2.5 **Digital media:** In the study, digital media is viewed broadly to include interactive and electronic media. Electronic media use digital codes rather than analogue to create digital content in different forms (ExplorNet/The Centers for Quality Teaching and Learning). Digital media expands beyond social media to include the internet of things and the use of screens to communicate (Hutchinson, 2016: 1). Digital media integrates storage and transmission speed capacity (Finnemman, 2011:84) plus interactivity, immediacy and capacity (Lundby, 2012:45) and includes digital platforms, digitised content that is available and accessed using digital devices (Nayyar, 2016: 15). In this study, digital media are platforms, applications, gadgets, electronic media and use of the internet through which persons communicate electronically to exchange information, interact, socialise, connect and communicate a given message synchronically and asynchronously²¹.
- 1.2.6 **Digital technologies:** These are electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or prose data – examples being multimedia, mobile phones, social media

²¹ Synchronically means communication and activities happening in real-time, and asynchronously is communication not happening in real-time, and both are evident in digital communication through digital media platforms (Dictionary.com).

and online games (Victoria Educations and Training: education.vic.gov.ac). This kind of technology allows the compression of lots of information onto small mobile storage devices.

- 1.2.7 **Gospel:** John Piper (2009: 2) argues that the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came, lived, died for our sins and rose again to demonstrate God's saving grace for humanity. This is the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ as it is communicated in the Holy Bible, which Christians and churches such as the COU use as a basis for teaching.
- 1.2.8 **Media:** These are communication channels or tools used in storing and conveying information. Examples are radio, television, print, telephone, computer, and the internet which reach people widely (Dictionary.com).
- 1.2.9 **New media:** These refer to Web 2.0, encompassing a wide variety of web-related communication technologies such as blogs, wikis, online social networking, virtual worlds and other social media forms (Friedman & Friedman, 2011).
- 1.2.10 **Social media:** These are digital communication websites such as social networking sites and social platforms through which users create online communities, interact, and share information such as ideas, texts, images, videos and other messages (Merriam Webster, 2004).

Chapter 2: The Historical Overview of Communication Media

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a contextual understanding of the digital communication of the gospel by the Church of Uganda (COU). To explore the communication situation, this chapter seeks to explore the first aim of the study namely, to provide a historical overview of the mediums used in communication in general and the gospel. It deals with the concept of communication, the historical overview of the various media of communication and how the mediums were/are used in communicating the gospel. Osmer's descriptive task of practical theology helps to understand what is going on.

To understand digital communication, the chapter is structured following the descriptive task of practical theology, which requires describing the situation to understand the practice within the context of the study. This requires the priestly presence to listen and understand the situation (Osmer, 2008: 33). Communication and the use of media in advancing the gospel in the world are discussed showing the trajectory of communication media and how it has evolved from one medium to another. The discussion of literature focuses on the different types of communication media used as channels in the spread of the gospel since the beginning and how they were and may still be intentionally used in the continuous process of communicating the gospel by churches and specifically the Church of Uganda in the digital age. The historical overview of the mediums of communication lay the foundation for an informed and contextual understanding of communicating the gospel by the COU in the digital age. The chapter concludes that the use of the media of the time is not a replacement for the previous media but a supplement and an opportunity to advance the gospel

2.2 The Communication Process

The description of the communication practice is crucial in the study. Communication holds a significant place in society throughout all generations. It has been and will always be part of both God and human beings, and it dominates everyday activities of life. Bussotti (2015: 206) states that 'Communication is a noun with its origin from a Latin verb 'communicare' which means 'to

share', and according to the French, communication originates from 'communication', which also means to share. The term 'communicare' was first perceived as a term meant for sharing physical items such as consumables. As studies advanced, the term was later associated with knowledge and information shared by humans, which allowed people to exchange thoughts, views and messages (Amudavalli, n.d.). Stephen and Little (2009: 21) state that communication is concerned with how people behave – creating, exchanging and interpreting messages.

There are several ways to describe communication. According to McQuail (2013:12), communication 'is transmitting and sending information linearly from sender to receiver'. Communication is also viewed as the process of distributing information, ideas, facts, opinions, and lessons between two or more people (Amudavalli, n.d.). When a message is shared verbally or nonverbally between parties, then communication is happening. Rice (2016: 5) takes it further to say that communication is when a sender transfers information to the receiver to change the mind and bring about control. However, Colombo (2004:11) defines communication as a two-step flow where informed people transmit the information to their followers with the desire that they understand and interpret the message. Previously, communication was widely viewed and limited to the transmission of the message from a sender to receiver in oral, audio, written or digital form (McQuail, 2005: 94). Presently, communication is also considered a two-way process through which participants exchange thoughts, information, messages, ideas and feelings to express clearly their knowledge and attain mutual understanding (Amudavalli, n.d). To James Carey, communication is 'to converse, interact and share in the community' (2009:29). Griffin (2018: 38) affirms the relationship aspect of communication. Communication allows people to participate in a conversation to make meaning, and share feelings, thoughts, and values, thus resulting in a change of behaviour (Fortner, 2006: 281). It involves the exchange of ideas and messages from sender to receiver and vice versa (Soler-Adillon et al., 2016: 196). Therefore, understanding communication in any era or age of operation is crucial since people now have established interacting communities in the digital world.

In the process of communication, different media have been used from the origin of communication to date. It has experienced shifts and has evolved with technological and media advancement in different eras from the oral, written, print, mass and digital communication eras

(Lytle 2013: xx). In addition to oral forms of communication were written, print, broadcast, and digital media, and all these different media call for different forms and genres in communications. Whenever the communication media advances, the practices and experiences of communication change alongside it (Nordquist, 2020: 4). In the communication process, the medium as a channel of communication through which information is delivered from sender to receiver linearly requires critical reflection (Sapienza & Veenstra, 2017: 11). In some communication theories, the medium is not just a channel of communication but an environment that allows communication to happen, which may change the meaning of information transferred (Amudavalli, n.d). In the communication process of a given message, the distribution of information, ideas, facts, opinions, and lessons between two or more people is impossible without a medium and an environment for communication.

In addition to the medium of communication, some key factors are important for any effective communication. Amudavalli (n.d), in the *Theory of Communication*, mentions the key factors of communication, which include: the source of information, the sender of information, the message or information or ideas to be conveyed, the receiver and feedback. The sender or the communicator is the one who encodes the message by using an appropriate medium to deliver the message (Griffin, 2018: 39). The message in the communication process is sent by the sender through different forms such as verbal, nonverbal, written, audio, visual, audio-visual, and digital forms to the different audiences using an applicable medium (Manage, 2000: 10–15). The message is important because it helps in the meaning-making process (Yolanda, 2015:6). The receivers are the ones who decode the message or information sent and are important since they receive the information. Through any media outlets, when the receivers decode the message, they are normally required to respond to the transmitted message, thus creating an interactive approach to communication.

2.3 An Overview of Communication Medium in Ugandan Society

Historically, communication in African is rooted in the oral tradition with the culture of storytelling by storytellers using different verbal expressions, as stated by Sheppard (2003: xx). Storytelling is sharing and expressing feelings, thoughts, attitudes, views and opines from one's experiences mainly through oral tradition (Tuwe, 2016: xx). Oral communication is widely employed in

different parts of Africa including Uganda to transmit knowledge, values and experiences from one generation to another. In oral communication, information is verbally transmitted face-to-face in communal interactions and conversations, leading to the sharing of meaning, culture and belief (Singh 2003: 189). Sheppard further asserts that African literature is orally composed, transmitted and created to be verbally and communally performed. Oral media and literature define African communication and it is highly interactive, interpersonal and promotes immediate feedback, which makes communication effective (Finnegan, 2012: 22). It is known that the majority of Africans will participate in formal and informal storytelling through interactive participation through stories, music, proverbs, poems, drama, and songs (Goliama, 2010: 1). Among most cultures in Africa, it is through oral communication that traditions, morals and values are passed from generation to generations. The African societies were primarily orality in expression in which the culture was not concerned with writing or printing (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

In the African oral culture, sometimes information is verbally communicated in communal conversations among participants. The verbal word-of-mouth communication among participants allows for the use of sounds, language, songs, stories and poems which facilitate daily conversations (Berger & Iyengar, 2013: 569). Word-of-mouth is normally used to communicate to organise societies, share values and beliefs, and distribute necessary information (Bowman, 2003: 26). In community conversations, verbal and non-verbal expressions are normally put into consideration to enrich a given message. In many African communities, non-verbal expressions enrich or send a certain message (Langmia & Haddad Nunez, 2015: 472). Verbal communication is normally accompanied by a non-verbal expression for several reasons. The non-verbal expression such as kneeling accompanies the verbal greeting, which depicts respect for the elders. Non-verbal expressions are normally known as rituals, which communicate a given message.

Rituals are powerful expressions that are used in orality to communicate important aspects of African religion and different beliefs (Grillo, 2012: 113). With the participatory nature of rituals, beliefs, knowledge and values are expressed and imparted to members through bodily expressions. In support of orality, body language and non-verbal expressions through any action or expression during a social and religious activity communicate one's faith and belief, which can be extended to everyone in the community through observation. Grillo (2012:114) states that the body in

African rituals bears specific importance in practice of communication and the expression of faith; for through rituals, Africans communicate and transmit ideas and values. In African religion, divination and sacrifices are rituals instigated by individuals orally and symbolically (Grillo, 2012). Therefore, rituals are strong deeds in which African Traditional Religion is practised, experienced and shared.

Suleiman (2011) argues that African communication is embedded in the orality, originality, creativity, tradition, spoken language and culture of its people. It is embedded in rituals to deliver beliefs and values (Grillo, 2012: 254). Bussotti (2015: 213) states that African communication is easily done through indigenous forms such as symbols and language that dominate the culture, including stories, beating drums, images, dances, traditional songs and culture. Suleiman (2011: 25) emphasises that the African traditional media are the indigenous forms of communication employed in oral tradition, which include; storytelling, talking drums, artworks, painting and cultural architecture. Kehinde et al. (2014: 5) takes it further by stating that in African communication, in addition to indigenous forms of communication, mediators (communicators) are central and use different symbols in oral communication. Furthermore, spiritual, moral, ethical, and educational values are passed on through conversations and communicators play an important role (Sheppard, 2003). In oral communication, the mediator that facilitates a conversation, employs a variety of symbols, forms and expressions to share a given message.

In Uganda, daily conversations with a rich vocabulary of words from different languages circulate through oral communication and help maintain social relations (Singh, 2003:190). In pre-colonial Uganda, each society had a language, set of customs and traditions, which regulated social behaviour (Bussotti, 2015) and were orally communicated to pass on messages, culture, values and traditions. Kizza (2010:15) mentions that in Uganda the Baganda rely on their cherished tradition, language, and folk stories to communicate communally about different topics such as parenting, hard work, religion and entertainment. Kizza continues to state that Buganda was known to possess plenty of colourful, authentic, beautiful expressions and interesting storytelling times around the fireplace where morals, beliefs, customs and values were passed on through storytelling, music, dancing and cultural events. Growing up in Uganda, one listens to folk stories and songs in community interactions through indigenous and electronic media (Sheppard, 2003).

Although different media are employed in communication, Ugandans still engage oral tradition in communication using different forms, to extend a given message.

In emphasising the richness, beauty and use of indigenous media in Ugandan communication, Mushengyezi (2003: 108) states that communication in Uganda hinges on rich cultural dialectics within the society using indigenous forms, which shape the environment in which the message is decoded. He further states that indigenous forms such as storytelling, Ugandan proverbs, traditional songs, and drama in the communication of messages are appreciated and accepted forms of communication in Uganda. Nevertheless, the indigenous forms are presently more effective in the deep rural areas among the illiterate. Oral indigenous communication is done in families, at village meetings, organisations, marketplaces, car parks and at community wells (Mundy & Lloyd-Laney, 1992). Indigenous communication in small communities is considered helpful in the decision-making process and sharing of information among one another, thus spreading a given message within the communities (Vajda, 2015: 8). However, since the advancement in education, technology and communication media, the majority of Ugandans are employing different media to share information, communicate and have long-distance conversations with family members and friends (Lugalambi, Mwesige & Bussiek, 2010: 58). Due to modernity and a shift in communication media, face-to-face community meetings are becoming increasingly minimal due to the possibility of using different media to communicate a given message to the community members without physical meeting.

In Uganda, written communication is actively employed in communication. Written communication was taught in Uganda by the missionaries through an evangelical Anglican missions, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), from England (Openjuru & Lyster, 2007: 99). To date, Ugandans transmit information in writing mode, which is taught in schools and homes. Through the written media, information has reached many people in different locations at different times. Berger and Iyengar (2013: 569) state that employing different communication media from oral to written, print, broadcasting and digital promote the distribution of information. The written material is often transferred into print material into multiple copies for many to access, which allows asynchronous communication. The print media industry in Uganda is obvious with evidence of newspaper, printing places, and stationaries, through which many books, magazines

and Bibles are printed (Odongo, 2010: 49). Odongo further argues that despite the challenges of print media, it has been advancing and growing. Therefore, the introduction of print media led to the wide spread of printed material in Uganda, which later evolved into broadcasting media.

Media in Uganda promotes freedom of expression, as stated in Uganda's Constitution. The Uganda Constitution (1995) guarantees press freedom and freedom of expression. Article 29 (1) states that 'every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media'. Since 1993 to date, the broadcasting sector has dramatically grown and is actively in use by people, companies and organisations (Lugalambi et al., 2010: 79). For media access in Uganda, radio is still the leading media mainly used and television is no longer a luxury in homes (Fiedler & Meyen 2016: 10-13). Lugalambi et al. (2010: 48) argue that Ugandans receive information mainly from the radio due to its affordability and penetration level. Therefore, radio is still a medium that is mainly used and a primary source of information. Radio is affordable and easily accessible for most Ugandans (Brisset-Foucault, 2018: 255; UCC, 2015: 8). In addition, television is owned in homes and also viewed in urban centres in different districts of the country. However, with the digitisation²² process, television and radio are being digitised in the process of upgrading to match the communication trends in the digital age (William, 2016: 356).

In the digital age, radio and television stations offer their broadcasts via the internet and on different social media platforms through mobile digital media gadgets. A household and individual survey on ICT use showed a great number of people using mobile phones to access radios in homes, communicate and access information (NITA, 2017: 130). With mobile phones, audiences can call into broadcast stations and engage in ongoing discussions (Masuki & Kamugisha 2010:2). Mobile phones, as noted by Goliama (2010), have advanced oral communication in Uganda through audio, audio-visual calls and audio or video recordings. In 2020, of the total population of Uganda, 60% used mobile phones and 5.6%²³ social media connections. The presence of new ICTs such as computers, the internet and smart mobile phones has facilitated the idea that people can now voice their concerns, engage in ongoing conversations and participate in wider debates

²² Digitisation is when information is converted into digital format, which are discrete units of data known as bits (Williams, 2016).

²³ www.Dataportal.com/reports/digital-2020-uganda#; accessed 1 March 2021

(Souter, 2014:2). Through mobile phones and the internet, face-to-face communication is rapidly being replaced by digital communication due to its convenience (Masuki & Kamugisha, 2010:10). It is important to note that the report by Fiedler and Meyen (2016: 12) showed high internet usage among Ugandans with a number of them accessing the internet through their digital media gadgets. By the close of 2020, about 18.5 million Ugandans were active on the internet.²⁴ However, the cost of the internet is still high and a great hindrance to wider internet penetration in Uganda (NITA Uganda 2018: 190). Nevertheless, the government still desires to expand internet coverage throughout all the districts in Uganda to develop digital media capacity and digitisation of broadcasting media (Gillwald, Mothob & Tusubira, 2019: 3).

Digital media is improving communication and spreading information in different parts of Uganda, including the rural parts. They are considered fast and easy ways to disperse a message (Masuki, Mowo, Tnui, Mogoi, Adera & J, 2010: 9). Digital media includes electronic and all traditional media that allow interactivity and use of hypertext through the internet (Dresang & Koh, 2009: 29). Although it is a little complex to define digital media in its entirety, one would say any media that aids the production, delivery of a message, receipt and interaction across the world and allows an invitation to the ongoing discussions through the internet is a form of digital media. Digital media integrates storage and transmission speed capacity (Finnemman, 2011: 84) plus interactivity, immediacy and capacity (Lundby, 2012: 45). It includes digital platforms and digitised content available and accessed using digital devices (Nayyar, 2016: 17). Digital media includes different telecommunication media including phones, radios and television that get integrated into digital media (Peter et al., 2013: 8). Digital media is mobile through different gadgets such as laptops, tablets, smartphones and all screen gadgets used to connect and access the world via the internet (Cheong, Halavais & Kwon, 2008: 117). Digital media is facilitated by internet availability and connects people in a conversation, thus attracting many to participate in the ongoing conversations (Pavlik, 2008: 5). Therefore, the digital media landscape in general consists of different technologies and communication media, as shown in the diagram below.

²⁴ www.statista.com/statistics/505883/number-of-internet-users-in-african-countries: accessed on 4 March 2021

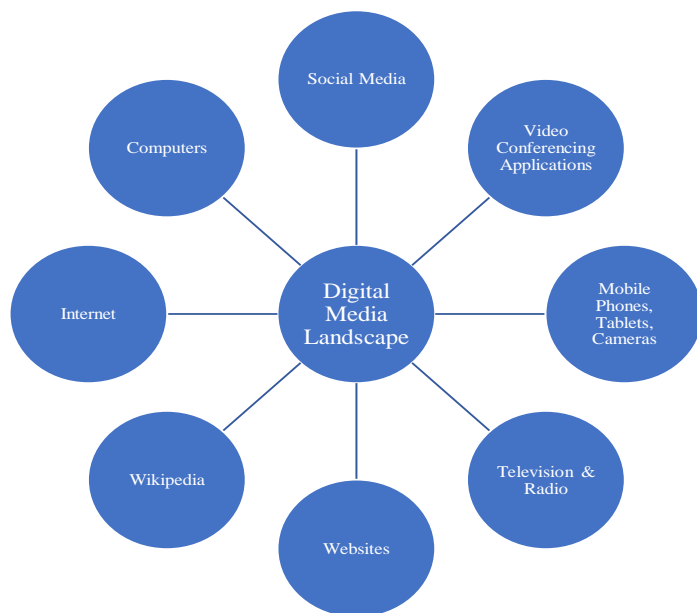


Figure 2.1 The tools used within the digital media landscape

The digital media landscape presents the outlets, including social media platforms, mobile phones, ICT gadgets, video conference applications, television, radio, and active use of the internet. All digital media tools are employed to access, share and receive digitised content. With the widespread advantages of technology and digital media, employing digital media is likely to enable institutions such as the COU to extend messages to the wider community. The COU is continuing to use a blend of different media in communicating the gospel, including oral, written, print, broadcasting and digital media. Therefore, with the growth and development in the digital media industry, organisations including the COU, the clergy and leaders will disseminate the Christian message, communicate to their parishioners and engage in ongoing conversations on digital media platforms, consequently allowing them to create a connection with people far from the Church.

2.4 An Overview of the Media Used in Gospel Communication

The gospel imperative through the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15)²⁵ is for all the disciples to communicate it across the world (Lewis, 2014: xx). The church is commissioned

²⁵ 'Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28: 19 NIV).

to communicate the gospel to allow people to engage with it and experience God and invite people into the kingdom of God and in fellowship with God (Mbewe, 2020: 23). With communication at the centre of the Great Commission, the instruction by the Lord requires that all his disciples go out into the world, which is now divided into the physical and the digital world (Mahan & Pomory, 2017: 69) to communicate the gospel message. The gospel is the key message for Christian communication in any world in which the church operates (Petersingh, 2003: 111). The gospel imperative to all disciples is to share the gospel story; therefore, knowing the content, and how and where to share it through different generations is important. The gospel has been communicated in most parts of the geographical areas in Uganda but scarcely communicated in the digital world.

Essentially, the media of gospel communication has shifted from generation to generation as a result of technological advancement. The medium is a channel of communication through which any message including the gospel message is delivered (Sapienza & Veenstra, 2017: 4). Marshall et al. (2001: 142) argued that the medium is the message, mentioning that people are impacted by the media used, making the medium central in message delivery. Different media are considered for different eras, such as the tribal era for hearing the oral message, literate time for the written literature, print time for printed text and electronic for sight and sound (Marshall McLuhan Quentin Fiore & Jerome Age, 2001). Miller (2004: 8) argues that the history of church practices and communication is divided into four eras. He makes a matrix to describe oral, print, broadcast, and digital communication and their influences on the church. Lytle (2013) mentions eras such as oral, written, mass-mediated and interactive media. Gospel communication media has progressed through oral, written, mass media and digital communication, causing a paradigm shift in the sharing the gospel story from origin to date. With technological and media advancement in Uganda, faithful church communicators are exploring all possible ways to share their messages effectively in the digital age. The media used to advance the gospel message throughout the generations develops and advances over different eras from oral, to written, print, broadcasting and digital mediums.

2.5 Oral Communication of the Gospel

Oral communication is considered by Barrow (2009:3) as the purest and oldest form of human communication, which is verbal and interactive. In oral communication, the social transmission of knowledge and information is predominately face-to-face interaction (Petersingh, 2003: 105). Oral communication is spontaneous and synchronous, which allows communication to happen in real-time, especially face-to-face and phone call communication (Berger & Iyengar, 2013: 568). Coppedge (2019: 1) states that oral communication depends on spoken word, verbal speech, songs, drama, proverbs, poems, dance and stories in real-time. Oral communication of the gospel message is evident in conversation, preaching, teaching, reading scripture, discussion in groups, Bible study, singing, listening to audio messages, drama, reading and responding to scripture (Ayee, 2013: 6–7). Ayee further argues that communication is God’s gift to humanity and allows people to orally communicate in fellowship with people and with God. Most people engage in sharing and listening to a variety of biblical stories and messages for edification and spiritual nourishment. Through stories, different community members share history, wisdom, culture and faith. Stories are central in impacting people’s behaviours and, with a persuasive communicator, one can make life-transforming decisions (Jonah & Berger, 2013: 569). In oral communication, stories can act as a medium and message, advancing McLuhan’s view that the medium is the message. Since oral communication is synchronous, Barrow (2009: 13) states that with it, a given message is delivered in real-time, allowing face-to-face interaction between the orator and the listener and benefiting from both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication.

Oral communication is not unique to Africans and Ugandans but evident in the biblical narrative through which the gospel message was shared. The gospel story was shared orally through stories, testimonies, and inspirations, and was later documented by inspired men. Bowman (2003: 3) states that God, the Prophets, Jesus Christ, and the early church Christians all communicated the gospel orally to people. Bowman further states that during the early Church, for almost 100 years, the gospel was communicated orally. Soukup (2002: 25) states that despite the written scriptures available, the Bible narrators, prophets, apostles and early theologians faithfully participated in the oral mode of communication of the message. With evidence in scripture, oral tradition was very predominant in Jesus’ ministry and the early Church. Following the example of the early church,

oral communication is evident in the Church in Uganda and Africa at large. Through oral communication, the gospel story is verbally communicated in all churches and communities.

The gospel first came to Uganda when the King of Buganda, Kabaka Mutesa I, sent a letter to the Queen of England in 1874 which appeared in the newspapers, and in response, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent missionaries to proclaim the gospel in Uganda (Coppedge, 2019: 18). Upon the CMS' arrival, they orally communicated the gospel to the King and his chiefs (Billington, 2015; Byaruhanga, 2008: 14). The missionaries, together with the converted chiefs, moved across the country spreading the gospel message (Niringiye, 2016: 51). The missionaries' early realisation of the place of oral tradition in Uganda enabled the oral use of indigenous language to spread the gospel (Chibita & Fourie, 2007: 2). The oral communication medium allowed them to proclaim the message to many hence the spread of the gospel and religion. Pace (2011: 209) states that religion's strength comes from the ability to communicate the belief system in communities, which the missionaries ably did in the Ugandan communities.

During the missionary's teaching and preaching, the lay evangelists orally interpreted the message into local languages and used proverbs and riddles common to the people to bring the message close to the hearts of the people, says Coppedge (2019: 179). Kizza (2010: 16) argues that the Buganda culture's system of teaching and sharing stories orally around the fireplace through storytelling, songs, rhymes, and games were helpful, in community communication of the gospel. With oral communication, interesting stories and proverbs common to Buganda culture were used in gospel sharing to both old and young in homes and communities. Although the CMS missionaries were conversant with other media communication, according to Byaruhanga (2008: 13), they encouraged lay catechists to spread the gospel using the oral indigenous forms of communication to different parts of the country, including Toro, Bunyoro, Bunyoro and Ankole Kingdoms. As the lay catechists communicated the gospel to different regions in the country, they mainly relied on the indigenous tools of oral mediums such as stories, drama, proverbs, and riddles which facilitated the wide spread of the Christian message. Especially during the East African revival, the message was communicated orally through indigenous media, personal testimonies and oral preaching of the gospel (Niringiye, 2016: 95). The East African revival in 1930 and 1940 advanced the spread of the gospel and strengthened the established COU (Miranda, 2007: 28). The

Revivalists emphasised the oral sharing of the message, testimonies, personal struggles, public confession and repentance. The informal conversations, public preaching, testimonies, singing, drama, dance, stories and colourful images employed in oral communication enabled the COU evangelists to spread the gospel. As missionaries and saved (Balokole) orally shared the gospel story in physical communities, the COU in the digital age may continue to orally share the gospel story in both the physical and digital communities.

The oral media forms of communication which are interactive allow immediacy and feedback (Goliama 2010: 30) in the process of communication. Oral communication of the gospel is intimate and allows interaction between and among people during the gospel sharing by Christian communicators. In the digital age, the Church of Uganda continues to communicate the gospel in both the physical and online space using oral forms of communication. Since the oral tradition shares attributes with digital media such as interactivity, immediacy, and conversation (Lundby, 2009: 32) the gospel message can be interactively, immediately and communally shared with digital media users in this digital age (Drescher, 2011; Lytle, 2013). Therefore, oral communication of the gospel is clearly articulated and extended in digital space through digital media in different forms that apply to digital media. Although the various oral expressions are central in gospel sharing, oral media has limitations such as loss of message in the process; nevertheless, it is still significant in gospel sharing by the COU both in physical and digital spaces. However, it is clear that historically the oral mode evolved into the written mode of communication.

2.6 Written Communication of the Gospel

In addition to oral tradition is the written mode of communication. The shift from oral to written form was due to the storage of knowledge in written form (Petersingh, 2003: 106). The written forms of communication came on the scene in 3300 BCE as cuneiform, hieroglyphics and alphabetic symbols, which offered standard signs and meaning (Lytle, 2013: xx). The thoughts and verbal speech were now written on stone, clay, papyrus and much later paper. In the early days, writing was limited to scribes and copyists who wrote manuscripts twice a year (Lytle, 2013). Although writing impacted people, the written texts were scarce, and the receivers and writers never interacted. In writing the receiver became unknown to the writer, and feedback was rare.

Nevertheless, writing never replaced oral face-to-face communication but supplemented the oral form.

Written communication allows the recording of events, dates, and histories in chirographic and print forms (Barrow, 2009: 6). With the written option, the oral information, stories and ideas became linearly transcribed and scripted in signs and symbols and shared with others. Since written communication is asynchronous, it allows the writer to reflect, write detailed information, and edit the text to offer the necessary message with relevant examples (Zhao, Berger & Li, 2020: 36). Unlike oral communication, written communication in letters or texts allows people to bring more interesting thought and well-researched information. This results in stories and history produced and presented on hardcopy for all to access and study anytime and anywhere.

In communicating the gospel, written communication was employed to preserve the message. Lytle (2013) argues that when the eyewitnesses of Jesus began to die, the oral tradition of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and teachings had to be preserved in written form. This was done in the form of letters, scrolls, paintings and images of biblical stories. From 40 to 52 CE the apostles and especially apostle Paul's letters, were circulating across the regions to churches (Coppedge, 2019: 71). Paul's letters with the gospel message allowed him to connect with people beyond time and space. Bowman (2003: 3) adds that some early fathers in Italy and North Africa followed Paul's communication model of letter writing, allowing them to document several forms of Christian literature asynchronously. The wisdom and knowledge from the gospel became personally accessible for several reasons. Asynchronous methods allow a message to transcend time and space which lives years after the writing of it (Berger, 2020: 8). However, this mode does not encourage the reader to see the author's facial expressions, gestures and body language (Sulaiman, 2011: 9). Nevertheless, the mode allows the writers to write a formal and permanent piece that is well-edited to communicate the gospel message across borders. This media continues to give religious writers the ability to exchange the gospel message and letters across great distances, received and read at different times (Simonson, 2016: 6). However, this mode does not promote live interactions like the oral mode. Instead, the interaction can happen after a long time – that is if a reply is sent in response. Nevertheless, it is widely used both in physical and virtual communities to spread a certain message.

As stated earlier, it was the Kabaka's (King) written letter that led to missionaries coming to Uganda. In response to the letter, the missionaries communicated the gospel in Buganda Kingdom, and they taught the Kabaka's chiefs how to read and write (Openjuru & Lyster, 2007: 99). The converted Buganda Kingdom chiefs were able to read the Bible and write lessons, which they shared with other people. The missionary centres where the new converts/saved ('Balokole') met, were places of reading and writing (Niringiye, 2016: 96). As the 'Balokole' read the Bible in fellowships and private life, they were to share their written lessons alongside their testimonies. The Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, hymn books, and study notes were to be revised to equip them for evangelism to different parts (Niringiye, 2016: 98; Byaruhanga, 2008: 87). The 'Balokole' (saved) elite leaders such as Simeon Nsibambi, William Nagenda, Festo Kivengere and Erica Sabiiti facilitated the discussion of written scriptures during fellowship time, in informal conversations and dialogues with fellow elites and other believers in the community (Stanley, 2017: 13). Therefore, employing written sermons, devotions and topical discussion can guide and attract many to the ongoing conversation among offline and online faith communities as guided by the COU leaders.

Although the written mode was practised manually on paper, nowadays with the advancement in communication media, digital media advances the written mode making it possible to write and store any content in digital form. Zhao et al. (2020: 31) state that the written medium is relevant in the contemporary world and it can further advance digital communication of the gospel to reach users with Christian text messages. Although written digital communication lacks physical presence and strong social ties (Berger & Iyengar, 2013: 570), it should never hinder the communicator from focusing on the audience behind the screen as the message is being drafted and delivered since it can have a positive effect on the reader. As written communication enabled the apostles to reflect and write their convictions, the digital media platforms enable the church ministers to write blogs and articles to share with online communities that can access them from any part of the world. Unlike written information on paper, online written communication tends to reach wider audiences anytime, anywhere although with weaker social ties. As in the past, the written information was transferred through print media and in the digital age it is digitally shared. The COU's written digital content might be preserved, made available to wider audiences and

accessible from every part of the world. Therefore, as the Reformers preserved written content in print form, the COU's written digital Christian content deliberately distributed on websites, blogs, emails, social media platforms and in all digital forms might be preserved in digital form and be accessed by many in the digital world searching for Christian content to derive the meaning and purpose of life.

2.7 Mass Print Communication of the Gospel

The written mode evolved into a mass print mode of communication. The print media is common in Uganda and evident in books, newspapers, newsletters, printed material on billboards and printed letters. The mass print is concerned with the distribution of the same message across the globe. It commenced at the inauguration of Gutenberg's press. Although the Egyptians had processes to print books in 1350 BCE, the invention of the Printing Press in 1440 by Gutenberg was a great communication innovation for the world, and it made a great impact in religious communities after Luther posted the 95 theses during the Reformation (Lytle, 2013: xx); although, Soukup (2019:12) argues that the era of the Printing Press slightly predated the Reformation period. Nevertheless, the printing age dominated the scene and expanded to 1855 when millions of Christian books were printed (Schmitz, 2012: 860). The Protestant Reformers and their Catholic counterparts used the new medium rapidly to print and disseminate Christian information as the gospel advanced. However, according to studies, Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, led the way in the wide use of Gutenberg's invention and print technology to provide Bibles and Christian literature to people, thus spreading the gospel to all. Coppedge (2019: 158) states that the Reformers considered the printing press as a gift from God to disseminate scripture and Christian literature to the masses. The technology of the printing press introduced mass media communication, now evident in the mass production of books, newspapers and Bibles, thus enabling the distribution of the written word in print (Nordquist 2020:3). The printing availed Bibles and Christian literature across the globe as facilitated by the printing press (Bowman 2013: 2). Initially the language was a challenge, nevertheless scripture was interpreted into vernacular and the vernacular printed Bibles were made available to people to enable both laity and scholars to read and engage with scripture (Soukup, 2002). The availability of printed literature, especially in local languages, fuelled conversations and discussions of the Christian content within communities (William, 2016). With the print documents, members in the religious communities

became literate and analytical and derived meaning from scripture which they later shared with others.

The printing technology enabled the missionaries to possess and distribute Bibles during the communication of the gospel in Uganda, thus making the Bibles readily available in the missionary centres and homes (Stanley, 2017: 10). Although the print media was used greatly in the transmission mode of communication, which was one way of communicating the gospel by the missionaries and church, as stated by Chibita (2007: 12), the printed materials such as the Bible, Book of Common Prayers, written prayers, and hymns brought by missionaries were translated into indigenous mother-tongue languages to aid interpretation and interaction during Bible study discussions (Ajibade, 2017: 3; Niringiye, 2016: 50). Niringiye further mentions that missionaries such as G. L. Pilkington, the linguist, alongside Henry Wright Duta translated the Bible into vernacular (Luganda) by 1897. Using the translated versions of the Bible to communicate, the missionaries and new converts were able to teach different people in different regions in the local language. This enabled the widespread use of the translated material by Ugandan indigenous church leaders and believers to allow many people to participate in the communication process. Consequently, there was a heavy demand for the vernacular Bibles and a desire to engage in the discussion using local dialects as guided by the translated Bible and Christian literature (Niringiye, 2016: 334). This enabled many converts to access printed text and feel at home with the new faith and, therefore, engaged in sharing it with others in their communities.

Although print material accelerated and made Bibles available, in the digital age, Bibles are digitised and are accessed in digital form on different digital media applications and social media platforms (Phillips, Schiefelbein-Guerrero & Kurlberg, 2019: 30). Many Christians and preachers use both hard copy print Bibles and digitised Bibles accessed through different applications. On different digital media gadgets such as phones and computers, Christians have downloaded Bible applications, which they use for Bible reading, Bible study and gospel communication. However, the COU is challenged to digitise more Christian literature and documents to provide digital content that is easily accessible. The church documents and rituals when shared through digital platforms will avail more Christian documents and rituals in the digital form. Digitised Christian content in different forms supplements the usage of print material for communication and allows

all people including the illiterate and disabled to participate in a conversation or discussion although absent (Goliama, 2011: xii). This indicates that digital media may be inclusive as it brings verbal and audio content from documents and supplements other media. Therefore, the availability of digitised Christian content and rituals may make Christian information easily accessible making communication and saturation of Christian content quick and easy. With the evolution in communication, print mass media evolved into electronic media which came with broadcasting services, such as radio and television.

2.8 Broadcasting Medium of the Gospel

After the print media, Guglielmo Marconi's invention led to the invention of the radio and radio communication, which later led to the invention of television (Pavlik, 2008: 111). The first broadcasting radio station was Pittsburgh KDKA which went on air when the first Sunday service went on air in 1921 (Coppedge, 2019: 212) advancing communication media through satellite communications for wider coverage. Broadcasting services through the radio and television allowed communication across long distances, using audio and audio-visual messages (Barrow, 2009: 5). Broadcasting offers an opportunity for the message to spread across wider audiences (Soukup, 2002). Although broadcasting media can be employed independently, it came in as a great supplement to oral and print media. Therefore, radio services allowed the delivery of messages from one to many since radio programmes could be broadcasted to many listeners in different places but at the same time. On the other hand, television advances radio communication by bringing the visual aspect to it and offers an attractive audio-visual aspect of communication of a given message to the world (Soukup, 2002: 22). However, broadcasting media is experiencing a digital change to offer digitised content (William, 2016: 207). Pavlik (2008: 28) states that digital radio and television are key components of digital media in the digital age to deliver digital signals facilitated by the internet. Digital video and audio allow the broadcasting of good quality services that attract both government and private communicators to advance messages across mass audiences at the same time.

In Uganda, although the broadcasting services at their inception were mainly for the government, religious institutions took advantage of the services. It was in the late 20th Century that many television stations were opened, which allowed Christians to use them for gospel distribution to a

mass audience (Coppedge, 2019: 212). The COU was among the first owners of a religious radio station through which the gospel was communicated to many Ugandans. Chibita (2007: 10) states that broadcasting media has been widely used in Uganda and has increased opportunities for a variety of voices to be heard and to communicate a given message. Broadcasting stations offer a great avenue or outlet to spread the gospel to reach larger audiences. In Uganda, some COU parishes and priests preach the gospel message through the Uganda Broadcasting Centre (UBC) and Christian and non-Christian television stations to reach many with the gospel. The use of radio, television, cable and satellite for communication allows the convergence of oral, written and print mediums in the delivery of the gospel through audio-visual recordings which are now dominant in Uganda (Coppedge, 2019: 200).

The digital convergence of all media includes audio, video and data on digital platforms for easy access through the internet (Lytle, 2013; Pavilk, 2008: 27) and allows easier distribution of the gospel message. It also allows for the exchange of church messages among many people using different media (Lytle, 2013). With the convergence of media, the audience can engage with the delivered message and co-create content, thus allowing interaction with the communicator through any digital media. The digitised electronic mass media enables Christian communicators to use new ways and blend all forms of media to proclaim the gospel through digital media and make disciples (Lytle, 2013). In Uganda, there are several Christian radio and television stations through which digital content is delivered to different audiences (UCC, 2015: 18). Through electronic media, the church uses multiple communication modes (audio, images, and text) which are brought together by evangelists and preachers to share the biblical message to both the offline and online communities. Presently, electronic media enables the church to extend its pulpit and communicate the Christian faith to reach a wider audience. Radio and television stations are great opportunities to proclaim the gospel message and reach the elite and many others (Lytle, 2013). Lytle further states that the introduction of broadcasting services enabled mainline churches to attain airtime to distribute Christian information and life-transforming programmes, although they are not fully used, as argued by Drescher (2011: xix).

In the past, the radio and television messages were one-sided – one-to-many – and could not allow interactions, but Goliama (2011:1) mentions that with the invention of telephones, listeners can

now make calls and interact with presenters. Due to technological improvement, there is an opportunity for interaction with audiences through live calls and comment sections on the internet on social media platforms. Taking it further, Lytle (2013) argues that the internet and new media are advancing radio and television programming since most stations use new media on different platforms to engage with the online audience (Pavlik, 2008: 27). Although broadcasting media has dominated the communication industry, when digitised, it becomes even more powerful and effective to reach wider audiences. Therefore, incorporating the broadcasting services with the 21st Century, new media by the COU in gospel communication may advance the Christian message and rituals through digital media, thus spreading the gospel message to wider audiences beyond the physical world into the virtual world. The digitised Christian programmes avail Christian content such as teachings, debates, devotions, music, dance and drama, dialogues, topical discussions and life-transforming teachings to virtual communities, thus making it possible for Christian messages to reach the digital world. The COU's intentional and consistent engagement in digital media with the gospel story promotes online interactions with digital users, thereby involving the audience in ongoing conversations around the gospel message to offer spiritual guidance to the audience.

2.9 Digital Media Communication of the Gospel

Broadcasting media has seen the growth of the internet and digital media use. In Uganda, all broadcasting media is digitised with upgraded operating equipment and as a result, this has attracted investors and bigger audiences. Both the old and new media are tools that provide digital content in the digital environment. The government of Uganda is upgrading the internet, improving information technology infrastructure, improving mobile phone access, reducing data costs and extending the internet to bridge the digital divide gap that exists in different areas and among people (NITA, 2017: 38) (Gillwald *et al.*, 2019: 8). Easy access and use of digital media has facilitated the creation of the digital (virtual) world and challenged different institutions to reflect upon virtual communities (Drescher, 2011: xx). Through digital media technology, people's engagements and interactions have extended beyond the physical space into virtual space in which churches communicate their message to an audience that would never come to church (Anderson, 2013). Digital media has become central to religious institutions facilitating digital religion and theology (Phillips *et al.*, 2019: 37–39), thereby challenging all churches to create a media presence

and reach members of the online community without requiring physical presence (Chang, 2015; Cheong, Fischer-Nielsen, Gelfgren & Ess, 2012). Digital Theology is offered as an integration of digital media into an understanding of theology, God and religion, thereby allowing interaction between digital media technology and studying God, communicating the message from God and teaching theology (Sutinen & Cooper, 2021: 12–17). To engage in digital theology, digital media is considered by some church communicators as a gift from God for evangelism and proclamation of the gospel. Dzekoe (2016: 4) states that the Pope’s message on World Communication Day 2016 encouraged Catholic priests to use digital media as a gift from God for evangelism and proclamation of the gospel. Therefore, digital media has significantly transformed the role of the church from a possessor to a dispenser of religion (Wise, 2014: 60). The way of doing and going to church has been revolutionised by digital media. It is used for a variety of purposes such as conducting live stream services, creating a worship experience, connecting members, uploading Christian content, conducting prayer sessions, Bible study and bringing the gospel message closer to people in the online community.

In Uganda, digital media users, through their gadgets, can participate in church services, conversations, debates, dialogues and broadcast programmes immediately and in real-time and share ideas about ongoing discussions (Brisset-Foucault, 2016: 256). Although digital media gadgets have disadvantages, they are celebrated for bringing church services close to people and inviting many to participate in the services (Campbell, 2013, 2017a; Cloete, 2020a; Dyikuk, 2017; Shepherd, 2020; Zsupan-Jerome, 2011). Therefore, digital media gadgets are great tools for advancing religious rituals, Christian practices, church services and allow participation in religious rituals, thus strengthening online Christian communities. Chang (2015:8) shows that digital media has connected people to churches and brought worship services close to people, however, he does not show how digital media has created interactions and furthered conversations among digital media users. Digital media attributes such as interactivity and connectivity are central to its effective use by the church.

Traditionally, the physical church is known as a community where people connect, interact, and find identity and a sense of belonging (Chang, 2015: 99). However, the digital age has seen the emergence of digital religion and online faith communities (Campbell, 2013: 1–3), which have

attracted people in search of identity, connection and meaning (Raja, 2011: 12). Therefore, the physical church is no longer the only community for connection and identity –virtual communities offer the same. Through digital media, religious services and theological discussions are connected to people through online spaces and communities (Campbell, 2016b: 16). Church activities that communicate the gospel such as Bible study, counselling, prayer sessions and others are practised in the virtual communities and have facilitated connection within virtual communities (Lytle, 2013: xx; Wise, 2014: 60). Since digital media thrives on creating connections and interactions among people, interactive church rituals practised in the digital world might attract, connect, and facilitate interactions among people. Knowing that people use digital media to access religious communities, participate in Christian rituals, engage in online services, practice faith online and belong to a faith community (Lytle, 2013), digital content needs to be easily accessed by the digital media community. By practising religious rituals and church services via digital media, the presence of the Church and ultimately God comes close to people. Through online religious activities, Christians make connections with other Christians and also with God. Therefore, digital devices are necessities in the 21st Century church, since the digital platforms are populated with netzines or digital natives²⁶ who spend time on social media platforms (Pavlik, 2008: 28), and are eager to participate in online church activities to meet with God through digital media.

To examine the internet for spiritual formation through online communities (Campbell, 2005: 5; Cloete, 2015: 3), Campbell (2016: 18) argues that the internet is now a spiritual medium to bring many to spirituality by bringing spiritual practices close to people. Cheong et al. (2012: 2) in the book *Digital Religion* present the internet as a well-known platform for social religious interactions and a place where theology is discussed as people interact. It now encourages religious worship, sacrament, mission, forming religious identity, and an environment to practise religious rituals. However, Cheong et al. (2012:4) do not highlight how to carry out religious rituals through digital media. Campbell (2016: 12) further asserts that digital media through the internet allows the extension of faith and spiritual activities and brings about conversion to a religious belief. However, Campbell does not highlight how church activities are carried out in the virtual space.

²⁶ Netzines and Digital Natives, these two concepts can be used interchangeably, for they say the same. Netzines and Digital natives are people that have grown up in the digital age, are exposed to digital media and have a presence in digital space. They spend a considerable amount of time with technology and are comfortable with it.

Nevertheless, through digital media platforms and tools such as mobile gadgets, social media platforms and websites, and online religious rituals and services, whether asynchronously or synchronously, faith is practised and extended to different online audiences.

2.9.1 Social Media in Gospel Communication

The 21st Century ushered the move to web 2.0 in 2004, bringing social media applications to the scene, which allow real-time interactive communication among users (Zhang & Lin, 2015: 671). This century is saturated with numerous social media which are, essentially, digital web-based tools for interactions, conversations, communication and content sharing. Social media enables people to give, receive and respond to information such as texts, photos, videos and audio (Gould, 2015: 3). This is done through different interactive communication media applications such as blogs, Wikipedia, MySpace, Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Twitter (Scharer, 2013: 10). With the active use of digital media in the world, 67% of the world's population actively use mobile phones, 62.5 % use the internet, and 58.4% use social media for communication and interaction²⁷. There are active social networking interactions on different social media platforms (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016: 5). Notably, social networking sites reflect human interactions and when used well can improve communication among people and, thus improve relationships (Phillips et al., 2013:12). The sites create a networked public that thrives on connectivity, interactivity, accessibility, replicability and an invisible audience (Davies, 2014: 16). Social networking sites grant participants an opportunity to create relationships and interactions among themselves (Buckingham, 2008: 4). Therefore, the established online communities on different social media platforms allow users to participate in global interactions with different people. Through the interactions and connections, users can access information from anywhere and at any time given stable internet connectivity. Social media has forever changed the way church communication of the gospel is done since it highlights the participatory and real-time conversations about any topic with people across the globe (Gould, 2015: 10). There are endless ways to use social media platforms to share a given message (Wise, 2014: 23).

²⁷ Digital media use has penetrated the world all over with an increasingly growing population of connected people and devices. [www. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-)

The church communicators use different approaches of communication on different social media platforms to advance the gospel in the digital age and reach digital media users with the gospel (Garnica, 2016: 21). Lim (2017) states that although churches use social media to share Christian content, church communicators lack a personal touch, connection and involvement with the audience. Social media thrives on interactions thereby challenging the dominant transmission view of top-down communication or the one-way mode of communication common in religious communities (Drescher, 2011: xxii). Although some church communicators have profitably used social media as a one-way communication tool to inform parishioners of Church activities (Bridges, 2013:8), its maximum benefit is with interaction (Lim, 2017: 38). Social media offers church leaders an opportunity to converse and interact with online users, which is considered as an opportunity to evangelise and preach the gospel message (Lewis, 2016). Through social media platforms, ordinary church members can freely share their faith and Bible lessons through online interactions (Lewis, 2016) and spark a conversation. Notably the interaction and conversation mode of communication depicted on social media platforms is similar to the mode Jesus employed during His ministry. Jesus engaged in interactions and conversations with the people through stories, dialogues, parables, debates, figures of speech and inquiries to share His message (Gould, 2015: 8). The interactive mode enables instant messaging and advances Christian discussions due to the quick, easy, inexpensive and immediate nature (Barrow, 2009). Although church communicators still seek better ways of using social media platforms to advance the gospel message, Lytle (2013) mentions that digital media is actively being used by the church across the globe for different church activities. The digital world has become a mission field, which has attracted churches, not leaving the Church of Uganda behind, but engaging it to reach the digital natives. The Church of Uganda is engaging in digital media intending to share the gospel message.

In addition to other media, the COU is using different digital media gadgets, applications and social media such as Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter for gospel communication to distribute church information and share the gospel. The Church mainly engages digital media and especially social media with a one-directional approach, simply to distribute information. Although digital media thrives on interactivity, Hinrch (2011) states that the majority of the church engages digital media tools and social media platforms for mainly information distribution rather than creating interactions among users. It is affirmed that some church

communicators are using social platforms simply to distribute information and ideas (Cheong et al., 2012: 16) and are ignoring the interactive aspect. Several church ministers acknowledge the place of an interactive approach in digital media use and desire knowledge to use digital media²⁸ appropriately. Although the Church of Uganda already engages digital media in sharing the gospel, it lacks the necessary information, skills and strategic approaches to maximise the benefits of digital media. It is noted from the literature that digital media presents numerous characteristics, including connectivity, interactivity, immediacy, community creation and sharing content, but the COU has not yet explored all digital media traits to its benefit. As discussed above, digital media connectivity abilities connect the world with a global village and promote connectivity, which the church may tap into for the gospel. Therefore, the COU's digital media use through social networking platforms can strengthen and promote interactions among users allowing numerous conversations and connections to happen among Christians. As the Church of Uganda continues in the communication task in the digital age, integrating digital media and social media characteristics such as interactivity, community, conversations and immediacy (Lundby, 2012: 25) are crucial for gospel communication.

The interactive approach to gospel communication allows communicators to create and sustain online communities. Online communities are considered to support sociability, usability and connections in the digital age (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003: 25). To engage in online community creation, stating the purpose of the community is central for potential people to find the goal and become members (Preece, 2000: 459). The internet has become a place for the creation of sacred faith communities (Campbell, 2011: 67) and through different digital platforms the sense of community and belonging to the religious communities in which connections with people are made (Golan & Stadler, 2016: 12–15). The Church of Uganda parishes through social media platforms have unintentionally formed online communities but the community members are not faithfully engaged in regular faith activities. Through the online religious communities, the church may be made visible to the outside communities whereby the webpages in the digital age act as faces to the communities (Lewis, 2014: 10). Therefore, if the COU is to continue with digital media use for the gospel to establish online communities through which the gospel is to be advanced, this

²⁸ <https://recowacerao.org/the-role-of-the-media-in-evangelisation-opportunities-and-challenges/> Accessed on 2 December 2019.

requires that the online communities are intentionally engaged in faith activities such as fellowships, discipleships, Bible study and faith formation. The church ought to intentionally explore further the theology that enables communication in online faith communities. Established online faith communities might advance communication of the gospel and promote theological reflection within the online space facilitated by church communicators and theologians.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter considered the historical aspects of the various mediums of communication used in Uganda and the Church of Uganda in the communication of the gospel. The communication of the gospel as instructed in the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19) is an imperative that motivates the use of different media in ministry by the Church of Uganda. It is argued that the advancement of technology results in a shift in the media used to communicate the gospel. The media of a given era advanced the spread of the gospel in that particular era. In communicating the gospel, the shift has been from purely oral to written, print, broadcasting and digital media. Throughout the discussion, it is clear that the invention of a communication medium does not necessarily wipe away the previous one, but supplements the existing medium. Hence, it is worth noting that the invention of different communication media has facilitated the communication of the gospel, thus aiding the Church in its communication mandate and mission. Therefore, technological advancement and shifts in communication media have been a blessing to the church in responding to the gospel imperative and Great Commission in every era.

This chapter has argued that the Church of Uganda continues to communicate through different media including digital media to share the gospel and fulfil its mission in the digital age. It was stated that the COU must understand the digital media characteristics such as immediacy, interactivity, conversation, community and convergence to consider them as it communicates in the digital age. However, the COU employs different media including digital media to spread its gospel message; it is to employ theological reflection in its use of digital media to communicate effectively in the digital age. To continue with digital media, an aspect of the online faith community for communication is to be explored further for the effective use of digital media to communicate the gospel in the digital age. The creation of online communities by religious institutions is motivated by several reasons, including a sense of belonging, spiritual nourishment

and faith formation (Campbell, 2020). Therefore, to communicate in the digital age, the COU is required to reflect on the creation of an online faith community for communication of its message and theologies as it continuously responds to gospel imperatives. The deeper study of digital media and how to use it effectively is discussed in the following chapters. The next chapter will address the complexities that come with digital media use and the discussion of relevant theories to optimally use digital media to communicate the gospel in the digital age.

Chapter 3: Critical Discussion of Specific Media Theories

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the second aim of the study: to present a critical discussion of the specific media theories to introduce the complexity of communication through digital media. The chapter engages an interpretive task by exploring a theoretical discussion and understanding of specific media theories. This task explores further to understand by asking the question: why is the situation happening? An interpretive task engages the mind in thoughtfulness and reflection to know the reasoning behind digital media use and explain the complexities of digital media use. It is necessary to make sense of the complexities and to understand how to maximise the use of digital media in communication. An interpretive task allows reflection on theories to render an understanding of the complexities of communication in general and digital media communication specifically, and I discuss five theories in this chapter. Various media theories are explored for digital communication to determine the complexities to progress effectively with digital communication. The discussion of the theories enables an understanding of how they can help determine, address and deal with the complexities of communicating in the digital age. The discussion of the theories highlights the aspects of each theory that are pertinent to analysing and addressing the complexities. The following theories are discussed: James Carey's Ritual View of Communication, Couldry's Media Ritual theory; the Mediatisation theory; the Uses and Gratification theory; and the Cultivation Analysis theory. Nevertheless, before engaging in theoretical discussions, a brief overview of some complexities is discussed. Communication media applied in everyday life are saturated with different complexities, which may affect the digital communication of the gospel.

3.2 Complexities of Digital Communication

There are several unavoidable complexities of digital communication resulting from the social, cultural, technological and economic environment, which all shape the communication within the communities (Edwards, 2015: 26). Luders (2008: 2) states that people's technological skills also bring several challenges, stressing that technological tools used for personal engagements are also used for mass communication purposes, which is likely to create a mix up in communication. Despite the use of similar digital media for all purposes, the digital media landscape consists of

different technologies that can be used for different purposes. Nevertheless, technology is the ability to combine and apply scientific knowledge to a practical situation to solve human problems, meet needs and satisfy the end-user (William, 2016: 36). Edwards (2015: 27) further asserts that digital technology is essential in sharing messages but insufficient for complete communication. Luders (2008: 1) argues that technology has become more complex over time, and the complexity of technology hinders people's effective digital communication. The complexity of technology may sometimes make it difficult and expensive to communicate through it. Technical and commercial challenges tend to dominate the digital world hindering maximum use. Papacharissi (2009: 204) states that digital communication through social networks and technologies is not independent of commercial interests. Therefore, the cost of specialised hardware and software, training youth in videography and photography, and upgrading particular communication styles is unavoidable (Lundby, 2008, 2012).

The cost of digital media communication due to different factors tends to hinder communication. The cost of software, hardware, internet and credit tend to hinder several activities and people's active involvement. In the Global South, Increased connectivity comes with challenges due to the higher bandwidth cost required for digital communication in everyday life (Edwards, 2015: 33). The report from the study on *internet use* by Anke Fiedler and Meyen (2016: 4) showed a high internet cost despite high usage among Ugandans. The high internet cost is a great hindrance to wider internet penetration in Uganda and digital communication (NITA Uganda 2013: 8). In addition to internet costs, the cost of mobile phones and accessing updates is high (Masuki et al., 2010). Additionally, the cost of digital technologies, equipment, maintenance of digital technology and training personnel is high and discourages continuous use of digital media to communicate (Edwards, 2015: 27).

The lack of necessary skills to communicate through different social media platforms among organisations and church communicators affects communication. Edwards (2015: 33) argues that communicators tend to approach new media communication in the same way as old media, thus miscommunicating. Szabo (2014: 33) states that poor skills' training for media communicators, lack of qualified editors for online content, few content managers and failure to catch up with technological advancements and update pace pose serious challenges to communicators (Szabo,

2014). Szabo (2015) further states that digital media is dynamic and requires adequate technology updates. Edwards (2015) argues that different digital media platforms require different digital architectures and styles of communication (Edwards 2015). The structures of websites, social media platforms and apps spread different amounts of information in different styles. The different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube distribute information differently. On Facebook, communication is visual and text, videos, audio and images. Instagram mainly communicates through pictures and images. YouTube is videos and Twitter restricts the words used and allows short messages. Different types of social media such as collaborative (Wiki), blogs and microblogs (Twitter), content communities (YouTube), social networking sites (Facebook), virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds (Social Life) require different styles of communication and media logic (William, 2016: 47–80). Therefore, the expertise to manage and communicate content on different platforms by organisations is still complex and calls for better approaches on different platforms. The approach to digital media and specifically different social media platforms is different from the broadcasting media.

While broadcasting media allows the public's passive participation in collective rituals such as societal transitions through live coverage (Hjarvard, 2008: 8–11), digital media highlights interactive formats online. Communication through broadcasting media is often transmitted one-directionally whereas digital media is interactive. Broadcasting media is one-directional, one to many, while digital media is one on one, or many to many (Lytle, 2013). The 21st century has led the media shift from one-directional to interactive media through digital media (Megan A Moreno & Koff, 2016: 130). The unidirectional approach to digital media communication frustrates effective communication (Drescher, 2011: xxix). Therefore, approaching digital media in the same way as broadcasting media promotes the transmission view of communication within digital media space and limits effectiveness. Wise (2014: 59–60) stresses that in the digital age, interactivity, connectivity and sharing are important in any form of communication through digital media. Digital media is interactive, participatory, dynamic, nonlinear, interactive, and communal, which appeals to humans (Dresang & Koh, 2009: 32–34). The interactive nature of digital media grants users an opportunity to create, deliver, connect, share, receive and engage with anyone anywhere (Lytle, 2013). Nevertheless, most churches are reported to use social media as a noticeboard, simply posting teachings and displaying information on websites as newsletters (Peter et al., 2013:

10). Digital media is designed to help one create, share and exchange information based on interaction (Nayyar, 2016: 8–13). The one-directional approach never meets the expectations of digital media audiences. Broadcasting technologies are mainly intended for one-way communication while digital media or interactive media (Lytle, 2013) encourages many to participate. Approaching digital media like broadcasting media assumes recipients are passive and discourages participation by wasting time in activities or programmes that consider the audience as passive receivers. Active involvement will encourage many to spend time engaged in online activity.

Creating and maximising an online presence and managing the digital presence requires necessary skill, equipment, and time commitment (Edwards, 2015: 4). Digital media is considered by some people as a time waster ((Badmos, 2014: 6). Although digital media communication advances business and spreads messages, it comes with the temptation to spend time on games, chats and other entertainment channels. The time needed to engage in a digital presence is scary for busy church ministers who fear wasting time. Therefore, time is a barrier – that is the failure to spend time to engage due to the fear of wasting time, also the lack of time during the day to respond to emails, post information, respond to comments, and update the website or post content²⁹, which delays communication and affects digital media presence. Inconsistency in digital communication due to the lack of regular posting of content affects the company’s media presence and makes it insufficient, thus affecting the relationship between the organisation or individuals and their followers. Although creating a website is easy, the cost of maintaining and always keeping it updated calls for a long-term commitment, which people might not have. The lack of time for a permanent online presence and dwelling in the online community is a hindrance to updating and keep communicating within the online community that is active all through the night and day, and possibly in different time zones.

The lack of national, institutional or organisational support for digital media use to communicate can frustrate the digital communication of a given user (Edwards, 2015:7). National laws and security measures inflicted on digital media use greatly frustrate digital communication. The

²⁹ The barriers to Digital communication on govloop. govloop.com/community/blog/7-barriers-digital-communication/. accessed on 25 June 2021

Ugandan Government's rules and regulations for media might also frustrate digital communication. The Government media regulatory body banned and shut down the use of the internet and social media during the 2021 presidential elections (UCC, 2021: 1) yet the Constitution of Uganda allows freedom of speech (1995). Article 29 (1 a) states that every person shares the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media (Ugandan Constitution, 1995). The ban and social media tax act as complexities of communication, although the social media tax has been lifted. On the other hand, the organisational culture and cultural shortcomings are reported as a barrier to a company's effective success in using digital media in the digital age (McKinsey Quarterly, 2017: 10). In certain organisations, due to hierarchical authority within, communication through media is done hierarchically to protect the organisation and institutional authority, thus hindering wide use of digital media by other members. Nevertheless, digital media is interactive and co-creative allowing all people to participate, thus destroying power structures that appear in various institutions (Cheong et al., 2012: 9). In digital media religious communication, digital media takes the responsibility away from only the minister and involves different lay people in the communication process of a given message.

Technology is good but not sufficient (Edwards, 2015: 8). The focus on digital media gadgets such as computers, phones and tablets in the communication process ignores the role of humans in the whole process which stifles and slows down communication. William (2016: 158) asserts that it is a mistake to focus on computers and replace or substitute humans in educational or communicational processes since there is a great need to create and interpret meaning when using any media, especially digital media. The communication technologies and mobile phones used by people seem friendly but need to be controlled by people to address a given message (Edwards, 2015: 33). The correct use of communication technologies, the networked digital media and technological advancement in cyberspace enables participants to connect, communicate, be heard and seen, thus spreading a given message. Therefore, the role of humans in the use of digital media technology is still necessary. Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 are interactive and allow people to write, and create content which is shareable on different online platforms, thus creating social ties and relationships among people behind the digital media (Ocampo, 2017: 113–116). Through digital media use, people across the globe are brought together in the virtual global village.

The use of digital media in communication increasingly reduces face-to-face interactions and connections (Badmos, 2014: 7). The rampant use of digital media in daily communication is observed to have side effects and disadvantages for social connections and relationships. Badmos, further states that the elimination of face-to-face interaction can enable people to create personas or pretend to be someone else. Such pretence and fake accounts are likely to affect the digital communication of the gospel. Nevertheless, digital media can stimulate the possibility of face-to-face interaction among many participants (Anderson, 2011: 92). Digital communication, although limiting physical face-to-face interactions, has increased virtual face-to-face interactions, and has increased the spread of the gospel across borders (Gould, 2015: 10) through sermon uploads and virtual interactions. Despite the challenges of digital media, some churches have created borderless virtual dioceses and churches to reach the fast-growing digital world via social media accounts which allow them to meet and interact with people in the virtual world (Ocampo, 2017: 115).

The regular use of digital media to communicate in daily life exposes users such as youth and church members to harassment, insults from other users (Badmos, 2014: 6) and cyberbullying. Many young people have fallen prey to cyberbullying during digital communication and face a highly negative impact, thus hindering digital communication (Steinmetz, 2013: 2). Those who spend time in cyberspace are exposed to cyberbullying, harmful relationships and develop harmful behaviour, especially youth and children (Steinmetz, 2013). Steinmetz further states that this permeates into youth communities with negative consequences and failure to deal with it affects the youth communities and their social upbringing. Harmful use of media and cyberbullying are considered to have crept into church circles, especially for those responsible for communication and using personal gadgets. The church's online activities are sometimes hacked into with pornographic content. The internet is occupied by several people who derive satisfaction from disrupting online discussions and hacking into meetings, thus causing damage (Kraut & Resnick, 2018: 3). Therefore, digital communication exposes users to increased risks from the internet. With the increased use of digital media to communicate, one's privacy is likely to be invaded due to possible hacking into gadgets by intruders. Social networking invites people into one's community providing them with the opportunity to invade your privacy and putting you at risk of exposing personal information (Badmos, 2014: 8). Badmos further states that social media managers and sites run algorithms that take note of key web browsing habits, data stored on your computer and

profile. They connect this information to advertising companies who then use this information to target an individual with advertisements. Similarly, as one uses social media, you unknowingly give permission to the creators of the site to share your information with others. Despite all the challenges with digital communication, it has penetrated everyday life and has revolutionised communication and the spread of a given message (Gould, 2015: 8).

It is important to note that the digital media communication revolution has emerged with complexities. This requires theoretical discussion in the media communication field to explore the possibilities of addressing digital media communication challenges. Although there is scholarly discussion in the field of digital religion (Campbell, 2016a: 3; Lundby, 2012: 26) and spiritual formation through the internet (Cloete, 2015: 5; Chilwa, 2013: 13, Lytle, 2013: xx), there is limited discussion about dealing with the complexities in digital communication. Therefore, to engage in digital communication of the gospel in the digital age, further theoretical discussions in determining and dealing with the complexities are needed. It is crucial to know whether the complexities in using digital media to spread the gospel are hindering its spread. What sort of effect do the challenges of digital media have on the gospel? While empirical research in digital religion is increasing (Chilwa, 2012: 739), there is still a great need for further theoretical exploration to analyse and understand digital media communication to efficiently communicate a given message to the readily available audiences in the digital age.

In the digital age, religious information is increasingly being disseminated through media, making it possible for people to access it easily and anytime. Information is taken from offline social events and activities and transferred into online communities (Sen, 2017: 474). Consequently, with the increased media usage and integration of digital media into everyday life, discussing particular media theories will provide much insight and wisdom to offer to scholars, media theologians, gospel communicators and the Church. The theories discussed are relevant and applicable and offer pertinent points to allow us to analyse the complexities of the current situation of digital communication. Therefore, analysing the suggested theories in dealing with the complexities might help to present effectively mediated messages and rituals in the digital space. Below are some of the discussed theories to engage with in communicating the gospel in the digital age.

3.3 Communication Media Theories

3.3.1 James Carey's Ritual Theory

In response to the digital communication situation, Carey's (2009: 18) Communication Theory – The Ritual Theory of Communication is specifically meaningful in this respect and it is discussed concerning digital communication to address certain complexities in digital media use. The Ritual Theory of Communication can be used to shed light on digital communication to determine and address its complexities in communicating the gospel.

The Ritual Theory advances the Transmission Theory of communication which highlights the sending of information linearly from sender to receiver (McQuail, 2013: 5). The Transmission Theory is a dominant mode of communication and is concerned with sending information, thus considering the audience as passive (Sapienza & Veenstra, 2017: 2). It lacks a sense of feedback (Danesi, 2000). Unlike the Transmission Theory, for Carey, communication is a ritualistic practice responsible for forming social realities and community bonds, thus helping in advancing community interactions and bridging the gap between people and communities (Sen, 2017: 476).

Carey's Ritual Theory stresses communication as a conversation, and a symbolic process where reality is produced, sustained, repaired and transformed (Carey, 2009: 19). The aspects of community and commonality enable society's transformation (Carey, 2009: 18). To Carey, the Ritual View of Communication is concerned with sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and common faith, thus promoting shared beliefs in the community also as interactions and relationships. The theory also focuses on understanding the culture and message, and sharing them correctly. To Carey, communication through newspapers is more of the Transmission Theory as it mainly imparts information to readers. In ritual communication, the newspaper's information is to be considered a reality that should be read daily to inform people of the world around them and aid them to spark a conversation and engage with the information, apply it in life and give their lives form, order, and tone.

Communication as a ritual involves humans and communities. In communities, humans are joined together (Sen, 2017: 477) through ritualistic practices of communication. According to Grillo (2012: 112), rituals are regular social actions that disclose and activate meaning. Foucault and

Melican (2007: 75) further state that rituals are social norms or cultural values that become embodied in form and are easily recognisable through shared images, dances, music and scripture images to become the symbolic representation of a group, faith, and culture. Rituals hold communities together, help to maintain formal relationships, develop social ties, transform participants, and mediate religion through direct interactions (Grillo, 2012: 114). Rituals are participatory and allow people to commune, converse, encourage commonality, create, maintain, interpret and change culture and community within everyday patterns of human interactions (Jiménez & Guillem, 2012: 16). Therefore, rituals are central in any community's communication process, human relationships and community transformation, both offline and online.

In sacred or religious communities, the ritual approach to communication is seen in ceremonies such as religious activities that bring people together in fellowship and commonality (Foucault & Melican, 2007). Therefore, the Ritual View of Communication is evident in religious circles during religious activities such as prayers, communion and other activities that bring religious group members together in any created space. Ritual communication promotes collaboration, fellowship and community interactions (Carey, 2009), thus improving personal relationships and creating intimate work relationships. Rituals are known to include the daily routines of people (Grillo, 2012). In daily routines, messages are not simply transmitted but are created and shared ritualistically according to Carey as he prioritises rituals. However, prioritising rituals in communication might limit the opportunity for humans to engage their minds in participation (Couldry 2003). Religious rituals such as liturgical prayers are often strictly approached and forwarded with no room for changing the tradition. Nevertheless, the conversation aspect of communication allows free-will participation, thus reducing top-down communication.

The Ritual Theory highlights conversations. Communication as conversation draws people together in fellowship to participate, converse and share common beliefs (Carey, 2009: 157). The conversation is an activity that is voluntary, personal, open and unstructured (Sen 2017: 476) and naturally attracts others. Conversation as a metaphor used by Carey to describe communication facilitates interaction and participation and brings people together in a given community. To Carey, communication is not necessarily imparting information but engaging in interactive conversations (Sen, 2017), Conversation is, therefore, significant in Carey's approach to communication.

Emphasis on conversation, which allows free thinking and contribution in a discussion is likely to promote interaction and advance online conversations, although it might promote relativism and subjectivism. Sen (2017:12) further states that subjectivism forwarded through conversation deters community development. To Carey, any communication among people and institutions ought to engage conversation to promote fellowship and interaction within the community, not simply deliver information. Concerning religious circles, the theory downplays the role of the sermon from the pulpit and highlights the role of fellowship, prayer, cell groups, Bible study and worship, which are done ritualistically in small and participatory communities. For digital communication, interactive conversation during communication in the online community is likely to promote Christian rituals in the media space. As the printing press facilitated the spread of Christian rituals in literature to communities across space and time, thus empowering the church (Lytle, 2013), digital media is in a position to present interactive conversation about Christian rituals into the media space for all media users to engage, converse and participate (Drescher, 2011: 5).

Carey promotes conversation, fellowship and discussion which is also reflected in online interactions through digital media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Lundby, 2012). Social networking platforms are in a position to facilitate dialogue in a ritualistic way that extends aspects of physical oral and written tradition to the virtual community, thus allowing people across the globe to participate in a given conversation compared to the limited physical oral tradition (Brinn, 2015: 5). Carey's Ritual Theory of communication reaches new heights with digital communication, which allows the oral traditions and once physical interactions to be extended beyond time and space by the internet. Despite some shortcomings, the Ritual theory is of great value in communicating the gospel in the digital age. Since Carey's Theory advances fellowship, it enhances social networks and ties which may advance Christian rituals such as fellowships, prayer and Bible studies in the digital media environment. Schultze (2000: 12) argues that the advancement of the Ritual View theory of communication promotes relationships, brings interactions, and gives people an opportunity to influence different communities.

Carey's theory expands the horizon of communication of the gospel from the one-directional to the interactive approach across different communities. It extends the Christian faith through engaging in conversations and dialogues and creating a mutual understanding concerning the faith.

However, Carey does not highlight the aspect of the moderator in his ritual communication. Yet, if conversations in the Ritual View are not guided by well-grounded leaders, there is a risk of promoting relativism, and compromising on truthfulness (Griffin, 2018: 48). Therefore, when applying the Ritual View, a grounded moderator is crucial to avoid sliding into relativism since digital media allows everyone to participate in the conversation by creating and sharing their meanings. Hence, the church communicator both in offline and online communities is to guide the discussion as informed by scripture and advance the authentic word of the Bible. Also, the church communicators in a participatory and free-sharing discussion should not agree uncritically with the participants in the conversation to avoid relativism from penetrating the Christian community.

Although the Ritual View allows the participants to create meaningful messages and engage in a conversation, the traditional approach to rituals might stifle creativity. Therefore, in engaging in interactive media rituals (Couldry, 2003), creativity, freethinking and traditional rituals are to be bridged. As God's people, Christians are commissioned not just to send and receive messages but to create meaning, engage in a conversation and share their interpretation of the gospel story (Jiménez & Guillem, 2012: 23). The Word of God ought to guide the Christian group conversations and it ought to be creatively shared during ritual communication. The church community is responsible for creating, engaging in conversations and correctly sharing the Word of God. Ritualistic communication especially among religious and cultural communities is advanced easily with technological innovation (Brooke & Jay, 2007: 76). Carey's Ritual approach to communication applies to digital communication since digital media has long-term ritual significance (Brinn, 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Carey raised concerns about modern communication as likely to destroy communities, communion and interaction (2009). It is noted, however, that established online connections among friends and in groups on different social networking platforms present the opportunity to advance rituals creatively in digital communities (Skarzauskiene & Mačiulienė, 2021: 5).

Although Carey's Ritual Theory has limited engagement with issues emerging from digital communication, the theory contains measures useful in studying digital communication (Sen, 2017: 479). The theory assumes a great value for the ritualistic approach in digital media since several practices in digital media are ritualistic in approach. Sen (2017) asserts that the ritual view

is essential in the analysis of communication in the digital age. Therefore, the COU, by employing ritual communication in digital media, might facilitate mediatised Christian rituals through interactions, conversations and creativity by engaging the digital community and thus digitally communicating the gospel story. The Church of Uganda communicators, pastors and evangelists need to engage in interactive communication that is both evident in the Ugandan society (Kizza 2010: 5) and digital world (Lundby, 2012: 26). Therefore, digital media scenery is a great environment for church rituals through which to connect and interact with individuals who are searching for identity, connection and meaning.

Carey's Ritual Theory of communication with its significant advantages for the digital age is not on its own adequate in dealing with gospel communication in the digital age. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Ritual Theory is applicable in the digital age since digital media has become a space for media rituals and religious rituals (Lövheim & Campbell, 2016: 10). However, the mediatised rituals may be creatively advanced and conducted by a well-informed moderator to guide the established digital communities. The convergence of voice, video and data on digital platforms through internet connections allows multiple interactions by sending and receiving messages (Lytle, 2013). In dealing with the complexity of creating a full-time digital presence (Edwards, 2015:7) to achieve effective digital communication, the Ritual Theory, which promotes the creation of community and engaging in interactions and conversations in the communities, might come in handy to address the challenge of fulltime digital presence as one engages in digital communication. Digital presence requires the presence of committed individuals to keep engaging through websites and social media platforms. Although James Carey's theory was not designed for digital media, it is still applicable, as it promotes community and interaction, which are traits of digital media (Lundby, 2009: 25). Therefore, advancing Ritual Theory into digital media and creating communities including religious communities of people with similar faith, denominations and churches, might attract people of similar beliefs to engage constantly in online communication (Drescher, 2011: xxix). This distributes the responsibility of constant digital presence among community members, thus allowing different members to post and share information at a given time, thus creating a full-time digital presence.

The Church of Uganda has usually used digital media to communicate both the gospel and any given information mainly one-directionally. Several churches often use social media and social networking platforms that are one-directional, such as bulletin boards, billboards and brochures, to offer information which falls short of the digital world demands (Dzekoe, 2016: 3). Although communicating information, sharing content, posting, tweeting, interacting, dialoguing and networking are key aspects in digital communication and establishing relationships (Drescher, 2011), digital media technologies require interaction and communal discussions, and allow online community members to create and also to comment on posited information (Lytle, 2013). Therefore, with James Carey's Ritual Theory, which was designed for physical communities, although face-to-face interactions are absent when employed in the virtual world (Sen, 2017), it is still applicable for digital media communities in the form of online conversations, interactions and fellowship, which are carried out in digital communities. Online community interactions among people and church communicators are crucial since most people might never come to the church building but desire to relate with a church minister. Digital environments are a great opportunity to present church rituals, interact, connect and relate with seeking people. Nevertheless, the interactive approach is not reserved for only digital communication, it is evident in African culture and appeals to Ugandans both in the physical and virtual communities. Among Ugandans, communication is social, communal, and interactive in communities (Kizza, 2010: 2) and for that reason many may engage in communication on social networking sites to interact and socialise within online communities. Therefore, mediatisation of Christian rituals will present mediatised Christian rituals for all digital media users, including Ugandans and others, to engage and participate in the rituals, thus spreading the Christian message in the digital age. This is likely to bring mediatised Christian rituals, gospel and Christian information into the digital world, thus leading to personal, cultural and community transformation.

In conclusion, despite Carey's limited focus and engagement with digital communication, since he thought technology was an inhibitor instead of a facilitator of the communal and conversational aspect of communication (Carey 2009: 156), his theory contains pertinent issues such as communal, conversation, community, and interaction which resonate with communication in the digital age (Sen 2017: 4, Lundby, 2009: 25). The principles of the ritual theory are applicable for internet and digital media use since the internet has become a ritualistic part of our lives and has

long term ritual significance (Anderson, 2011: 98). The Ritual Theory understood in terms of digital communication can serve the function of addressing the gap that exists in digital media communication and spread the gospel message since the use of digital media to spread any information is becoming ritualistic. It might also help to address the digital communication challenges in areas of intentionally creating online communities, advancing communication in the community, and allowing interactions, online conversation and participation, thus enabling the creation of an online presence to advance a given message.

The Ritual View of Communication is of value to scholars and religious communicators in communicating in the digital age that thrives on interactivity, specifically, the ability to establish a community in the online world, present mediated rituals, invite people to engage in interactive conversation in a ritualistic way and spread the gospel message ritualistically through digital media. The features of Ritual View Theory may play a significant role in digital communication of the gospel, Christian rituals and establishment of online faith communities. Digital communication of the gospel as ritual connects the church community to the digital community as communication as ritual connects physical communities and people. The ritualistic approach to digital communication and online interactive conversations might allow people that never come to the church buildings yet desire to relate with a church minister to connect and engage with a minister through online rituals and conversations. Therefore, the public's online engagement in church rituals and conversations allows members to participate from anywhere and to engage synchronically and asynchronously, thus addressing different digital communication complexities. Therefore, understanding media rituals in digital space is crucial in addressing other complexities of digital communication.

3.3.2 Media Ritual Theory

Couldry's (2003: 3) Media Rituals Theory presents the accepted ritual behaviour and activities for the digital age. Media ritual refers to the range of circumstances in which media stands for an organisation or institution to connect to society members. Media rituals³⁰ are formalised actions

³⁰ According to Couldry, rituals are picked from sites where people cross into the media world such as studios, places of media filming or production; places where non-media people interact with media or perform for media such as posing before a camera.

that stand in for wider frameworks of understanding with the media. The formalised actions involving media rituals are framed around media-related categories: the actions stand in for certain values associated with media, which show that media represents social space (Couldry, 2003: 3). According to Cui (2019: 4156), rituals are increasingly mediatised. Mediatised rituals are being made possible by digital media technology (Anderson, 2011: 95). Cui (2019: 4157) further states that mediatised rituals are people's ritualistic approach to their everyday lives through bands of technologies using internet data. Cottle (2008) states that mediatised rituals are not necessarily about symbols and sentiments although they are essential. Cottle (2008: 137) further states that 'mediatised rituals are extraordinary social occurrences that are mediated to mobilise and sustain shared sentiments and solidarity on a basis of symbolism and subjunctive orientation'. Couldry (2003: 3) considers Media rituals as actions that can connect and also represent the wider community values in the media space.

Couldry (2003: 11) states that rituals are extended in the digital age through media to preserve past practices such as religious ritual practices to other groups of people. Media rituals are promoted to make new connections with the public and social organisations. The theory introduces ritualisation which looks at the links between ritual actions and societies or communities in which rituals are performed and in which the links between media and rituals are more regular and embedded in everyday life. It also highly promotes the contribution of media to contemporary societies. Couldry's (2003: 13) media ritual suggests careful guarding of the boundaries between media institutions and the public to protect the integrity of media in connecting social centres with the audience as it presents social realities. However, in the contemporary mediatised society, several audiences that access media can co-create and share content that connects people in a conversation. In media networks, people are in a position to make the message synchronously and asynchronously accessible by the online community, thus allowing access to mediatised social realities. However, when social activities and rituals are reported by unskilled people, the rituals might be reported with technological challenges, and may lack authenticity and thus be prone to manipulation. The active engagement in media rituals possibly within the connected communities skilful people might use specialised hardware and software technologies to advance communication in different styles (Lundby, 2008: 1). Ritual performance is not limited to the

social space but simply generated there, and performed in other public spaces as digital media space.

According to Couldry (2003: 52), media is an access point to social institutions and its peculiar power is clearly through formal ritual actions mediated for people to access sacred realities. Media performs social, traditional and religious rituals that are part of everyday life. Religious rituals from real life are transferred into digital space. In the digital media space, they communicate transcendent values (Couldry, 2003: 53). Digital religious rituals enable the understanding of how people practise faith through digital media (Campbell, 2016a: 4) from offline to online. Through digital media, mediatised religious rituals point internet users to God. Internet digital media allows for authentic and highly interactive rituals among religious (church) communicators, individuals and online communities. However, through all interactions, the authenticity of the ritual activity is crucial for effective digital media communication authenticity (Gilpin, Palazzolo & Brody, 2010: 260). Holland (2013: 1) presents digital media as an extension of a sacred place through which offline ritual activities are extended into the virtual community to reach online communities. It allows the intersection of both offline and online, thus reaching those unable to access the offline rituals (Lytle, 2013). Campbell (2005: 9, 2016: 5) mentions that using the internet for ritual activities by religious adherents produces spiritualisation of the internet which works as a spiritual network. The internet is a ministry tool to reach all, evangelise and bring many to the fold of believers (Drescher, 2011: 2). The internet is considered a tool to promote Christian identity among community members and is a place of mediated worship through which different worship expressions take place.

Mediatised ritual is a concept used to understand rituals in contemporary mediatised society (Cui, 2019: 4157). In mediatised societies, people engage in networks in the social domain through communication technologies. CUI (2019) extends media rituals to mediatised rituals which provide benefits to media sociological inquiries. Sociological inquiry provides an understanding of humans' media usage. Media sociology offers human ideas, theories, and methods, and highlights sociological inquiries as foundational to cultural and communication approaches through media (Pollock, 2016: 149). Mediatised rituals bring to the forefront the unseen everyday social life instead of only ceremonial events (Couldry, 2003: 4163). Therefore, mediated rituals

are not only concerned with special media events but everyday activities and rituals in sacred places such as churches.

Mediatized rituals then explain and clarify the details of everyday life built through different social processes, connections and presentation of data, and appear to be normal and real, trustworthy and sacred rituals presented in media space (Couldry, 2005: 4), thus mediatized rituals take the focus away from media to the communicative nature of rituals in social life and religion (Couldry, 2005:7). Religious adherents actively use media to present mediated religious rituals for different people to participate in (Campbell, 2016a: 12). Therefore, media is relevant in providing religious rituals such as daily prayers and worship, thus spreading religious beliefs that invoke emotions among the audience. Campbell (2005: 9) states that the internet is a great resource to engage in spiritual activities for those seeking purpose and meaning in life. It is considered a place to practise mediatized Christian rituals for all to access and to help improve religious lifestyles (Campbell, 2016a). However, although the internet is a place for religious rituals, the exact approach to achieving it is not clear. Nevertheless, the digital media environment operates as a virtual space to execute religious rituals which may become open to different individuals and groups to participate in re-created religious activities such as online worship and sacraments. Digital media's ability to promote religion and religious practices online enables its use for worship, mission, sacraments and discipleship (Lytle 2013). Therefore, further theoretical engagement concerning possible religious practices and church rituals within digital media may bring authentic spiritual information close to people.

The authenticity of media rituals is debated in media studies. Often the rituals are considered as being simulations instead of being authentic (Hill-Smith, 2009: 6). Gabella (2012: 1) states that authenticity is to satisfy the context within which media recording takes place so that reality is captured. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, the authenticity of media rituals and their impact on the audience is compromised (Gilpin et al., 2010: 265). Studying how rituals in real life are mediatized in the virtual world will help to address the authenticity and seriousness of online rituals and show how to detect fake rituals (Antweiler, 2012: 3), thus enabling others to access the mediated rituals knowing they are of similar quality as face-to-face interactions. Therefore, social institutions such as religious organisations that advance their messages and rituals in media environments ought to

emphasise the authenticity of any communicated message to create healthy relationships with people (Lyle, 2013) by bringing mediated rituals as close as possible to face-to-face rituals; although Couldry (2003:7) argues that media institutions are guarded from the audience. However, in the digital era, with advanced interactive media communication technologies and software updates, the aspect of guarding is questioned. In mediatised societies, media institutions can never be guarded institutions separate from society as they are part of everyday life (Cui, 2019). Media penetrates everyday life, and it brings social realities close to people in a mediatised way. It also introduces concepts as mediatised rituals in everyday activities. Therefore, I argue that authenticity ought to be a concern for the social institutions mediatising their rituals. Although authenticity calls for serious intentionality, mediated authenticity may be achieved during worship services through digital media when church-mediated activities are presented as close as possible to the offline church engagement as they are broadcasted or live-streamed (Chang, 2015).

The media ritual presents aspects that promote interactivity within digital communication. Couldry (2003: 109) states that interactivity is central within the framework as it correlates with other ritual categories, especially during recording. Couldry further states that interactivity introduces more concepts as reality and live activities or interactions. The liveness due to interactivity is clear in live-streamed mediated activities on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, which allows participation fostered via an activity or ritual recorded in physical space into online space. Gabella (2012: 15) highlights the value and importance of the actual participation of people in the social activity mediated online as a central feature for the mediated. Gabella further states that in the ritual space of media the category of interactivity has developed, which cannot be ignored or taken for granted when dealing with digital media. Interactivity allows participants to engage in real-time interactions with people across the globe in the digital media space. Digital media promotes interaction during a shared conversation where users are allowed to comment on any shared content (Gould 2015: 48). Gould further states that digital media allows participation and the creation of opportunities for real-time online interaction between and among members concerning a given topic. The church in the digital age is experiencing transformation in its approach to religious activities in which interactive communication is destroying the top-down model of communication by religious leaders (Lewis, 2018: 521). Priests with an online presence are enabled to interact with members and share the gospel as they engage in an online conversation

with believers and non-believers. The church with an online presence through different media is in a position to continuously interact with people, share the gospel message and invite people to participate in the mediated rituals.

Church communicators' interactions in the digital media environment among and with participants could be an opportunity to present Christian rituals, thus allowing many to engage in the Christian rituals from different places via web conferencing, interactive texts, social media platforms and instant messaging. Mediatized rituals (Cui, 2019: 4156) are shared from the confines of physical space to involve people from where they are located and invite them to participate and grow in faith through religious rituals practised in the media. This also allows for the transmission of morals and transcendent values. Mediatized rituals provide space for different social institutions to interact. Therefore, Christian mediatized rituals serve in transforming religious creativity and innovation in media use in general by defying established institutionalised religious habits.

The Media Ritual Theory is criticised by scholars. Cottle (2008: 137) criticises Coudry's notion of mediatized rituals. He states that it is incapable of distinguishing what truly are media rituals in society due to a wide range of dynamics, subtle gradations and possibilities of ritualisation instead of clear boundaries. Cottle further states that high-profile media occurrences never appear with ritual placards on the forehead. However, certain rituals from social and cultural institutions such as religious organisations are known as rituals and when practised in the media space, might be easily recognised and appreciated, thus attracting many of the same religious orientation to participate. The study of mediatized rituals considers a particular category of identifiable cases of high-profile media events participating in clear rituals, but not all media rituals. It is a concept delimited or restricted to a special class of mediatized ritual events (Cottle 2008: 138). The concept of mediatized rituals is necessary when engaging ritualisation of high-profile media events, sacred rituals and how they penetrate the broader society, thus making rituals public through media.

In addition to the critics, media ritual shares the ritual from the social space through a one-direction approach and fails to facilitate participation and interaction among parties. Despite the criticism of the theory, understanding mediatized rituals might address the digital media communication complexity faced by communicators in effectively presenting the social and religious rituals in the

media space. Through digital religion, offline religious practices and rituals are extended into online space (Campbell, 2016: 13). Religious rituals are celebrated in physical church buildings. However, with the increased use of the internet and digital media to access spiritual nourishment, religious organisations continue to present religious rituals into the media space for the audience to consume for spiritual benefits.

Media Ritual Theory presents different aspects that make sense of the deep complexities that come with digital media communication by different individuals and social institution communicators. The media rituals highlight that activities communicated by different people are to maintain authenticity, and connectivity from real-life rituals and activities into online space with the audience and followers (Gabella, 2012: 16). Authenticity is maintained when the offline rituals and activities are mediatised as close as possible to reality for the audience to experience real things through mediatisation (Chang, 2015: 40). Although the theory does not highlight how to engage and sustain media interactions, Gabella (2012: 17) states that people's engagement is grounded in interaction. Therefore, mediatised social activities during the ritual activity promote authenticity in media space.

3.3.3 Mediatisation Theory

The Mediatisation Theory is studied by several scholars across the globe (Hepp 2013: 619; Krotz, 2001; 2007, 2017, Hjavard, 2008: 2, 2014: 199, Lundby 2009: 1, 2014:221). Its critiques such as Couldry (2008: 375; 2013: 22) and Lundby (2014: 10) raise concerns about the media logic and others debate against it (Hepp, 2013: 616; Giorgi, 2019). Despite the critiques, different scholars try to bring different perspectives of the theory to the scene. Several scholars are continuing to engage with the theory in numerous studies since the mediatisation approach is not final and concluded (Krotz 2017: 104).

Mediatisation came to the scholarly scene in the 1990s after the observation that media was relevant in everyday life. Sociologist Ernst Manheim started the theory of mediatisation in 1920 when he stressed the mediatisation of human relations of immediacy (Marszolek & Robel, 2016: 337). However, in the context of media transformation, and for empirical and theoretical approaches, scholars continued to develop the theory systematically to understand the changes it

brings in everyday life, culture and society (Krotz, 2017: 108). As a theory, mediatisation addresses the relationship, function and influence of media in society and culture. Hjarvard (2008: 3) considers media as an agent of change in society, which also works as an agent of religious change. Mediatisation is a theory of reconstructive analysis of respective everyday social life, and cultural and social media-related transformation (Krotz, 2017: 116). The theory focuses on the role media plays in mediating activities for social and cultural change. Mediatisation is a set of contemporary tools used for the production, branding and communication of religious information (Krotz, 2017: 110). Lundby (2009: 35) argues that it is a process that highlights changes in modern societies caused by media and mediated communication. Hjarvard (2008: 10) further argues that mediatisation is a social and cultural process that makes any social institution become reliant on the media logic.

Hjarvard's (2008: 2) approach to mediatisation presents media as an institution, a conduit and possessing media logic. Hjarvard (2017:106) states that media as a source of religious information and a social institution has delivered functions of institutionalised religion, offering both moral and spiritual guidance and making social communities depend on media logic. As a conduit, media is a primary source and channel for any information. Media as an institution with a unique logic influences the social, cultural and religious groups into transforming their information into media logic and genre (Campbell, 2016b). Media logic is the combination of technology, aesthetics and institutional modus operandi of media, which shows the way media distributes messages (Hjarvard, 2017: 110). Media logic is crucial in understanding the process of mediatisation and how media influences communication, interactions and communities (Hjarvard, 2017: 109). Therefore, considering media logic presented by mediatisation, social institutions with different rules, norms and logic have to adopt and conform to media rules and logic to address the complexities in digital media communication of their content.

Krotz (2014:5) states that media logic is independent of different media technologies and that it depends on different social and cultural contexts (Manor & Crilley, 2020: 69). Mediatisation is increasingly exploring the intertwined relationships between interactive technologies among social and cultural activities (Cui, 2019: 4157). Mass media, digital media, different media forms and media logic are part of everyday life in families, businesses and religions. However, it is important

to note that different media have different kinds of media logic or ways of operating (Cloete, 2020b: 28). Krotz (2017: 109) states that societies, community activities, relationships and individual lives are more mediatised due to the role of media today. This theory is a lens that focuses on the role of media which leads to social and cultural change. Krotz and Hepp (2014: 2–6) state that media are contemporary tools people use for communication, which are key for institutions disseminating religion, beliefs and values throughout society, but require critical consideration before use. Media has become a primary source of religious information. Therefore, mediatisation presents media as the institution with the ability to structure (build, construct) and frame the conversations of any community, thus enabling the transformation of that particular community (Campbell, 2016b: 18). Mediatisation is concerned with long-lasting development that results in individual, social, and cultural institutional change due to media influence and growth.

Mediatisation is a broad term to describe transformations due to media use, including the use of media by religious producers and consumers as related to religious branding (Krüger, 2018). With transformation, mediatisation concerns itself with the long-term transformation of social and cultural institutions and means of interaction due to the wide use of media (Hjarvard, 2011). Cloete (2019) states that transformation due to mediatisation yields long-term effects facilitated by media. To attain transformation, mediatisation as a process of communicating a given message through media from sender to receiver (Krotz 2017:108, Cloete 2019:3) enables the dissemination of transformative messages to wide media audiences. Couldry and Hepp (2017:10) state that mediatisation is evident and deeply rooted in the role of media outlets in sharing mediated activities in everyday life, resulting in transformation. Therefore, mediatisation is the process through which social, cultural and individual change is made possible through messages and activities that assume a media form and logic. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the media logic employed for each media outlet is different and that ought to be considered in digital communication.

Hjarvard (2011: 120) argues that the mediatisation of religion has transformed three aspects of religion; firstly, media is an important source of religious information whereby mass media and interactive media have become producers and distributors of religious expressions, information, and beliefs. Secondly, the demands of popular media genres determine the forming of religious information. Thirdly, media as a cultural and social environment is taking over the functions of

institutionalised religion. Media is not only for communicating information but functions for developing and sustaining online communities that allow members to engage in an experience, connect with another, allow participation and create a sense of belonging (Cooper et al. 2021: 2; Skarzauskiene et al. 202: 5; Chilwa 2013: 16; Campbell, 2012: 69; Preece, 2003: 26). For religious use, the mediatisation theory facilitates the spread of religion through media into the different environments (Hjarvard, 2008: 2–4), and redefines religion and religious authority (Hjarvard, 2016: 11). Religion as a social and cultural institution is intertwined with and influenced by media (Hjarvard, 2011: 120). According to Hjarvard (2017: 106), media is becoming a source of religious and spiritual information which thus presents religious information in a language of popular culture that is easily understood by the audience. Cloete (2016: 5) argues that media will continue to present the religious experience in new ways, and enable meaning-making among online users. Mediatisation shows the importance of media in society and presents media as an institution for agents of religious change with new ways of experiencing God in everyday life (Hjarvard, 2016: 14). Media has extended religion by disseminating religion's information and experience throughout society and by presenting religion in media logic and extends religious communication and interactions beyond space and time (Hjarvard, 2011: 123). However, although mediatisation is a theory for social and cultural change, researchers are divided on the importance and autonomy of media as an institution that explains change due to different media logic (Ampuja, Koivisto & Väliverronen, 2014: 3). Despite the media logic, media is seen as a conduit to distribute information which contributes significantly to the church in distributing the Christian message to digital media users. As Loveheim and Lynch (2011: 113) state that mediatisation allows one to connect media, religion and social change. Nevertheless, the increased use of media in society does not only allow the mediatisation of religion but increased access to any information and different activities through media, both harmful and helpful (Lovheim, 2014: 553).

The media's role as a religious information source, distributor and discussion platform widely challenges religious authority allowing ordinary people to disseminate religious information (Hjarvard, 2011: 120). The changing religious authority in society is increasingly being influenced by the mediatisation of religion, whereby, media structure challenges traditional forms of authority and allows new forms of authority to spring forth (Hjarvard, 2016: 11). With the wide use of media, religious institutions, ministers and religious texts are considered as secondary sources of

information on spiritual matters and religious information, making media more powerful than religious institutions and leaders (Hjarvard 2011: 121). When media becomes the place to run to for spiritual information and spiritual nourishment, community-based churches increasingly lose their place of influence on religious matters. Interestingly, with the intersection of media and religion in contemporary society (Lövheima & Lynchb, 2011: 114), media can provide rich religious information to the audience and invite people in the virtual world to have a religious experience. Nevertheless, media platforms are not in a position to preach but offer religious information as shared by the various users. Often, the media as a distributor and producer of religious content frames religious content based on the media logic and determines the way the audience interacts with religion.

Media has replaced the authority of institutionalised religion (Hjarvard 2011: 11) and advanced distributed authority (Drescher (2011: xxxi). Drescher continues to state that one's position is not synonymous with one's impact in digital communities but the ability to connect and engage the community is paramount. When using digital media, authority is no longer with only the clergy but shared with the audience (Cloete, 2020: 29). Increased self-performance facilitates the emergence of new forms of authority due to one's personality and ability to connect and influence other users (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019: 26). Therefore, through media outlets, religious information is shared by any person. Drescher (2011: xxxi) states that churches characterised with participatory leadership style and distributed authority are better positioned to use digital media, which promotes distributed authority. The Anglican Church (Church of Uganda) characterised by participatory and distributed leadership may offer a great environment for engagement in digital media. Unlike autonomy in leadership by certain denominations which the nature of digital media destroys, the Anglican Church allows shared leadership with the laity. Therefore, with distributed authority, Christians alongside clergy can participate, share, lead and engage in religious activities through the media. In the process, new leaders will emerge from the online faith community and thus, the digital media scenery is a great environment for church rituals through which to connect with the seeking masses and fellowship through the shared rituals, allowing all members to participate and develop new leaders. Although digital media channels of transmission defy institutionalised authority in the distribution of mediatised religion, it connects communities to

religious institutions by conducting the ritual (Hjarvard, 2008: 21). Institutional, social and traditional rituals are now mediatised and presented in media (CUI, 2019: 4169).

Mediatisation is considered to promote banalisation of religion, in which traditional churches begin branding their teachings, pastors and rituals and turn them into entertainment to meet the media expectations of the audience (Krüger, 2018: 8). The banal religious elements of branding as presented by media has penetrated societies, whereby churches and individuals brand media content in an appealing way considering the media outlet, platform and target audience (Hjarvard, 2008: 11). Therefore, banal religion becomes an important aspect to producer and distributor of religious imagery, which consists of elements such as crosses, prayers, music and any religious piece to bring religious meaning to the audience (Hjarvard, 2011: 14). Other scholars state that media promotes banal religion, which is religion mixed with entertainment (Hjarvard, 2008: 7). Corliss (2011: 11) states that games are filled with religion and entertainment mixed with religion have become part of everyday life. Cloete (2019: 5) states that organised religion is presented in films, which youth watch for entertainment and spiritual information. Although mediatisation has a great impact on societies, it is not to be forgotten that digital media includes use and misuse. It may also destabilise or establish religion and authority (Cloete, 2015:6). Despite the critics of mediatisation, the ability to engage in banal religion and creatively present any media content of a religious institution is likely to improve the institution's digital communication and visibility to outsiders.

Kruger (2018: 6) criticises the mediatisation of religion on grounds that promoters of the theory differ on media as an agent of social change and that some core elements such as media logic are challenged by historical and empirical findings and that it lacks coherence, clarity and conclusiveness. Morgan (2011: 1), from a Christian historical perspective, challenges Hjarvard's view of the mediatisation of religion as a modern occurrence with media as autonomous and separate from church and state, yet integrated into other cultural and social institutions as a unilateral process. Other promoters of the theory have not reconciled the understanding of the concept of media logic (Lundby, 2009: 288) since every medium has a unique media logic. Notably, not all promoters of mediatisation agree that media is a central institution of social and cultural change in the world (Finnemann, 2011: 70).

Despite these criticisms, mediatisation has become a central theory in media studies and media plays a key role in social change. Mediatisation is presented by some researchers to be coherent in the study of media and religion (Ampuja et al., 2014: 4). Therefore, a mediatisation framework is crucial and highlights the relationships among religion, media and social transformation. It shows the place and influence of media on religion in society, although criticised as Eurocentric and applied to other parts of the world in similar ways (Couldry & Hepp, 2017: 36) but ignoring the complexities of media use in other parts of the world. Through media and media logic, religious institutions can spread religious information, thus media as an institution tends to take on the function of the church to bring religious information to the people facilitating the creation of religious communities and bringing religious activities and rituals close to the people (Hjarvard, 2011: 119).

In the digital age, mediatisation is commonly used for religion to describe the transformation of religion and religious communication. Hjarvard (2008: 13) argues that media is a key agent and environment for religious and cultural change. Media has become an important arena in religion and extending church activities and rituals to the wider community beyond the four walls, which escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Campbell, 2020a: 27). Presently, across media, individual and societal change is experienced through moral support, spiritual guidance and community sense of belonging. Therefore, the mediatisation of religion has seen societal and individual change through the use of digital media, since digital media outlets are increasingly becoming the centre of spiritual nourishment and religious interests, a place where theology is discussed by both theologians and non-theologians (Hjarvard, 2016: 10) and where faith communities formed (Lytle, 2013: xx). Mediatisation reveals the relationship and interactions between media and religion (Cloete, 2019b: vii). It shows the long-term meta-processes of the interrelationship among media, religion and societal transformation.

Despite the complexities of digital media communication such as technical and technological requirements, credit, bandwidth, affordability and necessary skills for communication in digital media, mediatisation allows the focus to be on the interplay between technologically-based communication media both analogue and digital (Krotz, 2007: 289). Understanding mediatisation allows critical reflection on the complexities of communication media, thus improving

interconnectedness, interactivity and immediacy through digital media, which is aided by the proper infrastructure of information technology and the internet – big data, bandwidth, hardware and software updates that facilitate digital communication (Greengard, 2015: 51). Greengard further stresses the impact of new technologies and the revolution of the world caused by the internet of things, which expands the sources of data to almost everyone and everything, thus transforming operations and communication. The upgrade of software and different applications of digital media to share and distribute content is necessary for the mediatisation process. The technological upgrade is crucial to improve connectivity and mediatisation of social activities and the internet of things (Miller 2019: 2). Miller further states that upgraded digital media technologies, which allow story creation and sharing, when well used to mediate the message, will widely distribute the message to different media consumers and encourage wide use of media to create more content. In the increasing mediatisation of everyday life and communication, digital media is involved actively in the communicative construction of culture and society (Hepp, 2013: 116). Digitally-networked technology mediates many messages and contributes to the transformation of society (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016: 4). Mediatisation of the gospel message through different digital media contributes to the spread of the message, thus impacting the audience and leads to individual and societal change. Mediatisation theory, therefore, highlights the role of media in disseminating information among users across the globe, resulting in social and individual transformation.

Mediatisation theory aids the empirical study in communication and media, especially in religion and addresses the challenges of digital communication as different societal issues are mediatised in response to societal demands. It provides great analytical tools to study media in the transformation of religion in contemporary societies (Lövheim & Lynch, 2011: 114). Mediatisation points out that media development results in the transformation of everyday life; society and culture are facilitated by advancement in technology and fuelled by economic gain (Krotz 2017: 108). It highlights the technological development in areas of the computer-controlled digital media and infrastructure for societal, individual and institutional operations (Hepp & Krotz 2014: 3; Lundby 2014a: 4). Responding to technological upgrades, digital infrastructure and Web 2.0 software advancement allow mass participation in social activities, interactions and transformation of cities (Charles, Sharif & Ratti, 2022: 4). With mediatisation comes increased

mediated reality, the internet of things, the work of computer-guided infrastructure for war and drones and the development of robots (Krotz 2017: 111). The big developers and suppliers of technology, software, the internet, social networking sites, computer-controlled digital infrastructure and other technology producers are crucial in advancing digital communication of the gospel for societal transformation. Mediatisation theory requires reflection on digital media technology and infrastructure for societal transformation in everyday life.

The penetration of media in everyday life has spread into the political domain in many countries, including Uganda. Political operations, government and country laws are mediated for the public to engage with and participate in certain government operations. Mediatisation presents political institutions, leadership, activities and political practices that increasingly use media to communicate with nationals, with the government still in control of the media operations within the country (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 2010: 248). Notably, media has dominated the political domain and politicians now produce and disseminate their own media messages with the required media logic through different social media platforms to several audiences and influence all audiences (Manor & Crilley, 2020: 66). Clearly, mediatisation of political and government operations has led to the audience's interaction with authors of different content in real-time. Nevertheless, critics of media use for politics point out that to a certain level it has presented politics as a dirty game and a show-off. In addressing the complexities that arise with government regulations and restrictions on social media use and the internet, mediatisation of political activities might influence government regulators to impose considerable regulations, since the regulations are likely to affect government operations. Mediatisation has penetrated the political arena and media is increasingly becoming a necessity in the political sphere.

As mediatisation is responsible for the communication of any information and activity across media, it allows different activities and phenomena to become mediatised in everyday life since communication and different organisations, nations and church activities depend on media (Krotz 2017: 113), especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mediatisation of activities thus results in the transformation of everyday life, culture, society, and religion. Mediatisation shows the change that happens from the perspective of media users in different cultural, economic, social and political conditions (Krotz, 2017: 114). Therefore, an increase in media use and growth increases

society, individual and communication transformation, from unidirectional to interactive. Through digital media platforms, different platforms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are interconnected to share a similar message. The internet affords old media to make use of new media to reach different audiences. Cloete (2019: 3) states that mediatisation presents waves which include mechanisation, electrification and digitalisation. Cloete further states that mechanisation brought the era of industrialisation, electrification brought the era of electrified media such as radio, and television, while digitalisation brought the era of the internet, computer and mobile phone technology. Mediatisation has progressed with technological innovations in different eras.

The mediatisation theory has proved fruitful for the discussion and distribution of information from different spheres including religious information, thus allowing people to access spiritual nourishment through the media landscape and environment (Hjarvard, 2017: 106). Mediatisation as a theory contributes its unique focus on the role and work of digital media in the contemporary world to bring information and services close to people (Miller, 2019: 2). Mediatisation is intertwined with religion and influences the religious information dissemination process across borders and shapes religious communities, thus using media to highlight the role of religion in personal and societal change (Campbell, 2017b: 17). Although several studies in the field have focused on the interplay of media and religion within religious groups (Lövheim & Lynch, 2011: 115), the theory facilitates the use of digital media for communicating the gospel beyond a particular group. Mediatisation theory informs the advancement of a certain message despite the challenges, which include hardware and software concerns for the proper use of media for the gospel. Therefore, digital media use by the church in the communication of the gospel facilitates radical change in the church's communication approach to the gospel and transforms the lives and societies of digital media users. Mediatisation thus allows for the interplay between media and gospel communication, since media uses religion and religion uses media. With the mediatisation of the Christian messages the relationship between religious organisations, church and media users may be established and strengthened. This follows the continuous use of digital media outlets such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter by individuals, institutions, and organisations to present mediatised rituals, messages, interact and engage with individuals. On a daily basis, mediatised communication allows people and different institutions to meet and connect in the media space.

In summary, the mediatisation theory helps to understand how consistently and deeply media has impacted everyday life, cultures, religion and societies, resulting in transformation. In light of the impact of media on everyday life and religion, it is argued that communication through media is increasingly changing and also transforming institutions and individuals. Therefore, digital media communication facilitates change in churches, society and individual lives. Nevertheless, digital communication for the gospel requires theological reflection (Cloete, 2015: 5). Reflecting upon digital media, church and theology are crucial in guiding the use of digital media to advance media transformation in society and religion. The continuous use of digital media to communicate the gospel requires practical theological reflection, especially in addressing the complexities of digital communication that are likely to block the spread of the gospel. Another theory considered to address the complexities of digital communication in the digital age is the Uses and Gratification Theory.

3.3.4 The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) framed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumber in 1974 is concerned with the audience. The theory focuses on audiences instead of information and highlights the interdependent relationship among media systems, social systems and media audiences (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009: 65). The UGT presents the audience as very active in media use, seeking to meet certain goals and personal satisfaction (Megan A Moreno & Koff, 2016: 130) and points out that the audiences are not necessarily passive but have integrated media into everyday life. They use media to meet certain needs and fulfil specific gratifications. The theory suggests that there is a reason why the audience seeks out certain media. The main reasons include diversion, entertainment, educative information, social interactions, and personal identity.

The UGT states that the media's central role is to satisfy the main need of the audience (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016: 2). The media user will use a particular media to gratify needs and attain goals. Mehrad and Tajer (2016: 3) argue that the use of media is not necessarily the goal, but gratification. The UGT highlights two key components, the sought gratification and the obtained gratification, which are considered central to the theory. Considering the two components in content gratification (Windahl, Signitzer & Osolson, 2009: 67) generates better results for the media users. Therefore, the UGT assumes that media users know and seek what they need, acquire the searched

gratification; and obtain gratification. It is important to note that achieving a certain goal determines one's media consumption behaviour. One's attitude about the media's ability is influenced by the gratification and satisfaction that comes with a certain media. This theory helps one to understand why people actively seek out certain media and specific content. The users proactively seek out media for specific gratification and needs, and the audience is not passive but active in using media to interpret and integrate it into everyday life. Therefore, the daily consumption of media depends on the user's particular needs. To meet individual needs in the digital era, media is becoming an important source for personal satisfaction and acquiring information. Figure 3.2 shows examples of the different digital media tools and why people use them in daily life.



*Figure 3.2 Different digital media tools and how they are often used in communication*³¹

The UGT is necessary to understand the motivation for media users' daily involvement and consumption of media content (Vimala Balakrishnan and Huck-Soo Loo, 2012: 364). The assumption with the UGT is that users are actively searching for content that meets their needs and gives them maximum satisfaction (Windahl et al., 2009: 198). Among the many reasons for the use of digital media, it is clear that digital media is now actively being used for religious activities to meet the spiritual needs of the audience. Digital media use posits a rise in digital religion and

³¹ Digital Media by MBA Skool Team, from mbaskool.com/business-concepts/marketing-and-strategy-terms/17895-digital-media.html May 2019. Accessed on 1 May 2021

shows active use for religious activities using various digital tools for religious practices, theological dialogues and spirituality (Campbell, 2012: 70). Digital media religious use introduces the creation of online communities (Cloete, 2020: 28) and attracts many digital media users to belong to an online community to attain specific needs. Therefore, the audience's satisfaction depends on their personal and specific needs and desires.

Some key questions that come with the UGT include: Why are people interested in certain media? What satisfaction comes through media use? The main focus is on the audience and answering the above questions will determine the outcome (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016: 10). Nonetheless, the UGT suggests that media users consume media for needs such as diverting from everyday problems, for developing personal relationships, finding an identity and to survey for useful information in any field (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008: 66). The UGT focuses on one's purpose for using specific media. As mentioned above, it is assumed that people use specific media for a variety of reasons. When challenged with a life situation, people might access media to get answers to the situation. Many have accessed media to make friends and socialise with people they might never meet physically and interact with family members in distant places. Others access media to belong to communities of people with similar interests, identity and values. Living in the information age, others use media to acquire information for research and different reasons. Although audiences are active and choose what they want depending on the personal need, the UGT has limitations. The theory assumes the given media message will be consumed and interpreted by the audience in a similar way and does not consider the factors that determine interpretations and consumption. Therefore, it is assumed that all digital media users use media to meet unique needs including connection with other users.

In Uganda, people access digital media outlets for several reasons. The Ugandan media is known to benefit from a high level of dependence from a committed audience that faithfully relies on media for educational and religious needs, spiritual nourishments, life support, entertainment, socialisation, information and news (Fiedler Anke & Michael, 2016: 22). Understanding the context of media users, types of media outlets and reasons for media use enables media content producers to design, deliver and engage media users to meet the particular need, thus satisfying their audience. The COU gospel communicators, therefore, are in a position to offer the necessary

information, engage with media users and help bring about customer satisfaction among the audiences. Since for the media audiences media usage is not the goal but rather gratification or satisfaction (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016: 10), therefore, content gratification (Windahl et al., 2009: 198) requires the communicators to avail content that will generate users' satisfaction; thereby providing messages that address a particular need. The digital media through the internet is considered a space through which religiosity and spirituality are practised (Berg, 2018; Campbell, 2013). It is safe to mention that when the media users' needs are met, the media platforms that offer satisfying content will experience traffic from many people searching for advice and guidance. Understanding the audience's needs to meet them cannot be overlooked.

The UGT informs the COU content developers to develop and offer media information and rituals that will meet the needs of the specific audiences, resulting in gratification. With the theory, the Church's media content development will aim at developing religious material that will meet the audience's need for spiritual nourishment and discover meaning in life. Therefore, the audience's desire for religious and spiritual satisfaction through media will inform the Church of Uganda so that the communicators offer media content that will benefit the searching masses. Since several people go to the media in search of purpose and meaning in life (Raja 2011: 159), some media users do not simply consume whatever information is on media that might not help in satisfying their spiritual needs, thus understanding why and how people keenly pursue and use particular media to meet personal needs informs creators of digital media content to offer relevant information. Nevertheless, some institutions, organisations and politicians provide media content to stay connected with the audience and as a marketing tool (Krotz, 2017: 17; Manor & Crilley, 2020: 69; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 2010: 247). The UGT helps in understanding why people constantly and actively seek media. Understanding that media users access media to meet their needs and desires to attain gratification and satisfaction is crucial in digital media use for communicating the gospel. Nevertheless, another theory to consider in determining and addressing the complexities of digital communication in the digital age is the Cultivation Analysis Theory.

3.3.5 Cultivation Analysis Theory (CA)

The Cultivation Analysis Theory (CA) was first introduced by George Gerbner in 1960. The theory considers media as a conduit through which messages are sent across space and time (Megan A

Moreno & Koff, 2016: 130). The CA views media as mainly responsible for transmitting and spreading any shared belief and lifestyle. Littlejohn and Fross (2008: 254) state that cultivation analysis assumes that heavy users of mass media like television will be more likely to hold beliefs and concepts about life and the world that correspond to what they view. The heavy consumers of television are more likely to judge the world through the lenses of what is consumed via media (Littlejohn & Fross, 2008: 255). They further state that when people constantly consume media content, they are likely to shape their behaviour and attitude based on the media content consumed. Cultivation Analysis emphasises behaviour change due to media use, as depicted by mediatisation which highlights long-term social and cultural change (Hjarvard, 2011: 12).

Different scholars agree that the constant consumers of media will behave and view life from what was consumed via media. The theory has been widely used in the study of violence in television although not limited to it (Shrum, 2004: 511). It is also used in the studies to explain whether those who watch violent television programmes become violent themselves. It is generally noted by scholars that repeated watching of violent programmes informs the audience that the world is violent, unsafe and dangerous (Moreno et.al., 2016: 135). Griffin (Griffin, 2018: 366) regards media as a dominant force in shaping modern society through the impact of the symbolic content of real-life events. The repeated dependence on media shapes one's approach to life and interpretation of different situations. Therefore, media consumers' views shaped by constant media use will determine the way they see the world.

Cloete (2019a) states that media users need to be involved both cognitively and affectively to interpret content which is normally done in a unique idiosyncratic way, considering personal conflicts and spiritual aspirations. With an increased number of media users searching for spiritual nourishment to meet their needs, mediated religious messages come in handy. When religious institutions use media outlets to disseminate spiritual messages, chances are high that the audience will engage with the content and interpret the message depending on the different conditions of the user. As cultivation theory suggests, one's changed reality of the world due to the long consumption of media leads to a transformation of behaviour. Cognitive engagement and personal interpretation play a crucial role (Cloete, 2019a: 17). Therefore, regular consumption of mediated messages, personal engagement, interpretation, and one's context might yield moral and

behavioural change. This implies that media consumption is not a linear process – the users are attracted to the media activity, engage with the content, and interpret it according to their understanding and personal situations, thus leading to a positive or negative impact on the individual life.

The CA suggests that frequent viewing of distorted realities on television will increasingly lead to perceptions that distort reality (Shrum, 2017: 1). Distorted realities through any media can affect the audience's mind over a long time. Greater television viewing is associated with fearfulness, anxiety, increased violence, faith in doctors, and greater materialism (Shrum, 2017: 2). Although the CA was established with broadcasting media, especially television, in mind and concerns mainly violence, it can be extended to digital media that has penetrated everyday life. Since the theory is concerned with media mind change, the continuous use of digital media for informative messages will enable moral and faith formation (Lytle, 2013) although not ignoring the aspect of the user's engagement and personal interpretations, as Cloete (2019: 7) states. Therefore, considering the CA, an audience's frequent access to spiritual messages will avail Christian values that might facilitate a change in behaviour and belief.

The CA posits that regular use of television or media in general shapes how the users view the world and behave in everyday life. The theory proposes that continuous watching of television will impact one's behaviour and belief and instil fear in media audiences (Andy, 2020: 2). Therefore, since the CA focuses on the gradual and indirect but significant long-term effects on television viewers (Mosharafa, 2015: 23), the gradual change and indirect impact are likely to happen to digital media users. Consecutive users of digital media who access religious information from an institution are likely to experience gradual personal transformation due to the consumption of educative and uplifting messages. This theory, therefore, challenges communicators to present educative media content, which is consistent with moral and upright messages of spiritual formation. These are likely to address issues that arise from cyberbullying. Despite young people's active involvement in digital communication through instant messaging, phone calls, social media and text messages, many youths have fallen prey to cyberbullying during digital communication and face a highly negative impact, thus hindering digital communication (Szabo, 2015: 31). Cyberbullying affects one's access to digital media information and free participation. Therefore,

the CA's view of behavioural change due to long-time media use might address cyberbullying challenges as spiritual messages are consumed from digital media. Regular media consumption is in a position to advance distorted realities received through watching television. Consistent consumption of mediated messages condemning violent acts and cyberbullying might also promote a positive perspective on the world, thus addressing digital media challenges and advancing digital communication.

According to the CA, the continuous use of media can affect or inform one's moral values, actions and beliefs. Cloete (2019b: 8) states that it is important to pay attention to individual values and values motivating technological development. Very often, media technology is emphasised in the communication process without reflection on the values that drive technology. According to the CA, any mediated messages from institutions via different media might indeed shape the moral values and faith of the media users, but the impact of technology on the message and the media user should not be ignored. Media technology might shape a particular viewpoint about specific value systems and beliefs due to the values they represent. Therefore, ethical, and theological guidance in the usage of media technology is crucial to pay attention to the values behind technological development (Cloete, 2019b: 7). To cultivate a value system, the CA involves concepts such as the symbolic environment, storytelling, the function of media, media traits, the multi-directional process and cultural indicators, which are crucial (Shrum, 2004: 512). The concepts apply to how the different types of media affect users. Humans live in the world beyond their physical environment and are attracted to stories in different forms, which might aid in value system formation. The CA is criticised for its simplistic approach to media and only looking at the violence profile and lacking the positive aspect of media (Andy, 2020: 2). With the creativity that comes with media use, it disseminates stories about the symbolic environment derived from a multi-directional process which includes society, public, people, media institutions and various interested social groups. The same applies to digital media – stories circulated from different institutions including churches across borders can spread certain beliefs far and wide. Therefore, the COU's gospel stories packaged in media genre and disseminated through digital media might contribute to societal and individual change. However, it is worth noting that the CA presents the negative effect of media and the media audience is perceived to be passive in their media use which

is negatively affected by media. Nevertheless, different media theories present media with great traits that might benefit the organisations employing media to disseminate information.

3.4 Conclusion

The chapter presents a discussion of different media theories. The theories present unique aspects for communicators to identify and address technological, cultural, societal and material challenges among digital media users. To engage in digital communication of the gospel, the reflection on media theories and their unique aspects may guide communicators to address the complexities that come with digital media usage, thus allowing careful use of digital media to share the gospel content with the intended audience.

Carey's (2009: 15) Ritual view when extended to digital media considers its unique aspects that might deal with digital communication challenges, especially in areas of forming online faith communities, creating an online presence, committing time to media engagement, promotion of interactive communication, virtual face-to-face conversation and engaging in ritual from societal communities into the digital space. The conversational and communal approach presented by the theory might provide a richer account of effective online communication in community than the dominant unidirectional communication reflected in both physical and virtual spaces. Within the established communities, the Media Ritual theory as presented by Couldry (2003: 2), might allow the presentation of rituals from social institutions to online communities; taking media rituals from physical community gatherings into virtual communities, while maintaining their authenticity as in physical communities, might attract digital media users to engage freely in the presented mediated ritual. Nevertheless, the media ritual theory is more about transmission, thus contrary to Carey's ritual view of communication and digital media features that encourages interaction .

The mediatisation theory on the other hand points out clearly the individual, societal, cultural and organisational change due to the active use of media. It presents the media logic to consider when employing any media in communication. The theory presents an understanding of how technological complexities due to the daily use of digital media for the gospel in the digital age may be addressed putting into consideration the different media logic. Mediatisation goes beyond presenting the gospel to media users but points out the uses and misuse of the media. Its ability to

provide any message to consumers is both a strength and a weakness of the theory. The increased mediatisation of the gospel message is likely to bring about another reformation within the church due to the active use of digital media in gospel communication. The Uses and Gratification theory practically and theoretically clarifies the key question about the audience; why they become involved in media platforms and mediated communication and the gratification and satisfaction they get from using media. Therefore, understanding the motive for the audience's active use of digital media determines and addresses the challenges of media content.

Cultivation Analysis helps in understanding the media's impact and effect on communities. The theory presents the impact of media consumption on the audience by majorly pointing out the media's negative effect on the audience. Although the Cultivation Analysis focuses on violence through media, in the digital age, it may be advanced to expose both the negative and positive effects of digital media on active users. As pointed out by scholars, continuous engagement on social media is likely to affect users and may ignite a response that can cause a behavioural change, thus spending a lot of time on digital media to communicate is likely to shape individuals either negatively or positively. On the other hand, the theory considers the media audience as passive and does not promote interaction between the audience and media content producers. Therefore, the theory's failure to approach media interactively and involve participation might limit the maximum use of digital media since digital media thrives on interactivity.

With the wide digital media usage in most fields and operations, approaching digital communication through the lens of Ritual View, Mediatisation and Uses and Gratification theories might determine the optimum digital media usage, thus maximising its benefits to the institutions such as the COU. It is notable that as the COU engages digital media, it is necessary to know that media can disorganise or organise church leadership structures and approaches to ministry. Therefore, constant theological and technological dialogue and reflections are necessary for the digital age to guide the Church's use. Theological reflection on digital media use for gospel communicators is paramount to guiding the church's digital media strategy. Cloete (2019b) argues that theological reflection is necessary for giving ethical guidance regarding the use, approach, design and value that digital media promotes. The following chapter will discuss the theological perspective of digital media use.

Chapter 4: Communication as an Integral Aspect of Practical Theology and Ministry

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to respond to the third aim: to present communication of the gospel as an integral aspect of Practical Theology; to know the theological perspective on communication considering theological concepts, traditions, ethical norms and Christian practices; and to engage in discussion of the communicative nature of God, the Gospel, Practical Theology and the Church. Osmer (2008: 132) argues that it is important to explore the relationship of key theological concepts to the situation. To understand digital media communication for gospel dissemination, this chapter employs the normative task of Practical Theology to interpret biblical thoughts about the communication practice. The normative task tries to explore through scripture what ought to be done to provide a solution for the situation and define how communication should happen. In the discussion, the theological aspects of communication are brought forward to provide the discernment of God's practice in a particular time and place (Osmer 2008: 133) and understand the practice of communication and how to communicate in different contexts and eras. The normative task, which explores scripture and traditions, is discussed from an evangelical perspective. Through the normative task, God's communicative nature shown in God's self-communication is discussed to guide digital communication practice.

The discussion starts with the understanding of the communicative nature of the gospel as presented in the Great Commission. The communicative nature of Practical Theology, the discipline concerned with theory and practice, emphasising the praxis of communication and specifically digital communication is discussed. To further explore God's communicative nature, the communicative features of the Trinity, Incarnation Interaction and Visual Use as presented in scripture and literature are discussed. The practical theological reflection concerning the possible ways to continue with the communication practice in the digital age is discussed based on the Bible's thoughts on the practice and the church's practice in the world. The Practical Theological reflection in terms of communicating the gospel in the digital age is discussed in detail, focusing on the theology of the Trinity, Incarnation, Interaction and Visual Use concerning communication, specifically digital communication.

4.2 Understanding the Communicative Aspect of the Gospel

The Great Commission is a command of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples to communicate the gospel to all nations of the world. Sogaard (1993: 15) argues that the Great Commission is a communication task that ought to be considered carefully by all disciples. The disciples of Jesus Christ are expected to respond to the communication task and communicate the gospel message to all people in all generations. The communication process in any situation is only possible when the message to be communicated is clear to the communicator. The church communicators are to focus attention on communicating a clear gospel message with all people including those who are far off, thus achieving its purpose (Claydon, 2005: 13). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the message from God has been communicated by different messengers, including, priests prophets, the Son of God and the apostles using all available avenues. In Isaiah 61:1, the prophet Isaiah gives the prophecy about the messiah anointed by the Holy Spirit to announce the good news to the poor, sick, prisoners and all people. In the New Testament, it is reported that Jesus Christ travelled to different places communicating the gospel message (Matthew 4: 23). Before Jesus departed, he gave the Great Commission to his disciples. The Great Commission is the Lord's commissioning of his disciples to go into the world to preach or communicate the gospel to all people (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15). In the Great Commission, the disciples are instructed to communicate the gospel message to all nations in the world. Therefore, the greatest concern for the disciples and the church is to optimally communicate the gospel to people in all ages, including, the digital age. The church communicators must have a good understanding of the gospel message they are to communicate.

The word 'gospel' comes from the word *euangelion*, which is a Greek word meaning 'good news' (Burrows, 1925: 23; Wax, 2012: 18). The gospel is the good news and sums up the central message about Jesus (Hart & Spokane, 2016: 4). The word 'gospel' is often used interchangeably with good news in the Bible. The heart of Christianity is the gospel, which is the good news. The word 'gospel' was used by Jesus, the apostles and the early church fathers of the Christian faith to show the core message of the church (Hart & Spokane, 2016: 6). The gospel is God's story about creation, fall, redemption restoration, and proclamation of God's work through Christ's life, death, resurrection and exaltation (Wax, 2012: 19). Wax further states that the gospel is to be understood

and communicated for all to encounter, enter into the Kingdom of God and experience Him. Throughout the Synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke), the gospel is recorded and proclaimed mainly entailing Jesus Christ describing his message as good news (Gilbert, 2010: 15). In the gospel account of the Bible, the angel who appeared to the shepherds while tending their sheep said, 'I bring you good news, unto us a Child is born' (Luke 2: 10-11). Although the phrase was in use before Jesus' first coming, He came and announced the good news of the Kingdom, making it easy for all in his time to understand that the kingdom of heaven, which he represented, was about the good news. In some letters in the New Testament, the apostles refer to their messages as the good news, which deserves clear communication. Apostle Paul used written media as evidenced in New Testament letters to communicate his message. On several occasions, he referred to his teachings and messages as the good news. Therefore, to communicate the gospel across the world is to communicate the good news of God's reign, love, forgiveness, and redemptive work through Christ Jesus, and invite people into a loving relationship with God (Grethlein, 2016: 5). The gospel is the good news of the Kingdom which came for everyone to listen to, receive, engage with and come into a loving relationship with God (Belcher, 2009: 120).

Despite the reference made to different messages throughout the Bible, the gospel is the good news, Jesus' teachings, and the messages about Jesus Christ. Some scholars mention that Jesus' message was not the good news but a proclamation of the wrath and judgment of God. According to the account in the Bible, the gospel is widely considered to be the good news, for example, Mark starts his narrative by stating that 'this is the gospel or the good news about Jesus, Christ the Messiah, and the Son of God. In Mark (8: 35), the writer mentions that 'if you give up your life for My sake and the sake of the gospel or good news, you will save it.' Mark (3:10) continues to report that the gospel must be preached to all nations. In Matthew 24, Matthew asserts that the gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world and then the end shall come. Therefore, the New Testament is saturated with phrases about the gospel or good news that has to be communicated before the world comes to an end.

The gospel message of the Kingdom of God, which includes creation, fall, redemption, salvation and Christ's redemptive work on the cross for humanity (Gilbert, 2010: 16) must be communicated. It is the good news about the communicative God that ought to be communicated

throughout the world. God is extravagant in communication and is not silent (Wilkinson, 2010). For the sake of communication in the digital age, the understanding of God as a communicator and his message is central (Claydon, 2005: xx). God is all about communication and created humans to communicate (Lewis, 2014: 10). Therefore, to understand the communicative nature of gospel, God's communicative nature and how He revealed Himself is central. God revealed Himself in His Son and communicated among people. In His public ministry, Jesus communicated the gospel, which is the good news of the Kingdom of God (Luke 4: 43). With the gospel, Jesus came to seek and save humanity, which was doomed for destruction. The good news is that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived as a human being on earth, did ministry among people, was nailed to death on the cross, rose from death to life, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come back again for His people. The proclamation of the message of the Kingdom of God is not simply to bring punishment but to bring healing, comfort and salvation to all (Gilbert, 2010: 17). Since the gospel has been communicated throughout history, the church in the contemporary age must continue with the communication mandate (Lewis, 2014: 10). Paul in Romans (10:14) poses a question: 'How will people hear the message unless someone proclaims it?' The gospel is the good news, which is a message supposed to be communicated, spoken, taught, written, acted, and told by disciples to all people in the world in whatever era of communication. Therefore, the primary task of the church is to communicate the gospel message – the good news – in all contexts using different media for the world to encounter, engage and experience God's love and establish a relationship with God. Through the communication of the good news to the world, God who is all-loving, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and compassionate will be known and made known by all who encounter and experience him. To communicate the gospel in the digital age, practical theologians are to engage in theological reflection concerning the practice, provide an actionable strategy and guide the church to communicate relevantly in the digital age.

4.3 Practical Theology as A Communicative Action

Practical Theology is one of the departments in theology which is traced back to Schleiermacher (Anderson, 2011: 24). Cahalan (2005: 68) argues that Practical Theology emerges when the church and world's practices are questioned and challenged, which compels theologians to examine the practices in light of scripture, traditions and social science knowledge to form a faithful and

substantive response. Cahalan further states that theology is marked by a hermeneutic of practical reasoning, discourse and understanding. Practical Theology shows Christians how practices such as communication are to be done in life depending on the context in which the practice is done. Practical Theology requires a disciplined reflection on and engagement in practices at hand (Cahalan, 2005: 69). It seeks to address the disconnection between the religious practice of the church and theology (Latini, 2011: 2). Latini further argues that Practical Theology makes theology relevant, useful and applicable. This area of theology deals with crises in practice in which ministers, congregations and churches make the Christian traditions relevant in people's lives and societies (C. Hermans & W. J. Schoeman, 2015: 10). Ward (2017: 1) views Practical Theology as the church's ordinary life where practice and theology are woven together with spiritual life. It is a church within daily life as ordinary believers integrate the gospel story into the everyday life of the church. Ward (2017: 5) further asserts that through lived communicative church experiences of prayer, worship and preaching, Practical Theology leads to the transformation of people and societies.

Practical Theology requires the interpretation of scripture and tradition in the context of the contemporary experience and considers how human beings integrate faith in life (Osmer 2008: 4, Woodbridge 2014: 89 & Hendricks 2009: 5). It allows practical theologians and ministers to help Christians know how they ought to live, address practical issues and faith practices in a particular season (Cahalan, 2005: 70). Practical theologians are to engage with the Christian community considering particular context, experience and tradition (Klaasen, 2014: 4). Practical Theology contributes to transforming practice by creating research activities and new knowledge about the practice (C. Hermans & W. J. Schoeman, 2015: 8). The communication praxis by the church requires one to understand theology and make it relevant, useful and applicable. It means understanding the theologies undergirding the religious practice of the everyday life of the people. Practical Theology requires that the practices of the church interact with those of the world with the aim of bringing godly practices into the world.

Practical Theology is concerned with the practical application of the biblical text to contemporary practices in the everyday life of the church and world (Houdman, 2013: 10). It is important to note that Practical Theology is meant to be present and active in most human spirituality, relationships

and everyday experiences. It seriously considers the faithful communication of the gospel and faith, and promotes the truthful interpretation of scripture (Grethlein, 2016: 131). It enables Christians and church leaders to remain faithful to the gospel in different ways, stresses human experience and allows analytical theological reflection on the practice of the church in interaction with world practices to participate in God's redemptive work in the world (Swinton & Mowat, 2016: 17). Practical Theology starts from human experience as it engages the critical inquiry in the practice of the church in advancing God's work on the earth. It draws deeply on the traditional sources of theology such as scripture, tradition, reason and experience (Osmer, 2005: 129).

Practical Theology is praxis theology. Praxis is the unique object of Practical Theology reflection (Schuringa, 2019: 6). Schurunga further states that through praxis, God reveals Himself to people and His word comes to man in the world. The praxis through which God comes and communicates to people is of interest to Practical Theology. The theological theory is to occur in praxis and theory with a view of a practice (Osmer:2011: 3). Praxis and theory can be separated, whereby theory is considered to be conveyed historically and conditioned socially, although there are no theory-less praxes (Schuringa, 2019: 7). The reflective moment on the praxis is possible from theological theory. Theologising and praxis are considered aspects of the praxis in a dialectical relation, in which theological theory and praxis are considered to be able to inform and circularly correct each other, which results in a dynamic Practical Theology (Schuringa, 2019: 6).

Practical Theology is a specific approach to interpreting Christian practice concerning lifestyle and collective dynamics of religious and ecclesiastical attribution (Schlag, 2019: 422). Practice is what Christians and churches do together over time to address essential human needs in response to the world in the light of God's active presence and revelation (Cahalan 2005: 66). Church and the world are filled with several practices done by people all the time. These practices are informed by all the societal or cultural messages, some positive and some destructive (Cahalan, 2005). Therefore, practical theological or biblical interpretation of the practices can guide and sustain a given practice regardless of the context and cultural changes and interpretations (Dykstra & Bass, 2008: 6). Jurgen Habermas is a scholar who interpreted praxis as communicative interaction between people. The communicative theory of Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1981: 5) stresses human interactions, behaviour and actions in the communication process. To Habermas, praxis

was interpreted as communicative action through communicative reasons and interactions. Communicative action is an attempt by parties to present their views and reach a mutual understanding. Practical Theology in its epistemological orientation is in praxis (Kim, 2007: 422), which is concerned with the communicative praxis of the church within the congregation and the world. The Strategic-Practical Task in Browning's model promotes the communicative action of Practical Theology towards the service and spread of the gospel (Browning, 1991: 3).

Practical Theology allows theologians to establish a relationship between communication and theology for church communicators to employ in the ministry of gospel communication (Grethlein, 2016: 207) and also to create a connection between the theory of Practical Theology and the communication practice of the church in the world of digital media. Theory and practice are crucial for engaging in Practical Theology, which implies that by leaving out one of them helpful actions might fail (Tobias H & Masango, 2011: 2). Communication as a branch of Practical Theology is concerned with the proclamation of the Word of God to the people, which creates an opportunity to theologians to enter into dialogue with the everyday practice of the world (Grethlein, 2016: 210) and scripture to guide the church's approach to communication, which ought to be relevant and applicable. Through its reflective strength on praxis, Practical Theology is concerned with bridging the gap between people and church's communication practices in the world with the biblical principles of communication (Steyn & Masango, 2011: 3). In the digital age, digital media opens to the church an opportunity to communicate the gospel and participate in theology with digital media users (Lewis, 2014: 2). Through Practical Theology engagement, the church receives education to use tools and strategies of media to share the Bible message effectively (Claydon, 2005: 16). Hence, Practical Theology is crucial in guiding church ministers in communicating the gospel in the digital age. There is a need to engage in serious conversations concerning Practical Theology and communication to challenge and disturb the accepted views about communication to further the biblical views of communication to share the gospel in the digital age.

4.4 Theological View on the Practice of Communication

In the Normative task of Osmer's model (2008), there is a need to engage the Bible, traditions and theologies to study the communication practice of the church. The Normative task engages biblical

norms to estimate the departure between the church community and the standards of practice as presented in scripture (Woodbridge, 2014: 93). Osmer (2008: 41) wonders how the church can better communicate the faith to people, especially the youth who are less involved in Church. Therefore, Normative research tries to provide a solution for the situation and define how things should be done (Das, 2013: 4). This task deals with what ought to be done. What does God want us to do in this particular situation? This is the process of using theological concepts to interpret events, and construct ethical norms to guide church's response and action. It determines norms and principles to use to effect change in a certain situation and suggest certain recommendations (Fallis, 2007: 23). Therefore, theology is necessary to provide the perspective to understand the practice of communication and how to communicate in different contexts. In the theological dictionary, Rahner (1985: 120) opines that communication is possible with openness, the ability to listen and participate in communion between sender and receiver. Rahner further argues that the highest form of communication is when the sender communicates himself to the receiver, which is self-communication.

Human history consists of God's self-communication with humanity (Shutte, 2008: 156). Soukup (Soukup, 2019: 26) states that communication begins with God and that historically people have communicated with and to God. God's self-communication is revealed in the Holy Trinity and the Triune God reveals himself to humankind. Leonard (2011:12) states that the Triune God is in conversation with Himself and also communicates with human beings. God's self-communication is revealed in human history in several ways, including, the doctrine of Trinity and the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ (Shutte, 2008: 156). Leonard (2011) states that the Triune God is in conversation with Himself and also communicates with human beings. Communication is synonymous with God's nature, the nature He implanted in humans who are created in His image (Genesis 1: 27).³² Humans are, therefore, designed to communicate and for that reason, communication is core to all humans and all cultures, tribes and nations. God is relational and loves communion with Himself and His creation; God interactively communicates in relationship with Him (Budapest, 2007: 10). God's approach to communication is considered two-way, which allows interaction. Carey (2009:13) states communication is a two-way process that is interactive

³² Genesis 1: 27, God said, let us create man in our image. In His image he created both male and female.

and communal. The human desire to communicate, relate, and connect with people is reflected in God's self-communication and His relationship with humanity. God in his communicative nature invites people to engage in communication with him. God is all about communication and created humans to communicate (Lewis, 2013: 3). Communication is a gift from God.

God communicates to people in different ways. In scripture, it is clear that God spoke to different people. For example, God spoke to Adam and Eve, and Abram way before any known religion, rituals, law or scripture. To Adam and Eve – ‘they heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking, and the Lord God called to the man, where are you?’ (Genesis 3: 8-9). To Abram, God said, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you (Genesis 12: 1).’ God also spoke to Moses. As recorded in the book Exodus, God spoke to Moses at the burning bush encounter, throughout the journey from Egypt to the promised land and at Mountain Sinai. It is reported that God would speak to Moses as a friend speaks to a friend (Exodus 33: 11). The Lord spoke to prophet Isaiah and I Isaiah responded, ‘Then I heard the voice of the Lord, “Whom shall I send? And who shall go for us?” And I said, “Here am I send me (Isaiah 6:8).” God’s communication with Isaiah depicts a conversation, and an interactive mode of communication. Therefore, throughout scripture, God has been speaking with humans in different ways. God is the author of communication and has shared the communication attributes with human beings. The human’s ability to communicate with God and one another, demonstrates God’s nature of communication and allows the extension of God’s redemptive work in the world (Garnica, 2016: 27). To explore the theology of communication in all eras, understanding God’s communicative nature and how He revealed Himself lays a foundation in any communication practice.

Scharer (2013: 3) states that the real theological work of thinking and speaking of God in Communicative Theology entails packaging the academic discussion about God in a way of thinking and speaking that is and remains connected to the environment, context and all people. Eilers’s argument forwarded by Stollery (2009: 2) is that at the centre of theology God is revealed and in the incarnation is the communicating God. Rahner (1978: 116) argues that God’s communication is made clear in his revelation to humanity. Budapest (2007: 4) advances Rahner’s argument and states that the fullness of God’s revelation is in the person of Jesus, the true mediator

between God and man. Communication is viewed by several theologians as a basic principle and an important aspect of theology in which God is made known to people. Lonergan in his book *Methods in Theology* (2005: 44) considered communication as an essential element of theology. Theology is centred on the realities of communication (Imbelli, 1995: 279) and Lonergan (2005: 44) mentions that the Trinitarian view refers to Christianity as a ‘religion of communication’, for God in His essence is a mystery of self-communication. Soukup (2019) asserts that God’s practice of self-communication fosters the understanding of any kind of theology.

God’s self-communication with humanity brings salvation and revelation to all people throughout history and fully in God’s incarnation in Christ (Cawte, 1984: 257). God’s self-communication is a sign of His self-surrender, which is a mystery and incomprehensible by many (Boff, 2000), although it is now made clear through the incarnation of God’s Son. God is the origin and goal of communication, and that communication of the gospel increases the awareness of God’s love (Grethlein, 2016). The world is created by God to be a place where God can meet and communicate with people – God coming in person to speak to people in His self-communication (Ranher, 1978: 73). Soukup (2019:29) quotes Avery Dulles who states that the theology of communication is studying how God communicates to bring about convictions and commitments connected with one’s religion and faith to invite people to engage with the communicative God. Communicative theology is derived from God’s self-communication, which presents and reveals the communicative nature of God (Imbelli, 1995: 278).

Communicative theology begins with an understanding that God is a Trinitarian who deeply interacts and communicates within Himself as a community, made up of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Hess, 2010: 142). Communication theology stresses the idea of theme-centred interaction (TCI), which allows interaction in communication in response to God and others while respecting each party (Hess, 2010: 134). Therefore, communicative theology focuses on theological interpretation as it views the communication process, thus promoting authenticity in self-expression considering the situation and context. Palmer (2007: 160) states that in communicative theology, the communicator is to hold a balanced position in communication, yet digital media tools allow selective authenticity in communication (Hess, 2010: 146). Nevertheless, communicative theology allows people to participate freely and invites them to any community, offline or online. Communicative theologians state that in any way people look and engage in

communication, especially in the 21st-Century world of digital media, is to do so theologically and seek the mind of God as they communicate with and for God in gospel communication. They are to create a space that is free and fair for people to share, listen, participate, and present their creative articulations about God-community conversations (Hess, 2010). Therefore, as the church desires to communicate to and with people, and longs to hear the word of God in the communities, communicative theology is possible in the digital media environment and communities.

The communicative theology focus of discussion is rooted in the Holy Trinity and incarnation (Doyle, 2006: 110; Ryu, 2018: 241) which is a communion of divine Persons, completely One and in dialogue. This is rooted in revelation in which the Trinity communicates the truth with and reveals Himself to people (Doyle, 2006: 111). It has its foundation in the incarnation model which is the highest form of God's communication (Claydon, 2005: 15). The incarnation is inseparable from God's self-communication and that salvation is made possible through God's self-communication (Ranher, 2008). In the word of God, we encounter and understand the triune God communicating to Himself (Boff, 2000: 2), and the incarnation of God among people to communicate. God's self-communication is emphasised in the incarnation of God. This is a perfect example to show that communication starts with God and then to people. God's self-communication avails God's personal knowledge to people (Shutte, 2008: 157). God's self-communication is central in the communication practice of the Church in which God's knowledge is presented to people. The church exists to communicate the good news to all (Søgaard, 1993: 15), which requires it to understand the most effective way to communicate in all contexts including the digital age. Christianity is a religion of communication, stressing God's self-revelation through the incarnation and the church that is becoming incarnate in different contexts and cultures (Soukup 2019: 26). As the Church is becoming incarnate in different contexts, it is to continue with the mandate to proclaim God's word by relevantly adopting the communication medium of the particular era to remain relevant. Therefore, the theologians are to engage in deep theological reflection to guide the church and the Christians in the communication practice.

Theologically, digital media communication is a sign of the time and is to be viewed in light of the gospel (Gould, 2015: 8). This will eventually help people and the church to understand the new media communication tools and how to use them in different contexts in the World. Theological reflection on the everyday use of digital media calls for examining digital communication through

the daily use of scripture, and faith practices to guide the use of digital media for gospel communication. Concerning people's daily use of digital media for communication, Pope Benedict XVI on the 43rd communication day in 2013 commented on digital media use, stating that: People engage in digital communication as a response to the human desire to communicate. He considers this as a picture of human participation in the communicative and unifying love of God whose desire is to talk to all people.³³ In his speech, Pope Benedict XVI points out that people share communication and relationship attributes with God and that the attributes are now evident in people's use of digital media to connect and relate with others. Scharer (2013: 8) argues that communicative theology could be essential in the theological reflection and understanding of digital media communication. Scharer further states that communicative theology requires one's reflection on the communication experiences of people in everyday life in light of the scripture. Therefore, communicative theology is concerned with the communication process in reality and deals with everyday communication realities from the perspective of God, who enables people to communicate (Hilberath, 2016: 187). To understand communication in theological terms for the digital age, Stollery (2009:4) argues that the church with internal and external functions in the world ought to reflect on communicative theology along with communication media to remain relevant in all ages to bring the gospel to all people via different media logic of the times.

4.4.1 The Communicative Nature of the Trinity

Communicative theology builds on the communicative nature of the Trinity (Stollery, 2009: 7). God's self-communication and revelation is highlighted in the Trinity. The Divine persons demonstrate a communicative God who communicates in a community (Boff, 2000: 18). God's communicative nature flows naturally and freely in the Trinity (Stollery, 2009: 6). Stollery further argues that from the three divine persons in one God, the human beings are created and invited to a loving communion with the Trinity through salvation. Boff (2000) further argues that humans invited to communicate in the community of the Trinity are required to participate, which includes listening and responding during the communication process. Through Christ, the believer is invited into a conversation with the Trinity in the family of God leading to spiritual maturity (Oberdeck, 2011: 4). Boff (2000: 28) states that in the Trinity, there is free communion and interaction to

³³ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xbi_mes_20130124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html accessed on 1 April 2021

which humans are invited. This community of the three divine persons, but one God, lays a foundation for the conversation and communication process in any Christian community in the world. Therefore, human beings in a given community, especially Christians, can communicate as they learn from the triune God (Stollery, 2009:5), in whose image they are created, the God who engages in self-communication.

Karl Barth (1975) argues that the understanding of God as triune is the starting point of Christian theology. The Trinity describes God as being in a relationship, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, in eternal and reciprocal communion and coexisting in equanimity for eternity (Ryu, 2018: 100). Boff (2000: 31) argues that God is communion and not solitude and operates in communion as presented in the Trinity. The intimate communion between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit results in the Trinity expressing the unity of the three divine persons (Boff, 2000: 40). God can now be known by people through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and this brings the human race into the communion and community with Him (Purves 2004: 30). To Boff, the reality of the Trinitarian relationship is so infinite and deep that the divine three are united and are one sole God. The communion or relationship nature of community is reflected in human relations and God reaches humanity through communion. The Blessed Trinity is so perfect in communion, and it offers the approach to life for Christians. Nevertheless, Ryu (2018) asserts that the Trinity is an infinite mystery and that it is a mystery of inclusion in unity and diversity. Critics of Boff say that he undermines the gravity of the Trinitarian mystery, nevertheless, the Triune God reveals himself to people and invites people into fellowship and communion with him through His son.

Believing the expression of the Trinity signifies communion, participation, and relationship with each other, and that all in the community are invited to communicate. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are community beings and individualism is evil. God is not and does not promote solitude in existence (Boff, 2000: 2) and is not a solitary divine dictator (Strong, 2015: 5). Digital media religion and online religion scholars are concerned with the growing level of individualism on social media for religious activities (Perkins, 2012). Strommen et al. (2008: 270) further emphasise that postmodernism tends to promote individualism. However, approaching communication in the digital age through the eyes of God's communion of the divine Three – the

Trinity, which invites all his sons and daughters into this communion, might deal with the aspect of individualism and promote community. This is possible through the establishment of an online faith community of the sons and daughters of God in the digital space, that invites every digital media user into the communication process within the community. The divine Three are one God, who invites Christians upon accepting life from Jesus into the triune community to participate in the conversation through fellowship and prayer (Kleinig, 2008: 5). The Trinity, therefore, is communitarian within the communion of the Three Unique Ones, which invites humans into the conversation. The Trinity allows overwhelming communication, invites all into the community, and encourages inclusion and participation of everyone (Boff, 2000: 53). God is communion, a community of Three persons and in constant communication, in which He invites his people. The Church is mainly known as a community of faith, although through the internet, digital media is facilitating the formation of online faith communities. All faith communities both online and offline may grant members an opportunity to participate in an ongoing conversation, thus connecting with members and with God. Strommen and Hardel (2008:5) “*in passing on the faith*”, state that communicating with God regularly marks a life of commitment to Jesus. For that reason, participating in the Christian community is considered crucial in passing faith from one generation to another (Strommen, Merton P. & Hardel, 2008: 75). Therefore, the church’s communication in the digital age might happen in an established online faith community. The established online faith community may offer an open community for people to worship, pray, learn and grow in their faith (Lytle, 2009: 28). As Carey’s theory argues, communication thrives in the community with interaction in fellowship among members. Therefore, concerning communication in the community, Boff (2000: 28) argues that communion brings different people together in the community, respecting the uniqueness of each other, yet encouraging all to participate in the communication within the community.

Communication in the community, as advocated for by Boff (2000: 58) concerning the Trinitarian model, promotes immediacy in communication in which people engage together in the community without mediators. Boff (2000) further argues that no divine member of the Trinity exists alone for one’s sake, but always in a relationship and constant communication with one another. Communion in a community allows intimacy, transparency and convergence of various interests during the communion. The Trinity advances communication that advocates for communion in the

community as a key principle enabling ontological status to connections established among members (Cali, 2013: 51). Cali further states that humans are relational beings, therefore, the relational aspect among the persons of the Trinity corresponds with communication among people. Considering the Trinity lens to understand communication both online and offline, the aspects of communion, collaboration, commonality, relationships and interaction cannot be ignored. Cali (2013: 53) states that Trinity theologically aids an understanding of and motivates contemporary communication in communion. I strongly argue that approaching communication in both online and offline communities through the lens of the Trinity is a significant approach in digital media communication. It presents traits of digital media such as relational, interactive, and communion (Lundby, 2009:3 2), which when applied in the digital media may facilitate communication of the gospel in the digital age. The Trinity model in communication is not one-directional (Carl, 2013), but interactive and thrives in community.

4.4.2 The Communicative Nature of the Incarnation

God's self-communication in the incarnation is central to the communicative theology. The communicative God became incarnate. God becoming man in Jesus Christ, in the Jewish culture to dwell among people and bring his message to the World (Peter et al., 2013: 3). Stollery (2009: 2) argues that the incarnation in which God is revealed as a perfect communicator is a key point of communication theology. The incarnation is considered as the starting point of incarnation from which to communicate with people (Dizon, 2014: 17), and a model for the church when employing different media to proclaim and sustain the Christian faith and message (Soukup, 1996: 3). The incarnation is the mode of communication through which God makes Himself known and desires to be known, as is revealed by His son (Sogaard, 1993: 17). The incarnation presents the Divine taking on flesh to address Himself to the circumstance with a set of beliefs, which leads to actions resulting from belief (Oberdeck, 2011:3). Through the incarnation, God revealed Himself to the human race, and daily interacted with people. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ becomes the centre of Christian communication. Communication was altered dramatically when God came in the flesh in the form of man to interact with all humanity (Claydon, 2005). In Jesus Christ, God was present on earth and interacting with people.

'In the beginning was the word, the word was with God and the word was God. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among men (John 1: 1–15).'

'In the past, God spoke through the ancestors many times, through the prophets, but in the last days, he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Hebrews 1: 1–2).'

'God also as revealed himself to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2: 10).'

The Incarnation of God through Jesus (John 1) demonstrates God's desire to communicate with humans. Jesus' way of interaction through the incarnation becomes central to understanding how people ought to communicate effectively for the Kingdom of God (Stollery, 2009). Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) making His dwelling among men to communicate the message of God. Through His Son, God dwells among people and interactively speaks (Hebrews 1) with people. Sogaard (1993: 14) argues that incarnation is the centre of communication, considered the best mode of communication. He further says, in the incarnation, God bent down through Jesus to reveal Himself through the usual circumstances of human life to become completely relevant to the context of human beings. Through God's Incarnation, Stollery (2009) states that Jesus communicated in communities, interactive activities, and in different places such as mountains, markets, seashores, homes, and synagogues. Considering people's contexts and experiences, Jesus spoke and invited them to a conversation with God the Father. Jesus' audiences included different age groups in which he communicated, one-to-one and in groups. With the Incarnation, communication allows one to become present in a context by entering into real places, situations, struggles and the world of the people. The incarnation model of communication might be ideal for digital media where Christians are called to take the gospel message and communicate it to all people in the digital world. Jesus, the model for Christians, did not speak from heaven but came down, dwelt and identified with people, and communicated. Technological tools and digital media are bringing people together by digital threads into a global community to reflect on their faith in different ways with different tools at different moments in history (Soukup, 2019: 28). Communicators in the church ought to follow Jesus Christ's example

and dwell among people to share their faith and theological convictions. The church and Christian communicators are, therefore, to be incarnate in the media space where people spend their time to communicate the gospel message.

4.4.3 The Communicative Nature of the Church

God the Son, the founder of the church, is a communicator. The Church known as ekklesia is responsible for gathering people in the community to worship God (Kurlberg, Vo & Afshari, 2022: 4). Jesus said to Peter, ‘upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail over it’ (Matthew 16:18). Jesus further spoke, ‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’ (Matthew 18:20). Where more than one person are gathered in Jesus’ name, He is present. Jesus the son of God left an established church behind as a gathered community of his disciples. Ecclesiology allows the study of the church, its communication and operations on earth. Ecclesiology is often studied in terms of the communion of God’s people and the Church is a community of people brought together in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Doyle, 2006: 248). The people of God together characterise the ecclesiology of communion. Considering Doyle’s view, the ecclesiology of communion is to extend the relationship of the Trinity into the church. Therefore, any church in whatever space is built and sustained by Jesus Christ.

To different communities of God’s people, Jesus communicated the kingdom message during his teachings in the temples and lakeshores using different styles of delivery (Reddy 2004: 90–95). Jesus communicated in different styles in different groups. Christ used a variety of styles and media of communication to preach and teach His message. Reddy further states that Jesus used interactive and persuasive communication styles in his missionary work. Meggrove and Litt (2017: 4) state that persuasive communication is the kind that influences one’s behaviour and attitude. Interactive communication happens between two more people in the exchange of thoughts and ideas (Raja, 2011: 185–190). Jesus engaged mainly in interactive oral communication using stories, images, examples and parables to deliver his message (Lytle, 2013; Megrove & Litt, 2017: 5). Megrove and Litt (2017) argue that Christ communicated in small and big groups using stories and parables in his teachings. In the small groups, especially with His disciples, he engaged in conversations using parables, objects, images, question and answering, dialogue, discussion and other means to

communicate the message. In His communication, Jesus Christ could engage his listeners in a conversation, and maintain their attention of the audience. He engaged in public or mass communication in open spaces and public venues (Megrove & Litt, 2017: 7).

The interactive approach to communication is evident through the gospel records of the Bible. The Interaction mode is depicted in Jesus' approach to teaching, which was interactive and participatory. Jesus often engaged in interactive conversations to create an opportunity to deliver his message. He used interactive communication when He talked with the Samaritan woman at the well about the place of worship (John 4). With His interactive approach, Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born again (John 3), at Zacchaeus's home (Mark 5: 25–34) and many other engagements to reach all with a message. He used interactions when he used parables. In the use of the Parable of the Sowers in Luke (10: 25-37), He engaged his listeners by asking them questions and expecting responses. Megrove and Litt (2017) state that in engaging in interactive communication Jesus used parables, metaphors, figures of speech, epigrams (Matthew 5: 3–12), hyperbole, exaggerations (Matthew 5: 29–30), poetry (Luke 6:31) and allegories (John 15: 111). The interactive process is when different participants in the communication process engage in the conversation by constructively sharing meaning (Carey 2009:17, Raja, 2011:15). The Interaction approach in the communication process requires that the communicator engages the audience in the communication process. Humans are relational (Ayee, 2013) and want to engage in interactive activities. In the 21st century, the church and faith communities are to find opportunities to engage in interactive activities as Jesus did to reveal God to all people.

The communication practice employed visuals. Jesus' use of visuals facilitated his persuasive communication (Megrove & Litt, 2017). In persuasive communication during His teaching and preaching at the Mount of Olives (Matthew 5), Jesus spoke with authority and clarity. To make His points Jesus also used objects, images and different visual aids to illustrate a point. Megrove and Litt (2017) state that Jesus' use of images and visuals was another teaching and preaching strategy to make His message clear to the listeners. The images and visuals often connected the audience to his teaching and delivered the message. For example, Jesus drew an image on the ground when the teachers of the law wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery causing the accusers to depart from the woman one by one. Jesus also washed the disciple's feet to teach about

servant leadership to his disciples (John 13: 3–17). The use of images and visuals tend to make a lasting impression on the audience. Vanichvasin (2020) states that only stating the facts is not as powerful as when they are visualised in communication. Jesus Christ communicated to His disciples with analogues that would cause the listener to imagine an image or structure. Jesus said, ‘I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail over it’ (Matthew 16:18), allowing the listeners to imagine a building for the church. He was a skilled and creative communicator.

As a communicator, Jesus Christ commissioned all His followers to go into the world and preach (communicate) the good news to all people (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; Acts 1: 8). The church established by Jesus Christ is commissioned to communicate (Sogaard, 1993). Since its inception to date, the church is responsible for the communication of its message. The commission to communicate is to all Christians and the church and requires a commitment to the Sender and dedication to communicating the message given. The commissioned Christians are to emulate Jesus’ communication approach in which he used different forms, approaches, tools and locations in communicating the gospel (Stollery, 2009). Jesus the communicator communicated to people in different ways both in public and private. He, therefore, expects the commissioned Christians to communicate by employing all approaches and media to communicate the transforming gospel message. The disciples of Jesus are to learn from Jesus in spreading the message to others in the world. All disciples (Christians) are called to be ambassadors in the world to communicate God’s redemptive work and love to the world. Pomery (2017) argues that the world in the 21st century is divided into two: both the virtual and the physical world which is to be reached with the gospel message. Therefore, faithful followers are to employ all the media of communication of the time to spread the message to all.

Communication is an important aspect of faith. The Christians and the church are to spread the faith and message across borders (Garnica, 2016). Biblically, the early church understood itself as a community of God with the responsibility to communicate Christ’s message to all nations (Hess, 2010). Christians must draw from the early church, scripture and church traditions to understand how to communicate effectively in a particular period (Stollery, 2009) including the digital age. Stollery further states that by learning from Jesus and the early church, Christian communicators are to engage in interpersonal or interactive, small group, community, and visual communication

to communicate effectively in the digital age. Jesus incarnated and interacted with the people with whom He communicated (Søgaard, 1993) but He did not conform to the patterns of the world; instead, He transformed the people and society of His time. The Christians are to identify with the sender dwell among the people and interact with the people, but always keeping in touch with the sender as Jesus remained in touch with God the Father who sent him. The communicators are ambassadors who speak the message from the sender and say what the sender says through his word. Jesus said, 'I only do what I hear and see my Father do and say (John 17).' He also said, 'I do not speak on my own but for the one who sent me.' The Christian communicator, making a presence in the place where people spend the most time, is to represent the sender, and not conform to the patterns of the world³⁴.

Through interaction with the audience, the church is to continue God's self-communication (Stollery, 2009). It is the responsibility of the church to continue the communication work of God in each generation. The communication mandate is key and a motivating factor for the church and Christians in all generations. The early church responded to the communication mandate by using the communication media of the time. Stollery (2009) argues that the clergy are to view the communication mandate through the incarnation in their pastoral and preaching ministry and be present, interpersonal and able to connect with an audience in both small groups and large groups using all necessary tools in the digital age. As the study argues for communicative theology, key insights in the discussion of the Trinity, Incarnation, Interaction and Visual use may be taken further by the church to engage in communicative church activities motivated by communicative theology to advance the gospel message in the digital age.

4.5 Theological Approaches to Digital Communication

Practical Theologians argue that practical theology starts from practice, theory and practice; it integrates, relates, informs and compares Christian theories with the non-Christian theories to know how they work together to bring about the desired change (Schrier, 2010). Practical theology is to suggest a possible final product of a given practice (Donsbach, 2008). So practical theological reflection on the challenges and practices of the church's digital communication fills the

³⁴ Romans 12:1 Call upon the Christians not to conform to the patterns of this world to be transformed each day as they reflect on the word of God to know His will for life.

knowledge gap about the communication practice in the digital age (Schlag, 2019: 423). The Pragmatic task in Osmer's (2008: 175) model brings and presents the final product from the described practice and interpreted situation to bring the theories and biblical reflection leading to a relevant change in the practice and conduct of the church's digital communication. In the desire to suggest a strategy and recommendation for the communication practice of the church, the communicative approaches discussed above can be considered in the transformation of the communication practice of the church in the digital age. Therefore, biblically and theoretically motivated approaches for digital media use to communicate the gospel might enable effective communication. There is a need to articulate the theoretically and biblically motivated approaches of communication guided by Practical Theologians for the church to relevantly spread the gospel in the digital age (Berg, 2018: 79). It could be of interest to explore the communicative aspects of Trinitarian, Incarnation, Interaction and Visual Use approaches for the church in the digital age.

4.5.1 Trinitarian Approach to Digital communication

The Trinity is central to understanding communication. Communication motivated by the Trinity happens in community, where every member is welcomed to participate in the communication process. Trinitarian the community theme in Trinity finds a smooth landing and acceptance in the digital age. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, communication in the community is advocated for by digital media scholars and communication theorists. According to Boff (2000:21), the Triune God continues in constant communication with himself and invites the world into that community to communicate. Purves (2004) argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is a basic framework which guides the way Christians live and communicate. The doctrine of the Trinity does not only teach us about the communion of the divine persons, but it also offers a great approach to the communication of the gospel in the digital age for the church. The Trinity paints a clear picture of community, interaction, participation, and fellowship (Genesis 1: 1, 27; Isaiah 6: 3) and invites many people to take part in the conversation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Ugandan communal approach to communication and James Carey's ritual view support the Trinitarian approach to communication. I argue that the Trinitarian approach to communication may be advanced in digital media to create an online faith community and invite Christians via digital media to belong. In the Online faith community members are to engage in digital theology and digital ministry.

4.5.2 Incarnation Approach to Digital Communication

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ lays a foundation for communication in all eras. God's self-communication and self-revelation in the salvation story through the incarnation (Lytle, 2009) makes the Christian faith a faith strengthened by communication. Paul Soukup (2019) asserts that Christianity is predominantly a religion concerned with communication, with the incarnation laying the foundation for the communication practice, and that the church is increasingly becoming incarnate in the world with its mandate to communicate the gospel. God is the God of communication and through His word, He created all. According to John 1: 1-4, 'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God'. God the Son – the Word – became incarnate and became a medium of communication. In the incarnation, God made His dwelling with the people which allowed Jesus to interact with the people during His teachings. This challenges the gospel communicators to make their presence certain and dwell in the world – including the digital media world – to communicate in the language people understand and to influence people. As Jesus communicated among the people using examples and stories familiar to the people, gospel communicators ought to emulate Jesus Christ to deliver the message in ways that people in the digital world understand.

The incarnational approach allows the church communicators to take on the digital features, culture and language to make a presence in the digital space and engage with the people. Digital media offers helpful tools and platforms through which theological and Christian discussions can take place. The establishment of online faith communities enables online interaction with the people through virtual incarnation, and online faith activities. Lytle (2009) argues that online faith interactions manifest the presence of God and that the incarnate God is experienced through interpersonal or interactive relationships and faith practices online. The incarnation lens reminds us of what God in Jesus did among us and with us, thus allowing humans to interact with God in flesh. I argue that in the digital space through online faith communities, the Church and Christians become incarnate and use digital media tools and spaces to engage in digital theology and digital ministry. Digital media allows one to be actively present, yet physically absent as Paul the apostle was actively present in different churches through his letters, yet absent in body. The incarnation of church leaders as communicators allows them to be close to the online audience to engage in fruitful discussions that allow feedback.

4.5.3 Interactive Approach to Digital Communication

Quentin (2000:5) argues that God gave the gift of communication to interact, build relationships and concrete meaning. Interactive communication is still applicable and relevant in Christian communication as was used by Jesus. It allows the communicator to invite and draw his audience into the communication process. It is important in interactive communication to engage people from where they are and their level of understanding. The media space and platforms were not obvious places for the gospel but now they have become so, therefore, the church communicators ought to engage in interactive and participatory communication activities within the media space and then use the opportunity to deliver the gospel story. The church cannot effectively use digital media if it continues to consider the audience as passive (Dyikuk, 2017: 44; Wise, 2014: 60). Unlike broadcasting media that is passive, digital media is interactive and offers participants opportunities to share, exchange and participate in a conversation around the word of God through social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and Zoom application to present the gospel message.

The digital age is heralding a revolutionary change in most parts of life and through virtual interaction, people interact with God who is present in the virtual space (Lytle, 2009). The digital age characteristics influence people's interactions, communication and existence, thus building networks through digital gadgets and platforms. Digital media is no longer only a channel to simply deliver information through static web pages. With the evolution in communication, it is increasingly becoming interactive and an active environment for interactive, multi-sensory engagement and social networking communities created in the digital space but composed of people from the real world. The opportunity for synchronous interaction through the internet allows the creation of relationships. It allows meaningful interactive ways of connecting and supporting one another during tough times. I argue that when communicating in digital media, interactive approaches employed by Jesus such as stories, questions, images, parables, metaphors and figures of speech be employed to draw the audience into the conversation. Communication, as James Carey (2009) presents in his Ritual theory, is not simply the transmission of information from one to many but a conversation and interaction.

4.5.4 Visual Aids Approach to Digital Communication

The use of visual aids in communication has dominated the field of communication, especially in the digital age. The digital age is painted with numerous well-designed images and symbols to advance a given message, including the gospel. A picture speaks a thousand words! Vanichvasin (2020) argues that visual communication allows the artistic presentation and delivery of content to the viewer using visual aids such as animation, graphics, images, clips and colour to produce content beyond only text-based content. Although some denominations are accused of worshipping idols, on several occasions, the Bible commands the usage of images. The use of images to communicate the gospel story goes back to the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments and the first generation of Christians. Kanu (2018) argues that God commanded the use of images in the communication of his message and does not prohibit the use of images, but prohibits worshipping the image.

Throughout the Bible, God used images to communicate with people. The images of a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day were used by God in Exodus when He was delivering the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land. These images that went before and after the Israelites signified direction, protection and God's presence with them. In Exodus Chapter 20, God gave the two tablets with the 10 commandments to Moses. In Exodus 31, God instructed Moses to instruct skilled men from the community to make the ark of the covenant, which was to be a representation of the presence of God in their midst. The image of the ark of the covenant was very central to the Israelites. In Numbers 21, God instructed Moses to make an image of a bronze snake and put it on a pole, that when anyone who is bitten by a snake looks at it will not die. In this case, it signifies that through this image, he was to bring healing to the lives of His people. In the communication process, God has used and can use any image to send a message to people. Kanu (2018) states that the use of an image in the communication of God's messages and worship does not take the place of God but points people to God and His power. After the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the cross has become a significant image in the Christian Church, pointing people to Christ, His redemptive work and a bridge to the Father. Images communicate deep Christian truths that would not have been easy to explain.

The use of visuals is common in some physical churches and also in online Christian communication. Visual aid communication tools are crucial in communication for they act as an aid to verbal and written messages (King, 2003). King further states that visual communication has greatly advanced the communication of information and especially through new media. To communicate the gospel in the digital age, the church may use images, pictures, videos, and graphic designs to deliver the gospel story to an online audience. Digital communication thrives through digital media gadgets, social media platforms and different digital media outlets that allow a visual aspect. The use of visuals in communication is considered appealing to digital media users. When the church deliberately engages in the use of images and visuals, the message is likely to attract and reach many viewers, thus impacting many with the gospel. The use of videos, visuals and graphics requires that the church recruits gifted personnel to record, edit and produce clips that can be uploaded on different social media platforms (Vanichvasin, 2020: 35). The aesthetic element in visual and video communication is crucial, therefore, gospel communicators who employ art, beauty and aesthetic in teaching, preaching, discipleship and prayer are likely to attract the audience into participation (Raja 2011: 159). I argue that using advanced skills and creativity to design and deliver Christian messages, quotes, images, prayers and Bible verses, plus sharing them widely online, is likely to boost the faith of the people and attract the audience into the faith conversation.

4.6 Time and Space in Digital communication of the Gospel

The process of communication has evolved throughout time and in different spaces and environments. In history, the church space has been mainly about physical buildings with a focus on aspects of physical location (Cooper, Laato, Nenonen, Pope, Tjiharuka & Sutinen, 2021: 2–5). The physical spaces tend to facilitate community creation that allows members to participate in different activities. However, the response to the spread of the gospel message has varied in different generations through various physical spaces using media in a particular era. As the media of the time is applied, it is crucial to understand the role of time and space within a given life situation of the church in the communication of the gospel. The timeframe is crucial in understanding how to deal with the prevailing phenomena in each situation. The time and space or place in the communication of the gospel are important. The space and time in the Christian impetus tend to change (Grethlein, 2016: 191). In the past, oral and written communication media

were employed at designated worship hours and in sacred spaces (Ajibade, 2017: 10), of recent, the digital media space is being used as a sacred space for communicating the gospel through different media, thus influencing the spread of the gospel (Lövheim & Campbell, 2017: 14). As the writing and reading culture of the missionaries influenced the spread of the gospel especially through written documents, in the digital age, digital communication is influencing communication. However, in the digital age, different media forms such as text, audio, audio-visual, images and symbols are blended in communicating a particular media in the digital space at any time.

In biblical times, there were specific times and days for talking to God (Grethlein, 2016: 198). Grethlein further argues that in the Old Testament, mornings and evenings were set aside as times of worship and sacrifice to God. The Sabbath Day was a holiday or ‘holy Sabbath’ to cease secular activities for Jewish people to focus on reading and sharing the word of God (Bacchiocchi, 1999: 308). During Jesus’ time, gospel communication was in physical places and took place in oral face-to-face conversations among people in the communities on different days and times. The adoption of Sunday is considered to have come as a result of Christian factors, in which the resurrection of Christ that occurred on that day was of great importance and influence (Bacchiocchi, 1999: 315). After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the followers of Jesus started fellowshipping on particular days and in particular places. Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day on which Jesus rose from the grave. It was, therefore, designated as a day and time for prayer, scripture reading, sharing the word of God and praying together. With the partner of worship among Jesus’ earliest followers, Sunday was quickly adopted as a day of worship and thereafter most Christians started observing Sunday as a day of prayer and worship (Mciver, 2015: 15).

In addition to Sunday, presently, different seasons and days are set aside as times of prayer and sharing the Word. The liturgical or church calendar which highlights special seasons, days and events in the Christian life (Carlson, 2019: 3) is followed by several Christian denominations and churches including the Anglican Church of Uganda. The seasons and days include Advent Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Lent Period, Easter season, Ascension Day, and other religious days. On special days and Christian events, the gospel message is often communicated and invites people to deepen their relationship with Jesus (Carlson, 2019: 3). The Church of Uganda observes the

different church seasons and events which are celebrated throughout the year and through which the gospel is shared. With the special events and festivals, the symbols communicate the message of the gospel across the generations, thus taking the celebrations further than a particular generation. Sunday, as was valued during the time of Reformers, is still valued as the day for congregational meetings among Christians (Grethlein, 2016: 199). In contemporary times, services take place throughout the week and day and night in special places. New days of prayer, such as a day of prayer and fasting, Thanksgiving Day, Harvest Day, Reformation Day and other days like New Year's Day are set apart for special service at different times and places.

The place and space in which communication takes place or must take place varies, and it is predominately affected by the cultural, natural and social systems in which the practice unfolds (Grethlein, 2016: 197). The environment or place in which communication happens, like church or community, contains many systems that determine the response. Although in the early days the place was significant in religious activities and communication, in recent times, changes in communication have played a significant role in changing and influencing the space for practising religious rituals. Temples and synagogues were central in the Jewish tradition, and during the Reformation, the churches held a special place. It was in such buildings that religious activities and worship took place. Christians first met in temples, synagogues, homes and later in the church building (Grethlein, 2016: 210). Gospel communication was and is still mainly done in churches and in some churches the separation between clergy and laity still exists, which promotes hierarchical authority. Generally, church buildings function as a place where people congregate to listen to the word of God preached. Nevertheless, since the invention of digital media and social media platforms, churches and church communicators have used digital media to spread the gospel. This has contributed to taking the gospel beyond the four walls of the church into digital media. The church is no longer the only place to communicate the gospel. Although space in communicating the gospel is necessary, the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to the world that it is not only about space. During the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown of churches, the church leaders actively engaged in digital media to communicate the gospel (Campbell, 2020: 3). The COVID-19 pandemic broke down the four walls of the church and aggressively pushed the gospel message beyond the walls – leading to the creation of churches with no walls. Therefore, communication with and about God is no longer restricted to a Sunday; it now happens anytime

and anywhere if there is an opportunity to communicate. Christian practices of communicating with and about God through preaching, prayer, and Bible study takes place at any time and is not restricted by distance, place, space and time (Grethlein, 2016: 245).

With digital religion (Campbell, 2013), one does not necessarily need a sacred space for worship and communication of the gospel to take place. The sacred place moved beyond the four walls into the media space (Campbell, 2020a: 2), which has become sacred for religious rituals (Campbell, 2005: 8). The gospel message can be communicated anytime anywhere, although church buildings are still relevant in communicating the gospel. Gospel communication is no longer limited to a building but takes place beyond walls and across borders. Digital media allows communication to continue in the virtual world allowing all those far and near to participate virtually in church activities and rituals, which can now be accessed anytime anywhere. However, digital religion or church online is likely to entrench individuality among participants. The active use of digital media and social media platforms for the online church is likely to promote individuality since the participants seem to belong to the community while in the comfort of their homes. The fear is that the individual replaces the community (Dyikuk, 2017: 47), which further reduces the physical face-to-face interactions that the offline churches offer during physical interactions. Nevertheless, the possibility of the creation of online faith communities (Campbell, 2020b: 10; Chilwa, 2013: 16; Sutinen & Cooper, 2021: 19) allows the church to address the aspect of individuality. The Trinity community communication approach (Boff, 2000:6) that allows the creation of an online faith community might promote both the individual and the community since they are both equally important. Dyikuk (2017: 45) further states that the online church is affected by internet connectivity which the physical church does not experience, and this limits people from rural places from participating due to signals being poor. Still, digital religion is facilitating a merge of online and offline spaces. The two spaces are becoming blended, thereby promoting religion online and knowing that online religion promotes interactivity (Siuda, 2021: 1) bringing religious rituals close to people. Offline religion continuously intersects with online spaces leading to hybrid space (Campbell, 2017a: 2; Lundby, 2012: 30).

Although digital religion is growing and online churches are being established, online churches cannot fully happen independently of offline churches. Religion offline shapes religious

experiences online and vice versa (Siuda, 2021: 2). Therefore, the offline church still plays a crucial role since certain church rituals such as weddings are not yet possible through the online church. The online churches require support from physical churches since people live in both the physical and virtual world and are still actively involved and associated with the offline church (Chiluwa, 2013: 16). People alternate between offline and online religious activities since they live in the physical world and what is done in the physical is what is transferred to the digital community. I argue that, although worship is made possible online, the offline church is central because it feeds into the online church. The online church is not a replacement for the physical church but it supplements the offline church and facilitates church growth (Chiluwa, 2012: 736).

A growing number of people live in a hybrid world (Siuda, 2021: 3), in which the boundaries of real and virtual continue to disappear. In this, one's identity and experiences get mixed in both physical and virtual practices, whereby life is shared both offline and online. Knowledge and information flows from online into offline spaces and vice versa, for people live in two worlds (Summer, 2009: xx). Digital media creates a close interaction among users despite the time and space, allowing networked individuals and groups to share knowledge and participate in joint activities (Fuchs, 2014: 54). Regardless of time and space, digital media allows workers to co-exist and be virtually co-present. In the digital age, people are eager to connect online with people they already know in their offline communities. The physical or offline shared communities, connections and relationships contribute to the connections, interactions and relationships in the virtual world (Pettersen, 2016: 132). Digital media and social media is believed to enable people's virtual co-presence in a variety of contexts despite their present physical location and they get to participate in other communities.

Pettersen (2016: 131) argues that virtual communities are entirely dependent on an organic and authentic social organisation of a given community (Van Dijk 2012: 12). The ability to communicate regardless of time and space does not mean that space and time are not important in the communication process. Van Dijk (2012) states that virtual communities cannot replace real communities which advance traditional society, but they are supplements to strengthen the physical. Social networking platforms help in bridging the gap between online and offline relationships (Petersen, 2016). The physical communities enable the creation of relationships and

connections that facilitate common ground for communication and social relationships extended into the virtual space (Nortvig, Petersen & Balle, 2018). Authenticity is maintained when the virtual produces exactly what is happening in the real community. Online communications that allow dialogue and interactions among users offer opportunities for the parties to maintain a certain level of authenticity as they engage (Gilpin et al., 2010). Gilpin et al. (2010: 265) further argue that engaging in social media communication with a certain authority and expertise concerning a subject and an organisation builds trust and thus breeds authenticity in the communication. In building authenticity, social media highlights the importance of interactivity within the online community and risks open interaction instead of one-way communication. While authenticity is important for any interaction to be successful, it is important to note that although digital media offers the opportunity to spread the gospel message, it has challenges with developing authentic relationships and presenting church rituals.

Campbell (2016:6) states that online rituals are interactive and bring the social sacred space into the digital media environment since digital religion is practised in the digital media space as shared by religious adherents. Digital media, through the internet, facilitates digital religion and digital communication of the gospel. Campbell (2005: 14) describes the internet as a spiritual medium to make spiritual activities and formation possible and easily accessed by all users. The growing church activities within the digital space have spiritualised the internet (Helland, 2007:5; Campbell, 2005:2) with a new form of worship and church activities (Chiluwa, 2012:736). The internet is a space that allows the communication of religious rituals, gospel and sacraments. It is viewed as a missional tool to be used to extend and communicate as a medium for religious activities and outreaches (Chiluwa, 2012:740). It is a medium of the 21st Century that extends religious conversations and builds people's religious lives and build religious identities. Although Campbell (2016:7) promotes the internet as a great medium for religious communication, she does not go into the details of how the internet can be used for religious activities. As a worship space, the internet and digital media must be theologically backed up for their effort to provide and be used for worship and religious rituals, through which users engage in online worship in cyber churches or churches without walls (Campbell, 2005:4). Loveheim (2004:7) argued that young people greatly use the internet for religious identity and formation, not withholding the destructive habits picked up through it. Although digital media presents great challenges and destructive

habits, it avails great opportunities and several churches have engaged the digital space as a space to communicate the gospel message. Digital media has created new sacred spaces and communities in which people come together and communicate the gospel (Golan & Stadler, 2016). I argue that digital media and the internet have become places or spaces through which the gospel may be interactively communicated. Having an online presence is increasingly becoming important for religious leaders and theologians since digital media is spiritualised with sacred and spiritual information.

Although religious organisations and churches use digital media to share and access religious information, deep theological reflection on the use of digital media cannot be avoided. Church communicators and Christians either use appropriately or misuse digital media thus disorganising or establishing church structures, and authorities. This calls for clear theological guidance. Cloete (2015) asserts that communication in the digital age requires theological reflection to guide the church's use of media. The church's digital communication practices show that Practical Theology reflection in digital media use to spread the gospel is crucial for further engagement with the contemporary medium. It is the role of theologians and ministers to discover appropriate ways to extend and engage in digital communication of the gospel and guide the Church. The evolution in communication media evolution brings different application of technology to participate in theology and gospel communication, thus inviting theological reflection.

4.7 Practical Theology Reflection on Digital Communication of the Gospel

The advancement in technology and active use of digital media for the communication of the gospel by the church calls for theological reflection. In other words, understanding the normative aspect of digital communication to advance the gospel message and participate in theology is a curial area of focus. Although digital religion has developed over time with different scholars engaging in active research, its counterpart, digital theology, which is using digital media to do theology, is still under ongoing development (Phillips et al., 2019: 34). In digital religion, Campbell (2013: 1) points out that digital media and online spaces are being formed by religious activities to participate in religious activities. Digital media is no longer only considered as a tool but a space for the church to create faith communities to participate in church ministry and gospel discussions. Digital media is a contemporary medium necessary for the Church to engage,

therefore, understanding the mind of God in dialogue with media theories may result in optimal use to the benefit of the church and fulfilment of the great commission.

In advancing communication in the digital age, certain qualities that cut across digital media, media theories and theology are necessary to reflect upon. According to digital media studies, some dominant qualities of digital media such as community, interactivity, connectivity, commonality and the convergence of media (Lundby, 2009: 34) are features that call for theological reflection concerning digital media communication for the gospel and theology. With the task to communicate the gospel in the digital age, church ministers and theologians are to continuously engage in theological reflection (Swinton & Mowat, 2016: 27). Scherer (2013:3) argues that theologically, digital media communication allows people to engage in theological discussions, participate in conversations that unify them in the love of God in time and space and may distribute information to different people. Therefore, the communication practice in the digital age is to reconcile with the communication media theories and communication practices of God considering all traits to bring transformation in the practice.

Practical Theology reflections create an opportunity for theologians to engage with the field of digital media to participate in digital religion, digital ministry, digital communication of the gospel and digital theologies with insight. Furthermore, theological reflections enable the digital media users to employ different social science theories and normative sources to address the possible problems and complexities that come with digital media communication. Practical Theology reflection helps the church, Christians and clergy to interact and deal with the crisis in the communication of God's message in the pursuit to make the Christian story relevant to the world (C. Hermans & W. J. Schoeman, 2015).

Practical Theology reflection on digital media use allows religious organisations, theological colleges and churches to overcome offline religious limitations and online complexities to create online communities to share religious information with religious adherents in media space (Campbell 2013: 2–5). In the digital age, churches including the COU have employed new religious and spiritual formation delivery practices in the media space to disseminate religious information with no clear theological guidance. For that reason, reflection on digital media use for

religious and theological information requires more attention and focused research since it is the medium that the church is faced with and comes with serious implications. With focused reflection, digital media becomes effective in preserving the Christian message, participating in church rituals, disseminating the gospel message, training theologians and inviting many media users to engage in digital theology as guided and facilitated by theologians and church workers.

Practical Theology reflection on the practice prepares church communicators and theologians for the practice of communication with theological conviction and guidance in light of scripture. Digital media theology as a growing field calls for understanding the practice and the theories in the field to participate in a dialogue with normative sources to suggest a transformation in the practice. Digital media tools and platforms are filled with features that facilitate Christian, church and theological activities to bring theology and church work close to the people. Through social media platforms that facilitate community discussions and fellowship, people can participate in practical theology in everyday life. Although Practical Theology is to guide the church's digital media communication, most of the church's communication approach is mainly driven by skill and technology, rather than theology-driven. Therefore, Practical Theology is meant to help understand the rationale of communicating the gospel in the digital age in light of scripture and church tradition to offer theologically sound models of communication that are appropriate to the context and relevant for communicating the gospel through digital media.

4.8 Conclusion

In light of communication as an aspect of practical theology, the chapter highlights the communicative nature of the gospel and communicative theology. The chapter discusses the communicative nature of God as revealed in God's self-communication by highlighting the theologies such as Trinity, Incarnation, Interaction and Visual Use in the communication process between God and humans. It points out clearly that God is a communicator who communicates with humans. Through God's self-communication, he has revealed Himself to humanity, and humans may learn from God's approach to communication to communicate the gospel message and share different theologies in different eras, specifically in the digital age.

This chapter presents the argument that to engage in digital communication, it is crucial to understand the communicative nature of God and His interaction with humans. God's approach to communication to and with humans lays a foundation for how people, Christians and the Church ought to communicate the message in the digital age. Therefore, the Church's approach to digital communication of the gospel requires continuous theological reflection to allow theology and scripture to play a significant role in the discussion and further use of digital media by the church, Christians and theologians. In light of digital communication, reflection was done on the theology of the Trinity, the Incarnation, Christ's interactive approach and the use of visuals in communication.

Although there may be numerous ways through which the church may communicate using digital media, the discussion attempts to fill the knowledge gap in the area of theologically guided approaches that the church may follow as it communicates the gospel and shares different theologies through digital media. Without proper theological basis and guidance in communicating in the digital age, the church might never maximise and sustain digital media use for the gospel. On the other hand, with theological guidance, church communicators may theologically engage, maximise digital media use, participate in digital theology and train more digital media users to spread the gospel message in the digital media space. Furthermore, with practical theology reflection on digital communication, God's communication practices may be applied in the church's communication approach in the digital media space to advance the gospel.

In the digital age, using digital media for church ministry and creating an online community and online presence is increasingly becoming important for religious leaders and theologians, therefore, how to engage in that space is crucial. I would like to suggest that communication be conducted in communities in the digital media space as presented in the trinitarian model. I would further suggest that during the church's communication in the digital media, activities that call for being present, interactivity and visual use may be considered when using digital media and reaching audiences in the digital media environment. Online communities established by the church may allow the church to create a presence in the digital space, relate with people and bring their message close to the people so that those far away from the church can access the gospel

message through digital gadgets and platforms such as phones, tablets, computers, digital radios, digital televisions and social media networking platforms.

In the digital age, digital media are more than tools of communication but also spaces for digital theology, digital ministry, digital religion, digital spiritual formation, digital discipleship, digital evangelism and digital witnessing. Therefore, digital communication of the gospel is an aspect of practical theology and requires continuous theological reflection to guide people and the church's everyday use of digital media to optimally engage with digital media tools and spaces to bring the gospel message close to digital media populations. The digital media influx and revolution in the digital age require theologians and church leaders to continuously review and refine the digital communication approaches and practices for the church to remain relevant and be able to achieve its mission in the world. Therefore, the Practical Theology reflection on digital communication together with the empirical findings of the study may further suggest possible modifications of the church's digital communication practice resulting in a theologically informed digital communication strategy that may transform the church's use of digital media to share the gospel and theologies. The next chapter presents the process of data collection followed for the empirical aspect of the study to understand what is going on in the context of the COU by exploring the digital communication practice of the COU.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, the research question is clearly stated: What is the Church of Uganda's understanding, attitude and approach towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel in the digital age? The descriptive-empirical task of practical theology (Osmer, 2008: 4) helped to guide in the gathering of information to understand and describe the communication practice from the COU context. The study was conducted as qualitative research through a case study design to obtain in-depth data to answer the research question.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs the case study design and research qualitative methodology as explained in chapter 1.

5.1.1 Research Design

The case study design for qualitative research relevant to a descriptive-empirical task (Osmer, 2008:39) enabled the researcher to explore the depth of participants' understanding of digital media use within the COU. As a case study, the parishes selected for the in-depth investigation of the leaders' understanding, attitudes and approaches towards digital media usage for communicating the gospel were from the two dioceses of the COU. The dioceses and parishes were purposively selected for a thorough, holistic and in-depth exploration of the COU's digital media use. I employed a case study to generate a deeper and more detailed understanding of the COU's digital media use to describe clearly an accurate account of the COU's understanding and experience with digital media. The two dioceses, the Diocese of Kampala and Namirembe Diocese were studied as case studies to enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the COU's views, attitudes and approaches to digital media use to communicate the gospel. The inductive approach was necessary for case studies to produce qualitative data that would be used to offer certain generalisations (Schoch, 2020: 246) and draw general conclusions and proposals (Langkos, 2015: 4).

5.1.2 Research Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology is multidimensional and calls for an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the matter at hand to answer the question in areas of credibility, transferability and dependability (Daymon & Holloway, 2005: 1–25). The methodology was important for the study since it stipulated the methods and steps to use to answer the research question and realise the aims. Considering Osmer's (2008: 39) hermeneutical model, the qualitative method enabled a clear explanation or description of the COU's understandings, attitudes and approach towards digital communication. It brought out the perspectives of the participants, both priests and fellowship leaders. At the beginning of the study, I had rough information concerning the COU's digital communication but the qualitative approach allowed me to gather detailed information from the case studies to respond to the research question of the study.

5.2 Research Context

The Dioceses of Kampala and Namirembe are two of the dioceses in the Anglican Church of Uganda. In 1890, the Namirembe Diocese, the first diocese of the Church of Uganda, was created with its cathedral acting as both the Namirembe Diocesan Cathedral and Provincial Cathedral³⁵. Namirembe Diocese is served by St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe (Namirembe Cathedral) which once operated as the provincial cathedral of the Church of Uganda. St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe served as the headquarters of the Church of Uganda until 1972, then the Kampala Diocese succeeded and then it came back to Namirembe. Presently, St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe serves as the provincial Cathedral of the COU and the diocesan cathedral of Namirembe Diocese. Namirembe Diocese is composed of archdeaconries, parishes and sub-parishes. The Diocese is one of the biggest dioceses in the Anglican Church of Uganda and consists of parishes and sub-parishes located both in urban and rural areas. Therefore, Namirembe Diocese's coverage, although its headquarters are situated in Kampala city, goes beyond one district and cuts across other districts covering urban and rural areas.

³⁵Kampala-city-guide.com/Kampala/gallery/Namirembe_cathedral.html. St. Paul's Namirembe Cathedral is the Church of Uganda's oldest cathedral, and the first cathedral built on Namirembe Hill/Mengo in March 1890. It is located in the Lubaga division of Kampala in the western part of Kampala the capital city of Uganda. Namirembe Diocese, although its cathedral is in Kampala, covers a number of other districts in the country such as Wakiso.

From Namirembe Diocese, two parishes were considered for the study. St. Paul's Cathedral and Martyr's Church Nateete were considered for the study. The parishes in Namirembe Diocese, although they have English services, are commonly Luganda-speaking parishes. Generally, most of the parishes in the Diocese stick to the church traditions and predominately the dominant local language (Luganda). The Diocesan Cathedral, located in Kampala, is experiencing a revival in its approach to ministry. To fulfil the Great Commission, Namirembe Diocese continues to preach the gospel through several avenues including media. In addition to the pulpit at church, crusades in communities and door-to-door preaching activities, it preaches the gospel through radio, television and digital media platforms.

In addition to Namirembe Diocese, I considered the Diocese of Kampala in the study, and two parishes of the Diocese of Kampala were visited for the study. The Diocese of Kampala³⁶ was originally part of the Namirembe Diocese and smoothly worked together. After the enthronement of the Most Rev Eric Sabiiti as the first African Archbishop, challenges occurred that led to the creation of the Diocese of Kampala to serve as a home diocese for the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda to date. The Diocese has been in existence for 50 years, serving Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. It is a vibrant and fast-growing metropolitan diocese bringing together people from different cultures and ethnic groups. Although it conducts some services in the local languages, its services are predominately in English being a cosmopolitan diocese. Therefore, the dioceses under study due to their locations have parishes that attract multicultural parishioners, conduct some services in English and actively engage different media in ministry. The parishes considered for the empirical part of the study include All Saints' Cathedral Kampala, St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe, St. Luke's COU Ntinda and Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackay.

5.3 Background of the Units of Analysis

In each diocese, two parishes were considered for the study following the recommendation of the Church of Uganda Christians. The parishes in the study were considered to have a great history, fast-growing churches, significant development and actively employing media and specifically

³⁶ After the Rev. Eric Sabiiti was elected as the bishop of Rwenzori and was enthroned as the first African Archbishop, it became practically difficult for the Archbishop to preside over the provincial office in Kampala from his home diocese and the challenges increased, which led to the creation of Kampala Diocese and carving it out of Namirembe Diocese (DOK-Strategic, 2019).

digital media. Therefore, all parishes considered for the study have an active media presence and ministry activities on different social media platforms.

5.3.1 Namirembe Diocese

Within Namirembe Diocese, the parishes considered for the study included; St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe and Martyr's Church Nateete. St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe is the Cathedral for the Namirembe Diocese located on the Hill of Mengo. It was the second church to be constructed by the missionaries after Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackey and the first cathedral in the country. St. Paul's Cathedral served as the provincial cathedral of the Church of Uganda until the creation of the Diocese of Kampala. The headquarters of the Church of Uganda was first at Namirembe and was then moved to Kampala and back to Namirembe. The Cathedral is the seat of the Bishop of the Diocese, but the Cathedral activities are run by the head priest, the dean of the Cathedral and his staff who assist with the work and ministry activities within and around the Cathedral. Although St. Paul's Cathedral conducts services in English, its main language of operation is Luganda. The church services and ministry activities are growing and now reaching several people both in church and outside of church since the cathedral actively engages in media ministry. St. Paul's Cathedral is considered the reference point by the other parishes within the Diocese of Namirembe.

Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackey was the first church to be constructed by CMS in Uganda. The birth of the Anglican Church started at a cave in Nateete, which was the home of Alexander Mackay, a missionary who started preaching the gospel in the areas of Nateete and Busega, where Martyrs' Church is situated³⁷. At Martyrs' Church Nateete, Alexander Mackay preached the gospel and translated the Bible into Luganda, the local language³⁸. The church is headed by the archdeacon and is the seat of the Archdeaconry of Nateete in the Namirembe Diocese. This church is located in the Namirembe Diocese and serves parishioners from both Kampala and Wakiso districts and serves both urban and rural people in its jurisdiction. The priest at Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackey and his leadership team continue to communicate the word of God through the

³⁷ www.nilepost.co.ug Death marked the beginning of Martyrdom in the Anglican church by Sheila Tusiime Mugisha June 2018, accessed on 2 January 2022.

³⁸ Frontnewsonline.com/martyrs-church-nateete-mackay-mackays-cave-nateete

church pulpit, crusades and media. Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackey has different digital media platforms and applications through which they share the gospel with people far from the Church.

5.3.2 Diocese of Kampala

In the Diocese of Kampala, the parishes considered in the study included All Saints' Cathedral Kampala and St. Luke's Church Ntinda. The Diocese has All Saints' Cathedral Kampala, located in Nakasero, as its Cathedral. It started as a chaplaincy for a European Colonial Hospital in Nakasero and later became a pro-Cathedral. It evolved from a chaplaincy for expatriates into a Cathedral and is the seat of the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda who is the Bishop of the Diocese of Kampala. All Saints' Cathedral Nakasero as a metropolitan church is a fast-growing and purely English church with members from different cultures both national and international (Nkesiga, 2012). It is a Christ-centred and caring church, meeting the dynamic needs of the community. The Cathedral has several services, ministries and fellowships through which the gospel is communicated. All Saints' Cathedral's clergymen and women with the lay fellowship leaders continue in the task of communicating the gospel in and outside of the church (Nkesiga, 2012:3). It communicates the gospel in several approaches and media. In the digital age, in addition to communicating the gospel through pulpit ministry in church and open-air crusades, it employs digital media such as television, radio and digital media platforms to communicate the gospel.

The second church visited for the study was St. Luke's COU Ntinda. It is a fast-growing Church with a dynamic and cosmopolitan congregation. It is a Christ-centred church with the mission to proclaim the gospel following Christ's mission to make disciples of all nations through love, worship and missions (Kyakulgira, 2020). It is a Church committed to preaching and communicating the gospel to all people throughout all generations since its inception in 1956. It first belonged to Namirembe Diocese and later with the start of the Diocese of Kampala was transferred to Kampala. It is the fastest-growing Church in the Diocese of Kampala with a vibrant youth and children ministry. It is actively involved in preaching the gospel of Christ both in church and communities using different mediums of communication. It is actively involved in using the church pulpit, open air crusades, door-to-door and digital media in the spread of the Christian message. It is active in using digital media platforms and applications to share the word and conduct fellowships.

The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at the parishes. The head priests at each parish were interviewed for in-depth interviews and the fellowship leaders were engaged in focus group discussions at each parish. Data collection was carried out in both Namirembe and Kampala dioceses.

5.3.3 The Diocesan Priest Interviews

The senior diocese priest in charge of the diocesan office is responsible not only for administration work but also for communicating the gospel message. The senior diocesan priest is appointed by the Bishop of the diocese to carry out the administrative work of the diocese and follow up on the priests in the parishes. I interviewed the senior diocesan priest from each diocese following the interview guide³⁹. They were considered key informants in the interview process. The senior priests offer a supervisory role to the parish priests and were in a position to give insightful information during the interview. The key informants' interviews were guided by the same semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured questions guided the discussion which was recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts of interviews were exported into the atlas-ti software program where coding and thematic analysis were done.

5.3.4 The Parish Priests

The parish priest is responsible for the running, management and preaching of the gospel within a specific parish. The parish priest is appointed by the Bishop and supervised by the senior diocesan priest who works on behalf of the Bishop. Although the parish priest is responsible for several activities at the station parish, his or her main responsibility is to share the gospel and feed the flock and parishioners on the word of God. Due to the parish priest's main role in the parish, I interviewed the parish priests of the selected parishes. I interviewed four head parish priests from All Saints' Cathedral Nakasero Kampala, St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe Diocese, St. Luke's Church of Uganda Ntinda and Martyrs' Church Nateete. The parish priests were invited to participate in the in-depth interviews. While conducting the in-depth interviews with the priests, each in his office on a special day, an audio recording was done. The audio from the in-depth interviews was transcribed and later using a triangulation approach the themes were paralleled with data received from other sources.

³⁹ Addendum D with the Interview guide for the In-depth Interviews.

5.3.5 The Fellowship Leaders

In every parish, due to the work and the number of church members, the parish priest cannot work alone. The parish priest with the guidance of the senior diocesan priest elects and appoints different fellowship leaders to help in the work at the parish. The fellowship leader is given the responsibility to give oversight to a particular fellowship. He/she is responsible for the spiritual growth of the members of the fellowship group. The fellowship leader is responsible for communicating the gospel within and outside the fellowship, using any form of media to bring the message close to people. I considered fellowship leaders including the Mothers' Union, Fathers' Union, Children, Youth, General fellowship, Marrieds, Missions, Discipleship, Christian's Women and Christian Men's fellowships. In each parish, the parish priest mobilised the fellowship leaders for the focus group discussion (FGD). The 10 fellowship leaders per parish were invited to the FGD. The FGD was conducted in the parishes' understudy including All Saints' Cathedral, St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe, St. Luke's Church Ntinda and Martyrs' Church Nateete.

5.3.6 Criteria for Inclusion

Some of the criteria I considered for the parish to be included were that the parish had to have 10 active fellowships, and an active digital media and broadcasting ministry for communicating the gospel. The two dioceses and four parishes included in the study are active users of digital media to communicate the gospel. Even though the church in general is expected to communicate the gospel to all generations, the considered parishes in the COU have intentionally used different digital media platforms to communicate the gospel to both Christians and non-Christians amidst complexities. For that reason, they were chosen. Despite the challenges experienced by the use of digital media, these parishes endured the challenges and made a media presence with the gospel. The parish priests and fellowship leaders are active users of digital media in daily life and share devotions and scripture with their fellow members.

Furthermore, the parishes were selected upon the recommendation of Church leaders and members of the Anglican Communion, since they have good network coverage, internet access, media presences and active use of digital media by both parishioners and leaders. The parishes considered are in Kampala and Wakiso districts, the areas which have very good network coverage and internet infrastructure (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014). The two dioceses, which are Kampala and

Namirembe, operate differently; one is urban and the other is both rural and urban, but both actively use digital media to communication the gospel. Also, in both dioceses, diocesan senior priests, parish priests and fellowship leaders are active users of digital media to communicate the gospel message among members. In addition, the two dioceses are not only considered due to the availability of good network coverage and internet access but they have English-speaking congregations, full-time priests, active fellowships, knowledge about the topic, and were easily accessible, and transportation costs were affordable.

5.4 Research Sampling

Research sampling was necessary for answering the research question study. As explained in Chapter 1, to select the participants to engage in the study, I employed a non-probability sampling technique. With a non-probability sampling technique, I engaged in purposive sampling to select the study participants.

5.4.1 Process of Sampling the Study Population

To get the participants (unit of analysis) from the selected population to understand the cases in-depth, purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling techniques helped in selecting the participants. The sampled participants were considered due to their leadership role, exposure and insightful knowledge about digital media use to communicate the gospel. To obtain the sample, I relied on personal judgment having consulted the priests of the parishes under consideration.

5.5 The Research Process

The consultation meetings were held between 29th September and 5th November 2021 with the senior diocesan priests and parish priests of the parishes mentioned above to introduce myself and the study in preparation for the focus group discussions and interviews. In the meetings, the priests' involvement in the study was sought and their participation in the study was gained. In the same meeting, I explained the nature and the importance of the study, and in return, the priests accepted to take part in the study. During the discussion, the parish priests promised to communicate with the fellowship leaders who were to participate in the study and request them to come on the set date for the FGD.

I set up a schedule of the data collection sessions for the different parishes in which the participants were to be engaged in the discussion and interviews. The schedule was communicated to the participants who later came for the session on the set date. During the FGD meetings and interview sessions, I took notes while the recording of the meeting was taking place to capture all the necessary information. In all data collection sessions, the respondents were free to express their views on the topic and respond to the questions in the interview guide freely. The conversation during both interviews went on naturally and smoothly.

I conducted the focus group discussions with the fellowship leaders in each selected parish at the church premises. The focus group discussion brought together fellowship leaders within the church to engage in the study. The ten fellowship Leaders including the Fathers' Union, Mothers' Union, Youth, Children, Christian men, Christian women, General fellows coordinator, Cell, Missions, Discipleship, choirs and Bible Study coordinators were mobilised by the Parish priest. The fellowship leaders explained in detail how the Church of Uganda communicates the gospel using digital media.

In addition to FGD, I conducted in-depth Interview sessions with individual parish priests and Diocesan priests. During the interview sessions, the priests were open and shared freely their perspectives, views, opinions and experiences about the COU's use of digital media to communicate the gospel in the digital age.

5.6 Trustworthiness of the Data Collection

I am a priest in the Church of Uganda and serve within the Diocese of Kampala. During the study, I asked for time off from parish work to focus on the study. Although I am a Church of Uganda priest, I do not serve in any of the parishes considered for the study. Some issues may be raised concerning partiality, biases and objectivity concerning the study within the Church of Uganda. Key measures were considered to make sure I remained unbiased and objective. As a minister in the Diocese of Kampala, I am not an active priest in the parishes under study. To limit being influenced by the collected data, I was not involved in the parish's active ministries. During the data collection process, I recorded all interviews and discussions, and carefully transcribed the participants' views without any bias. To limit the risk of manipulating any data, I was responsible

for the data with no participants having access to the data. To limit any influence on me from the communication process of the church, I have not been involved in the management and ministry of the church and was an outsider as I engaged in data collection.

5.7 Data Recording

During data collection, I maintained a notebook with field notes to complement the audio recordings. In the notebook I noted down any comment upon impression, situation and context; and nonverbal expressions that cannot be audio-recorded were noted down (Austin & Sutton, 2021). During the data collection, the notes were handwritten in the notebook and then set aside for the research work. The audio recording helped to inform the research during the transcription process. The audio recording was maintained and kept securely uploaded on a computer, personal drive and the University drive and was used in the transcribing process. All the recorded data was uploaded to Google Drive of the University and my storage for safety. The transcribed information was uploaded into the ATLAS-ti software to enable the coding process and theme identification.

5.8 Quality of Transcription Process

Both the interview and FGD sessions were recorded, which required transcription. Interviews are transcribed at different levels (Clark, Birkhead, Fernande & Egger, 2017). Although transcription of the records faces certain challenges, as noted by Weber, perfect transcription is a challenge to attain (Silverman, 2014). Nevertheless, quality transcription was highly considered with careful observation, although improvement is expected with transcription (Weber, 2014). To consider quality transcription, I ensured that while recording was happening, notes of the discussions and interviews were taken. After the transcription work, I carefully read through the write-ups while listening to the recorded audio and compared them with the notes taken during the data collection to attain validity with the transcriptions and ensure that the participants' opinions recorded were reflected.

5.9 Data Analysis

As explained in Chapter 1, the data was transcribed and uploaded as documents into the Atlas.ti 9 software to identify the themes.

5.10 Conclusion

The empirical part of the study was necessary to determine the Church of Uganda's understanding, attitudes, views, experiences, opinions and approaches concerning digital media use to communicate the gospel. To understand the communication situation in the COU, the priestly presence and qualitative listening to the participants from the COU leaders allowed me to gather the required information. Using the above-explained qualitative research and the case study design knowledge and insight were obtained from the participants about digital media use to communicate the gospel.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to present the finding in form of the themes derived from the analysed data. The chapter contains themes generated by capturing key, relevant and significant data from the participants' views, understandings, experiences and perceptions. To generate the themes, I identified core ideas, opinions, views, understanding, experiences, attitudes, assumptions, theologies and ideologies from the narratives and reflections shared by the participants. The generation of themes was done by reflection on the research questions of the study. This was possible with the guidance of the Practical Theology task; the descriptive-empirical task that guided in understanding what is happening. The description of the findings was crucial in narrating what was happening to understand communication practice. The interpretative task was crucial to explain why particular trends are happening. The interpretative task drew on the theoretical study to understand why digital communication is happening in such a way.

6.2 Reflection on the Research Context

The study was conducted in two dioceses: The Diocese of Kampala and Namirembe Diocese. In each diocese, two parishes were included in the study. In the Diocese of Kampala, All Saints' Cathedral Kampala and St. Luke's Church of Uganda Ntinda were included in the study. In the Namirembe Diocese, St. Paul's Cathedral Namirembe and Martyrs' Church Nateete-Mackey were included in the study. At each diocesan head office, a senior priest was interviewed. In addition to the diocesan senior priest, in each parish understudy, a senior priest was interviewed and a focus group discussion for fellowship leaders was conducted. The total number of participants engaged in the study was 46. Of the 46 participants, two priests were engaged in an in-depth interview as key informants from the diocesan level; the four priests were engaged in an in-depth interview as parish priests and in each parish 10 fellowship leaders were engaged in the focus group discussion. The participants of the study were engaged following the semi-structured interview guides, which contained questions that were focused towards answering the research question of the study. The participants were receptive and responded to the questions freely from their experience and understanding. The descriptive and interpretive tasks are necessary to dialogue with normative sources to propose a change in action leading to a transformation of the practice.

6.2.1 Codes Used for the Study

For the presentation of findings, codes were allocated to participants, namely: Namirembe Diocese – ND, Diocese of Kampala – DK, priest for in-depth interview ST. Luke’s – ID-STL, priest for in-depth interview All Saints’ Cathedral – ID-All Saints, priest for in-depth interview St. Paul’s Cathedral – ID-STP, priest for in-depth interview Martyrs’ Church Nateete – ID-Nateete, priest for in-depth interview Martyrs’ Church Nateete –ID-Nateete, focus group discussion St. Luke – FGD-SLT, focus group discussion St. Paul’s Cathedral – FGD-SLP, focus group discussion Martyrs’ Church Nateete – FGD-Nateete, and focus group discussion All Saints’ Cathedral – FGD-All Saints’. The codes are attached to the quotations of the participants’ views.

6.2.2 Gender of Study Participants

During the study, a total of 46 participants were engaged. The study attracted both female and male participants. Table 6.1 shows participants per gender. According to the table, the majority of the participants were male. This suggests that the COU is male-dominated in its leadership structure.

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	28	60.9
Female	18	39.1
Total	46	100

Table 6.1: Gender of Participants

6.2.3 Age of Study Participants

The ages of the different study participants are shown in Table 6.2. Participants were aged between 20 to 69 years. The median age for the participants was 40 to 49 years of age.

Age Group	Number
20-29	8
30-39	11
40-49	12
50-59	9
60-69	6
Total	46

Table 6.2: The table showing the number of participants per age group

6.3 Study Findings

In this section, I present the views and findings as gathered from the focus group discussions and interviews. The FGD and interviews were guided by the interview guides.⁴⁰

6.3.1 Understanding of Concepts by Participants

To answer the research question: What is the Church of Uganda's understanding, attitude and approach towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel in the digital age? Questions about certain key concepts were raised. The questions raised were clustered into four major categories. These included, Communication of the Gospel, Digital Media Use, Theological Motivation and Digital Media Approaches.

6.3.1.1 Understanding of the Communication of the Gospel

In presenting the participants' understanding of the communication of the gospel by the church, the responses given fell under five major themes. These include, the gospel message, traditional methods of communicating the gospel, digital media communication, attitudes towards digital media and convergence of media, as shown in Figure 6.1. The data is reported in themes as identified. The data is a representation of the responses from both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions.

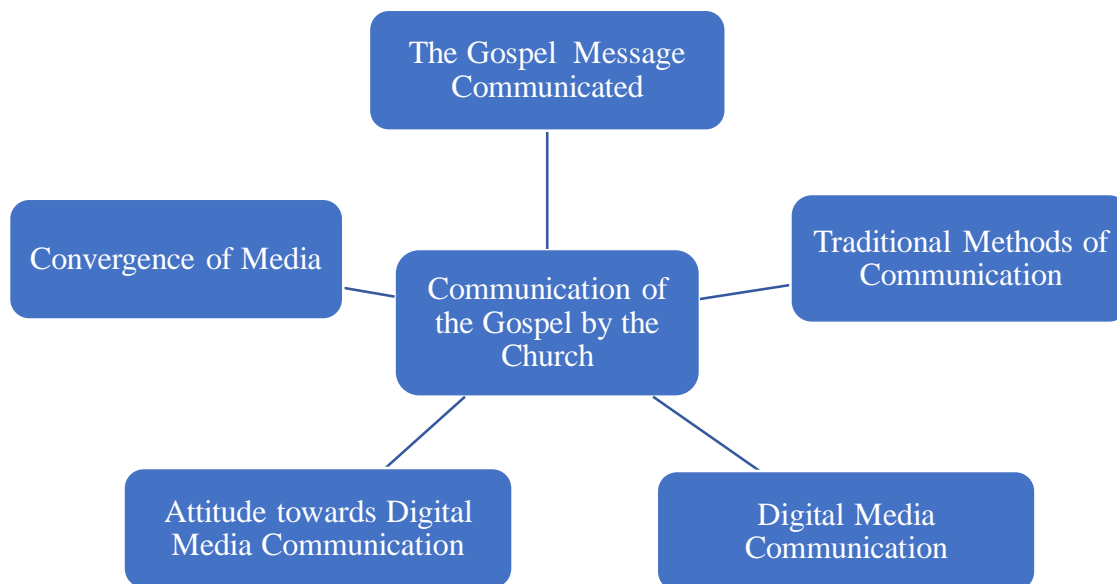


Fig 6.1: Themes in the category of communicating the gospel

⁴⁰ Addendum D and E contains the semi-structured questions followed in data collection.

6.3.1.1.1 Understanding of the Gospel Message Communicated

Below are the participants' views regarding the message communicated by the COU:

***The Good news:** As a Christian, I will say that the gospel is the good news about the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Part -1-FGD - All Saints).*

The Great Commission commands the disciples to spread the good news to all people in the world.

The gospel is the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ (KI-DN).

Jesus Christ's teaching is the good news, which is the message we share (KI-NK).

The good news is the word of God to all (ID-STP).

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ in the kingdom so that's the gospel the good news (ID-STL).

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, to redeem man (Part- 2 FGD-STL).

***The word of God of salvation:** The gospel is talking about Jesus and what he came to do on earth. It is the proclamation about Jesus' life death and resurrection leading to salvation (Part – 2-FGD – Nateete).*

The gospel is not just a gospel but the word from God, which is enabling us to understand why humanity exists. So, briefly, I can say that the gospel enables us to understand why we exist as human beings (Part – 3-FGD - STL).

***The Trinity:** To me, the gospel is about getting the knowledge about the Father, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our saviour and also together with the lifestyle that we have to live as Christians (Part – 4-FGD- STL).*

To me, communicates the gospel, which is about getting the knowledge about the father, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our saviour and also together with the lifestyle that we have to live as Christians (Part 3 – FGD-STL).

The gospel which is the word of God helps us to understand human existence. It's about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Part 4 – FGD-STL)

***God's message to man:** The gospel is the godly message that we share, that is to guide in daily living. People knowing the godly purpose for their lives. For example, if we talk about the gospel,*

in line with the people who God united together as husband and wife, it's those values that uplift the name of the Lord in the way they are to live as marrieds (Part – 5-FGD- STL).

The message the church communicates is the gospel, which is all about Jesus, without Jesus there's no gospel, that is the simple answer I can give you (KI-DK)

Good News of Redemption: *The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, to redeem man (Part 3 – FGD- Nateete). The gospel is the spreading of good news, that's the word of God to all people both Christians and non-Christians. It's the good news everybody is entitled to get to know the good news (ID-STP).*

To understand the message communicated, the participants emphasised that the gospel message is the good news about Jesus which is the word of God to all mankind, bringing salvation, redemption, teaching on the Trinity and the word of God. There was a clear understanding among the participants about the message the COU communicates. Several Christians tend to give different responses when asked about the good news of Jesus Christ, depending on several reasons (Gilbert, 2010:23). The participants were convinced that the message the COU communicates is the good news of God through Jesus for salvation and reconciliation, given to the church, which is to be communicated by all disciples of Jesus Christ. The gospel as the good news of God's salvation, transformation, redemption and reconciliation work in Christ Jesus agrees with Okeke and Thompson (2012:31), Dockery (2008:34), John Piper (2009:104), Reed (2004:457) and Treier and Elwell (2017:16). The participants mentioned that the Church is responsible for the mandate to communicate the gospel message. The Church is commissioned to fulfil the Great Commission, therefore the message to communicate in response to the Great Commission is the good news of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is a communication task (Sogaard, 1993:12) in which all Christians are required to participate. The church must communicate the good news to the world using any available media outlet (Lewis, 2014:10; Claydon, 2005:x). Therefore, according to the participants, the COU is clear about the message it communicates and continues to spread it in the digital age. To the COU, the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, the message of the Kingdom of God that brings salvation, redemption, forgiveness of sin and reconciliation of men to God. The COU considers itself as a church commissioned to communicate the gospel to all generations. The COU with the mandate to communicate and advance the gospel message considers digital media

as new tools to meet the new challenges in the digital age. Therefore, with the mediatisation of religion in the digital age, the COU's gospel communication spectrum is extended beyond the church walls to new media spaces and communities. In the digital age, the COU ought to consider not only the audience in the physical space but also the audience accessed through media. When digital media tools are theologically and prayerfully used it may help the COU in advancing the gospel message to fulfil its mission in the digital age.

6.3.1.1.2 Traditional Methods of Communication

Below are the participants' views regarding the COU's use of traditional methods to communicate the gospel:

***Traditional Pulpits:** At Church, we use the traditional method which is church congregations, our traditional pulpit, which is a way of communication to people who are seated in a congregation and evangelistic arrangements like crusades, conventions, and other platforms like seminars, conferences so those are some of the traditional means we are using to communicate the gospel (KI- ND).*

From my experience, most of what has been communicated is through the traditional pulpit of the church and fellowships, but to me, one of the most important ways to communicate is through mission, because we get to reach people in homes (Part 5 – FGD-STL).

***Oral teaching and preaching in the church:** Gospel is shared verbally through sermons, teaching, preaching, and sharing testimonies and life stories. Many people have been involved in gospel sharing through teaching, preaching, testifying, speaking and sharing Bible stories (KI-DK).*

Traditional methods, such as oral preaching and the use of the pulpit, are common to all churches. These methods are user-friendly and at no cost for that reason, they are easy for the leaders to use for spreading the gospel. (Part 6 – FGD-STP).

***Missions in the communities:** I know one of the quickest ways to communicate the gospel has been through Sunday services and organized missions, especially during holidays and Christmas. At church, we have organised and planned missions to the communities twice in a year (Part 2 – FGD- All Saints).*

Carrying out door-to-door mission times. Also, we visit people at their homes to share the gospel (Part 6 – FGD-Nateete).

The participants presented their views on how the church has originally and traditionally communicated the gospel. According to the participants, the gospel is communicated within the church buildings verbally and orally through church pulpits and community missions. This agrees with Ajibade's (2017: 24–25) argument that the church communicates the gospel daily using different methods mainly orally through the pulpit in church and the community during evangelism. The church leaders still predominantly use the traditional methods of communication because they are easy, cheap and quick to use. The respondents emphasised that the sermons from the pulpit on Sunday and missions in the community were reaching people in the community, although many from distant places and unable to come to church may be missed due to certain restrictions. The findings indicate that traditional methods such as pulpits, community door-to-door and crusades are still necessary and in use since they are free and easy to use by all church leaders. However, the use of digital media extends the church message beyond the four walls into the digital space. As the church continues to use oral communication as it was used in the early church (Bowman, 2013: 2, Grethlein, 2016: 12), it is to note that traditional approaches are restrictive and do not go beyond the present audience. In addition to the traditional methods, the church is to supplement its oral communication style with the use of different communication media technologies to reach wider audiences.

6.3.1.1.3 Digital Media Use

In the digital age with the daily and active use of digital media in everyday life, church leaders have discovered other tools to spread the gospel. The wide use of digital media in Uganda has not spared the Church of Uganda. Below are the participants' views:

***Digital media explosion:** This is the period for the explosion of digital media use, media communication technologies, and digital generation. The churches are using digital media platforms and gadgets to share the gospel to many people in the country and beyond because it is available. At St. Luke's we use our phones to share messages of the teaching through WhatsApp and we mainly use Zoom while streaming on YouTube. We used to stream on Facebook but with*

the government ban and the use of a virtual private network (VPN), we stopped streaming on Facebook (Part 3 – FGD-STL)

Supplement to traditional means: *Obviously, in terms of attitude, I am a great supporter of modernizing our traditional means of communication by adding digital media tools. I think these tools are helping to reach the media users on smartphones, computers, and the many social media platforms. So, I think the digital way of communication is a game-changer and can have a lot of impact. The impact is how many people can you speak to at one given moment at on given time (K I-ND).*

Digital media communication is the new media and digitised old media. *Digital media is using new media tools which are affordable to communicate the message. The Church uses digitised traditional media like television and radio also known as old media. Digital media is the new media such as smartphones, the internet, mobile gadgets and social media platforms. The majority of people and churches are transitioning from traditional media, which is expensive, to digital media which is seemingly affordable. (Part 2 – FGD- All Saints).*

At the church, we use digital gadgets to record the sermon and share. With the cameras on the phone, you can capture a photo and videos of the preaching and teaching and send them to many people. We have used Zoom and Facebook a lot of course, plus WhatsApp. We are using social media simply because we find it cheap and manageable. Of course, we have experienced a number of challenges. Zoom is a bit new to us but we have got a license and using it well. (Part 3 – FGD-Nateete).

Different digital tools: *All Saints' Cathedral communicates the gospel through a different virtual platform, using phones, WhatsApp, Zoom and other social media platforms. In addition to those we use television and radio; for example, media houses such as NTV station, UBC, Family TV and NBS come and broadcast our services. We normally use Zoom for prayer meetings and fellowships, on Zoom we conduct prayer overnights, fellowships, counselling and cell groups. The daily devotions that we record, we upload them on Facebook and YouTube and then we share the link and the clips through WhatsApp. Church WhatsApp groups have more than 200 people and*

through the groups, we share the recordings of the teachings and also share posters and links inviting people to the programmed online services. We are trying to integrate all media platforms in place although the ministers are not trained in media use. The use of different media has exposed the cathedral, its ministry and its services to outsiders. I think we have reached very many people through social media. On the broadcasting media, we cannot tell how many we have reached but with social media, we always go back to see how many people have viewed and the comments so that we can respond to the comments (ID-All Saints').

Digital media are easy tools of communication that take the message close to people. *Digital media use is quite a good and easy way to preach the gospel (Part 4 – FGD- STL). Digital media communication is mainly through digital media gadgets and social media platforms. St. Luke's Church Ntinda has media pages, like Facebook, YouTube page, Instagram page, Twitter and WhatsApp pages through which the gospel is communicated. (Part 1 – FGD- STL). The Diocese of Kampala, its churches and clergy have tried to incorporate all media in church ministry. I have seen many leaders use social media, radio and television, although I wonder whether they know how many people are reached in the process. I have visited a number of the parish social media pages such as Facebook and YouTube to listen to the uploaded teaching and I have often been blessed. I am on a number of diocesan parish WhatsApp groups and very often I see a number of links and recordings of teachings being posted on the WhatsApp group and I am encouraged (KI-DK).*

New Tool of communication: *Digital media communication is a game-changer in the sharing and preaching of the gospel. The impact is how many people can you speak to at one given moment and at a go the Word is proclaimed and the message of God reaches many people at the same time. Although we used to discourage it, media is a blessing to the church and I encourage our clergy to use it (KI-ND). Digital media tools are the new normal, and the people have been very positive at using them to disperse the gospel. The people have given all through digital media to support the use of media and some have donated data so that the gospel message is shared (ID-STP).*

The participants considered digital media as new tools of communication, a space for dynamically doing ministry, and a supplement to traditional media. They further expressed an appreciation that the COU is incorporating media in its activities but showed a deep desire for all the church leaders to have a mindset change and adopt digital media use in ministry. Although the COU may lack the strategy to guide the digital communication of the gospel, it calls upon all its leaders to integrate media tools. At the Church of Uganda leadership summit conducted in 2020, the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda referred to digital media as new tools given by God to communicate the gospel in new ways. With the active use of digital media tools, digital media channels are becoming increasingly popular and a place to run to for information, and communication. Therefore, the COU ought to equip all ministers with the necessary skills to use digital media tools. At the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, it was argued that media is a tool that was widely used through the Bible, and the growth of communication technologies, such as the internet and digital media, present new opportunities to spread the gospel and participate in evangelism (Claydon, 2005). It was further stated that the church is called upon to embrace digital technologies and use media for effective communication and engagement with the culture of the time to draw non-believers towards spiritual truth and proclaim Jesus Christ in a culturally relevant way (Claydon, 2005). The Church of Uganda considers digital media as a new tool granting an opportunity to the Church to engage in digital ministry and digital theology, thus extending the gospel message beyond geographical boundaries.

6.3.1.1.4 Attitude Towards Digital Media Use

Despite the active use of digital media for sharing the gospel by Church leaders, participants expressed their attitudes towards digital media use as reported below:

***The Negative attitude:** The evil that is in media: we say that whatever looks good to the eyes, has a number of disadvantages so you have to hide away. The church knows and some use media but media is harmful and filled with evil. Very many people hear and talk that in the western world people don't pray anymore, they are always at home and work, many have given up coming to church. The youth spend more time on media than coming to church. Some just send offertory by wiring but not coming to church. Some come to church when dead for the pastor to pray for them. The places of worship have now turned into museums, people no longer pray in them. When we*

use media people will abandon the church and pray through media. Media is harmful and destructive. It is filled with cyberbullying and false accusations and lies. So, I will say that I do not use the social media for ministry. It has more evil than good. Let people come to church premises and attend services (Part 9 – FGD- St. Paul)

Not valuing ministry through digital media platforms. Through media there are many interruptions and no focus, it doesn't feel like church. I am not for it and I do not like it, on media you are not in church and not with people but alone. Is that church (Part 6 – FGD-All Saints)?

My attitude is negative. Does the church know the situation and condition of its people? The poverty in the land stops many, so they cannot be used. In some churches people are poor and not everybody can afford a smartphone. Since not everyone can afford a smartphone so how can they access the message online(Part 9 – FGD Nateete)?

Positive attitude towards digital media use: *I am obviously a great supporter of media use. I would be a great supporter for modernising our traditional means of communication. So digital forms, first of all, they are modern, they are mass so you would be speaking to a bigger audience than one would in the traditional forms. I therefore say, my attitude towards media use is very positive. We simply need training so we can use the tools better (KI-ND)*

I support any means and media that help us to popularise the gospel message. All Church ministers need to embrace media wholesomely because it is the new normal we live in and media has penetrated everyday life. As church, we can no longer bury our heads in the sand and say we will only use traditional methods to propagate the gospel. All ministers need to use the digital media to be able to propagate the gospel and bring the word of God close to people (KI-DK).

My attitude on the use of digital media is so positive, I think we need all people to embrace it and know that media is here to stay and to be used in fulfilling the Great Commission. Allow me to say that we need media more than yesterday. I have been asking church to engage media and ICT, as a student of IC. I like using media in ministry. I have been using media on a number of occasions

in all the parishes I have served. The church needs to get on top of the game in using media so that we can teach others (ID-STP).

Well, I think digital media is beautiful. I wish it came yesterday or it started yesterday. We as a church, we just recently woke up to the challenge of COVID. As an evangelist, I have been using media in ministry and advocating for media use by the church. Media is so good because it allows you to communicate your message to people who are in the diaspora. With media use, the church is visible and can therefore address the community concerns (ID- STL).

My attitude towards digital media is positive. It is an additional tool to preach the gospel and allows one to participate in church activities from a distance (Part 3 – FGD-Nateete). I advocate for media use across the church, therefore all leaders must be trained to embrace digital media and adapt (Part 4 – FGD-STP). It's needed, the digital media reformation is long overdue. Many have been stuck on pulpit and forgot that the whole world is on digital media and moving forward. Many people no longer come to church, they are on TV, social media and radio receiving the gospel message. Therefore, the church needs to intensify its media use to fill the media environment with the gospel for all people to access it (Part 1 – FGD-St. Paul).

I am really positive about the use of media and especially with youth and children. I support the active use of media for the gospel. I personally have been there and participating in sharing the word through Zoom and Facebook and I am part of online fellowship (ID-Nateete). Media is the way to go. It simplifies life and communication. I encourage all church leaders who are still slow in using media, to know that change has come. Media requires a holistic change of everything like the entire system and the way we think. A total mindset change starting with leaders (Part 10 – FGD- All Saints').

In response to the COU's attitude towards the use of digital media, the majority of the participants about 43 of the participants expressed that they were very positive about the church's use of digital media to spread the gospel. The participants desired to see a revival in the church through digital transformation and influx. The majority of the respondents appreciated digital media use by the church, which allows the gospel message and different theologies to reach many in the media

space, beyond time and space. Through digital media use, the media audience is drawn into theological conversations and church ministries.

Although the majority of the participants expressed a positive attitude towards digital media use, a few expressed a negative attitude towards integrating digital media in church ministry. There were three participants against media use. They had their reasons for not wanting the church to use digital media. According to these participants, digital media is likely to stop people from attending physical church, and it exposes people to immoral content in the media. To those participants, being in a church building was considered as being in church service and safe from evil. Those with a positive attitude were many but longed for training to use digital media effectively from an informed point of view. The leader's attitude and perception towards media use for the church determine how the leader will use media in a particular church (Animante *et al.*, 2021: 11). The COU leaders with a positive attitude towards digital media use for church ministry integrated digital media to share the gospel and reach people in the digital media space.

6.3.1.1.5 Convergence of Media in Communication

Respondents mentioned the possibilities of converging different forms of media and tools to spread the gospel message as shown in their responses below:

Blending different media tools for the gospel: At All Saints' Cathedral, different media are put in place to communicate the gospel during Sunday service. On Sunday during the lockdown, some people were on Zoom, on Facebook, and YouTube and while others were on television all receiving the same message. That is the power of technology (Part 8 – FGD All Saints 8). Convergence of media allows bringing the different media together to communicate the message. There are people who don't listen to radio, nor watch television but are always on social media through their phones. When the media are used together such as social media as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter spaces and Television, then the message will reach a wide coverage and bigger audience all found on the media platform they are conversant with. Unfortunately, on one occasion, while the service was being aired on television also as Zoom, some hackers shared vulgar images that also aired on television. We need to learn how to address such challenges but the convergence of media is crucial in the digital age. How then, can we effectively converge the media such as television,

radio, internet, phone, social media platforms efficiently to reach many with the gospel (Part 9 – FGD-All Saints ’)?

According to the participants, some churches are trying to bring different media outlets and platforms together to communicate a given message. Convergence of both old and new media to communicate the gospel gives an opportunity to many people from different locations to receive the same message but through different outlets. The convergence concept allows the merging or combining different unique media to have a unique communication expression and reach different audiences (Gershon, 2019:2). Gershon further states that convergence is central with digital media revolution, which involves technologies and software applications such as internet, smartphone technology, digital animations, high-definition television and different digital videos. Convergence allows digital media, broadcasting media, and other media to work together through digitalisation. Raja (2011: 131) conceptualises the concept of convergence with the responsibility to bring technologically all the analogical operations such as voice, visual, text exchange, music and networks done using different instruments into a single digital computerised system to distribute the gospel message for many people to access and derive meaning.

6.3.1.1.6 Conclusion Relating to Communication of the Gospel

The participants’ responses indicate that the majority of the COU leaders have a positive attitude towards digital media use, and actively supplement the traditional methods with digital media tools to advance the gospel message beyond the four walls of the church. In the process of communicating the gospel, the COU tries to converge different communication tools, although still facing challenges. The findings on the communication of the gospel indicate that the gospel is communicated but the communicators need theological and technological training to integrate all tools effectively and communicate the gospel in the digital age to reach people beyond the church walls and active on digital media. Lewis (2014: 5) argues that people do not actively ignore church activities, but they do not think about them since most time is spent on digital activities. Therefore, the COU’s guided and intentional use of all media as digital tools for the gospel may make the digital media space a front door to the churches for the digital media users, thus coming to church for further spiritual guidance, leading to spiritual and church membership growth.

William (2016: 136) argues that digital media although actively used, does not replace traditional methods of communication but instead supplements and complements them.

6.3.1.2 Understanding of the Digital Media Use by the Church

The second category in responding to the research question was about understanding the use of digital media in the COU. The themes in this section are from the views and perceptions of the participants concerning digital media use. Figure 6.2 shows the themes identified from the responses of the participants when asked about digital media use by the Church of Uganda.

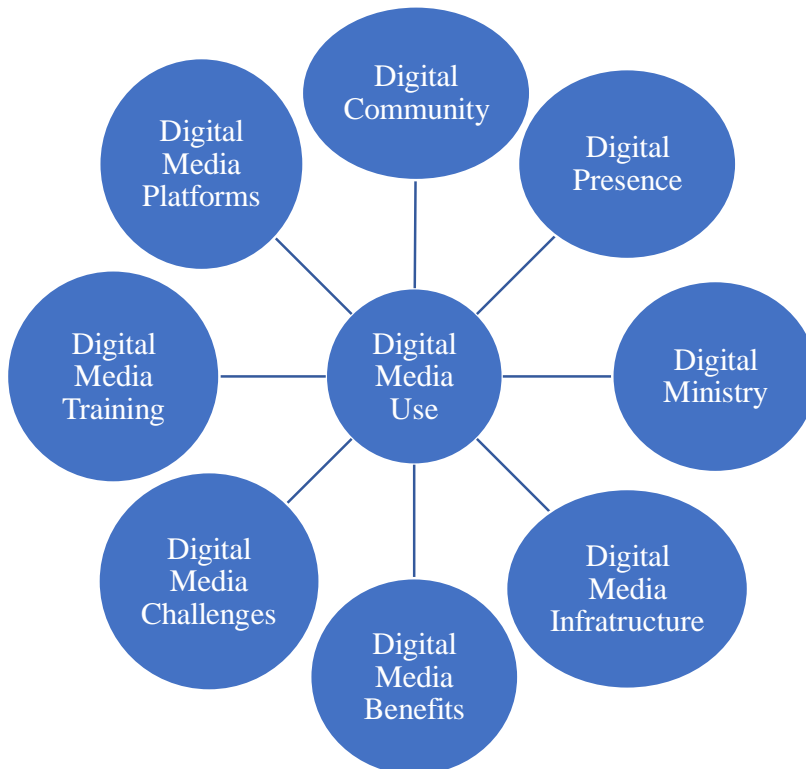


Fig 6.2: Themes in the category of digital media use

6.3.1.2.1 Platforms Used for the Gospel

The study reached out to discover the platforms the COU employs to communicate the gospel. Below are the participants' responses about the platforms used to share the gospel.

Social media platforms: In addition to traditional methods of propagating the gospel, digital media gadgets are easy and quick in dispersing the gospel. Through digital media, we use WhatsApp group, Facebook, YouTube and other platforms. These platforms and applications

spread the gospel far and wide. I see a number of people sending messages, and sharing prayers through WhatsApp bring the message close to people (K I- DK)

Digital media are social media platforms accessed through the internet. The communication of the gospel through digital media increased during COVID19 lockdown of churches. We have been using all media in the past but during COVID we had to learn and use all digital media tools to take the gospel message to the Christians and parishioners locked in homes. We are using digital media such as phones, the internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google meet and YouTube to preach the gospel (ID-All Saints).

Digital media are easy tools of communication that take the message close to people. Digital media use is quite a good and easy way to preach the gospel (Part 4 – FGD- STL).

Digital media communication is mainly through digital media gadgets and social media platforms. St. Luke's Church Ntinda has media pages, like Facebook, YouTube page, Instagram page, Twitter and WhatsApp pages through which the gospel is communicated (Part 1 – FGD- STL).

Old Media: *Digital media communication is the new media, but old media tools are digitised and in use for the gospel. The church uses digitised traditional media like television and radio also known as old media. Digital media is the new media such as smartphones, the internet, mobile gadgets and social media platforms used in addition to radio and television. However, majority of people and churches are transitioning from traditional media, which is expensive, to digital media which is seemingly affordable. (Part 2 – FGD- All Saints).*

Effective Tools: *All Saints Cathedral commonly uses digital media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Google Meet, Zoom and Television. The Cathedral's teachings, preaching and devotion have been posted on social media more than even on television. To be exact, devotions on social media have been much more viewed than on television. Yes, at least I have received a lot of feedback even from people in other counties, wherever I go someone says aren't you the one who has been on worship sending teachings, thank you for encouraging us (ID- All Saints).*

In the digital communication, we use Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp and Radio and Television. Through social media and radio, a lot of the church's teachings have been shared and received by many media users. I can sit home before the television and listen to a teaching by some of our churches. The gospel message is on television, radio, phones, social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, Tik-Tok (KI-ND). The church engages in both traditional and new media

to communicate the gospel. The tradition has radio, TV, print media and New media: digital media and social media platforms, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Part 4 – FGD- All Saints)

Mobile Gadgets: The message is shared and received through television, mobile phones, iPad, computers and platforms. WhatsApp for small group fellowships and zoom help although it can become costly on data use (Part 2 – FGD-Nateete).

We have ever used zoom services hosting 100 people and live face booking, some tell us that they use YouTube channels, however, some haven't started it yet (Part 6- FGD-

Nateete. The use of computers, smartphones, iPad, and different electronic platforms. The platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and Zoom applications are some of the platforms used. WhatsApp brings the message close. Phone are used and can be employed for mobile gospel message as we use phones for mobile money. The use of phones have made the gospel mobile and brought close to people (Part 4 – FGD- SLN).

Item	Church/Parishes			
	All Saints'	St. Luke's	Martyrs'	St. Paul's
Facebook	3	3	3	3
Zoom conferencing	4	4	4	4
YouTube	4	4	1	1
Twitter	2	1	non	non
WhatsApp	4	4	4	4
Google Meet	2	0	0	0
Digital Media Gadgets such Phones, iPad, computers	4	4	4	4
Television	3	1	1	3
Radio	2	3	2	4

Table 6.3: Media tools used and their frequency. The scale is as indicated: 1-rare, 2-moderately, 3-above average, 4-most used

Table 6.3 shows the different digital media tools actively used by different COU parishes. A scale of 1 to 4 indicates the least to most used digital media. Number 4 shows what the particular parish uses most in the dissemination of the gospel.

There is no doubt that digital media use has gained acceptance in the Church of Uganda. It is increasingly becoming a tool for the communication of the gospel (Badmos, 2014:7). The ability to use digital media to communicate the gospel has become an everyday activity within the Church of Uganda. For that reason, the parishes have engaged different media outlets or tools to communicate and present the gospel. According to the responses, the COU is employing both old media and new media in the communication of the gospel. The new media is inclusive of different social media platforms, video conferencing apps such as Zoom and Google Meet, Church websites, Mobile Phones and Smartphones. The two Cathedrals employ old media, such as radio and television in the spread of the gospel message which does not necessarily need the internet unless accessed through social media tools. Nevertheless, the use of radio and television is considered expensive to use, thus only Cathedrals use them for gospel communication. It was reported that the media houses sometimes offer free airtime to the Cathedrals to air the services, but with several restrictions. Parishes such as St. Luke's and Martyrs' rarely use radio and television due to the high costs. Since digital media platforms such as phones and social media platforms seem to be free, they are intentionally used by the COU parishes to share the gospel message.

The findings can be explained that Zoom conferencing, WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook are now commonly used in churches with Zoom and WhatsApp in the lead. When Zoom conferencing is used, some church activities such as the services are live-streamed on YouTube and sometimes on Facebook so that those unable to join through Zoom can participate in the services through the social media platforms. WhatsApp, which is a messaging platform, is highly used compared to Facebook to share recorded devotions, messages, links for online fellowships, prayer directions and prayer chains done through WhatsApp platforms and groups. Globally, Facebook is one of the biggest social media platforms with more than 2 billion people using it every month (Darko-Adjei, 2021). Although church leaders find ways of using Facebook, the Uganda Government's ban on it affects its maximum use for the gospel, making platforms such as Zoom applications, WhatsApp

and YouTube actively used by the COU. All participants indicated that Zoom was used across the COU by parishes that can afford it and Zoom services streamed on some social medial platforms. WhatsApp was used for the circulation of recorded messages and sharing links about the Zoom services and prayer meetings. This makes Zoom and WhatsApp the most used to communicate the gospel, followed by YouTube and then Facebook.

6.3.1.2.2 Digital Presence of Church ministers

Participants raised concerns about the leaders' presence in the digital space, as reported below:

***Authenticity through clergy digital presence:** The presence of the Bishop or clergy in an online event makes the activity authentic. When you communicate about the online event and people see the presence of a Bishop and priests people will know that it is authentic. When a communication goes out with the Bishop or clergy as the leader of an online service, it will attract people. The presence of the clergy makes a difference. When the bishop or clergy leads the online ministry, it sets the services apart and gives weight to the event (Part 6– FGD-STL).*

***Online Presence for the Clergy for Children and Youth:** When it comes to online children and youth activities, there is a need for active and dynamic children ministers that will lead children's ministry online. Some of our Anglican churches are performing well and others badly. The clergy tend to leave the ministry to young people to run the online children's ministry using media. When using media, the parents would want to sit in behind any gadget and watch with their children, but if the ministry is sub-standard the parents will not want to send their children again. Our priests must actively participate with the children. The presence of mature and dynamic leaders in the youth and children's online events cannot be overstated (KI-DN).*

***Present Media Clergy:** The COU should have a team of media ministers that are responsible for media ministry. They need to be present and responsible for the media ministry. At All Saints Cathedral, we live-stream the services but I doubt the leaders go back to read the comments and respond. I do not know if our head priest and priests know what people say about the content on the church platforms. The media team led by priests must be available to respond and give feedback to the public. Since the Church of Uganda has embraced media ministry, the creation of*

the Church of Uganda Media Team at a provincial level, diocese, parish and chaplaincy level is a dire need. We lack a media team at our church (part 1 – FGD All Saints).

Gifted Online Clergy: *We have seen many priests preach in the digital space, but are they all gifted to do so? The digital media ministers are to be deeply rooted in the Word, mature, creative, dynamic and with passion as they minister online. Many media preachers people like listening to from across denominations are anointed and gifted, they are good preachers and talented, so the Church of Uganda should allow those anointed and gifted minister to be present in the media space and make presence felt. I think it is important to select those who are ordained, anointed and talented for media ministry and do media ministry, others can do or preach in another forums (ID-STL).*

According to the participants, there is a need for an active present online COU clergy to guide and minister to the online community. The participants further mentioned that the youth and children who are active on social media need to engage with a clergy through digital media so that they are spiritually guided. The priest and ordained minister being present in the media space brings the church's presence close to the people according to responses. Campbell (2020c: 10) argues that the integration of digital technology into church communities to facilitate communication of the church allows the church to create a digital presence. The presence of the priest and church in the media requires a high level of commitment to interaction and connection that cannot be achieved in a one-time interaction but through active engagement (Campbell, 2020: 6). Since digital technologies thrive on interaction and instant responses, some churches have thrived on these digital media traits, and engaged in church activities online with an active minister presence (Cooper et al., 2021: 2). Digital media presence of church leaders allows the counsellors and Bible teachers to engage with the clients in real-time although geographically apart. In general, the participants reported that the presence of priests and church ministers in the media is important, and it brings the church services and ministries close to people. Digital presence allows the creation of an online community through which the Church can connect with people to engage in spiritual and faith formation activities despite the geographical distance (Cooper et al., 2021: 5).

6.3.1.2.3 *Digital Media Online Communities*

The following were the participants' responses about online communities:

Online Fellowship community: *As the church, we have an online community or virtual fellowship. This community meets through Zoom for the online morning prayers and fellowships. The church is finding it easy to use Zoom to conduct online fellowship communities. I think Zoom is convenient, cheap and easy to maintain. A few days ago, I met somebody who does not physically pray from St Luke, but he said "I am your member through the Zoom fellowship," I was shocked, but that is the power of media. Currently, we have around 200 in one of the sessions. So, for us, zoom has made it easy to share the word (ID-STL). The Zoom application allows interactions and participation in an online fellowship. People participate in different activities such as, praise and worship, reading and different interactions. Quite often, different people are called into that ministry to lead in fellowship from the comfort of their locations. (ID-STL).*

In online fellowships, there are interactions especially through Zoom chat room, YouTube comment section and Facebook comment section. One speaks as others are typing their comments. So, I think for me the online community in small groups and age group fellowships work better in reaching out to online people. The Zoom fellowship is a fellowship in real-time where faces are shared although one is far apart. It is often streamed on either Facebook or YouTube and brings people together in online fellowships (Part 5 – FGD- All Saints).

We have seen a number of online fellowships start. There is an online Church of Uganda that conducts services throughout the week. The activities are morning, lunch hour and evening every day. I am a part of that online community and I have benefitted from all its activities. I have seen people committed and now considering themselves as members of the online community of believers. People have become friends through that online fellowship and later met in the physical (Part 6 – FGD-STL).

Digital media ministry: *The digital media ministry through Zoom and YouTube brings people close in fellowship and enables them to participate and the gospel is brought close to all people. Through Zoom, overnight prayers are active and through online people attend the overnight*

prayers from the comfort of their homes, as a result, family prayer altars are established and strengthened. When an online prayer meeting is advertised, people who want to pray click the link and they are in the Zoom room at the said time to participate in online prayers (ID- Nateete).

According to the responses, the Church of Uganda has created active online fellowships which are becoming established online communities where Christians attend church services, prayers and fellowships daily. In 2021 during the lockdown of the churches due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the COU established an Online Church of Uganda, through which services and fellowships are conducted. The online Christian communities are established groups of people applying digital media technologies to practice faith, fellowship and draw close to God via digital media technologies (Cooper et al., 2021). With the continuous need for fellowship, interaction and spiritual needs, Christians now belong to both online and offline communities. The Christians are attending fellowships and prayer sessions through online fellowships. Campbell (2020a) argues that especially in the era of COVID-19, most Christian fellowships were transferred to online communities and fellowships. Cooper et al. (2021) state that digital media can be used to create an online faith community, connect people in the community, enable people to create a sense of belonging, participate in worship as a community and allow spiritual encounters with God. The participants in their responses mentioned their active involvement in the established online fellowship. Some mentioned that they have developed a sense of belonging and an attachment to online communities. The Online fellowships are bringing people together in fellowship with each other and God.

6.3.1.2.4 Digital Media Ministry Activities

Since the COU participates in digital media for ministry, I reached out to know the ministry activities the church carries out in the online space. Below are the responses:

Prayer and Bible Study: *The digital media platforms give the church an opportunity to conduct digital media ministry. The ministry activities carried out through Zoom, include prayer meetings, bible studies, fellowships, counselling and services. Some of the services are streamed online through Facebook and YouTube, thus reaching a wider coverage and many people including youth and adults (Part 3 – FGD-STL).*

Church Sunday Services: *Through digital media, the church is able to continue with Sunday services and church teachings. During Covid-19, the church conducted services through Zoom, we could gather like over a hundred people on Zoom while on Facebook some people viewed the bible teaching and preaching. With online ministry, when someone benefited from the ministry he/she would come back with a friend. The online ministry widely attracted participants and people nationally and internationally got involved Part 8 – FGD Nateete).*

Online fellowships: *At the Cathedral, the digital media ministry sustained the church during the Covid-19 pandemic. The leadership of the cathedral actively engaged in the use of internet, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Television to spread the gospel. The Cathedral daily engages in online fellowship, devotions and prayer meetings through digital media. During the days of prayer, we have gone over 300 people in attendance on Zoom and other members in attendance and participating through Facebook and YouTube. Through the media ministry, we have continued to record morning devotions that are distributed through WhatsApp and Facebook. The Cathedral is committed to digital ministry to share the good news to all people and to bring ministry close to the people. Nevertheless, we need to have training for digital media users, a strategy to guide the digital ministry and set up a media infrastructure. We need to maintain the digital media ministry; therefore, finances are necessary for the ministry (ID-All Saints).*

Preaching and teaching of the word: *Currently, with digital media, people are able to access prayers, bible teachings, devotion and counselling through their gadgets. A number of prayer sessions are organised by the Cathedral and other parishes within the diocese through Zoom and Facebook. There is a general prayer move through digital media and many people are praying for the nations through social media platforms (KI-DK). In digital media ministry, we have observed online giving towards the work of the church since it continues to feed people on spiritual food. People who are receiving ministry through digital media are motivated to give towards ministry and church activity (Part 3 – FGD-All Saints).*

Real-time online services bring the presence of God now in homes, cars, shops, hospitals and on the road. I often join the service from anywhere and at any time. When I miss the real-time meeting during lunch hour or morning glory, I normally go and access the recording through Facebook and YouTube. Now in our homes, we pray as a family through the Zoom service and overnight prayers to pray with family members away from home (Part 3-FGD – All Saints).

Digital media ministry activities are prevalent throughout the different dioceses in the COU and especially in churches and Cathedrals within the cities and some in certain villages. Through digital media such as phones, computers and social media platforms the church ministries are brought close to the people. Digital media ministry activities are accessed via the internet, which allows people to come together for fellowships. Lytle (2013) argues that digital media allows digital media users an opportunity to participate in church ministries within online communities and pass on their faith to others in the community who might never come to church. Participants mentioned that smartphones and mobile communication gadgets have become ‘friends’ for the youth. Through digital mobile gadgets, the youth and children access teachings, spiritual nourishment, prayers, Bible study and counselling. Digital media tools have become a place for Christian information, spiritual and faith formation (Cloete, 2015: 5; Lytle 2010: 40). Active digital media users are always busy with their phones and in constant communication with other digital media users. Digital media users are predominately youth⁴¹ accessing any information and connecting with friends through phones. Although some youth miss out due to data challenges, when they have access to data, they can easily participate in online events. Therefore, the church is to consider digital ministry to reach the youth but must consider the programming. The programming must be youth friendly to attract the youth to the digital ministry of the church. Also, the church may consider involving the youth in the programming for the digital ministry.

6.3.1.2.5 Digital Media Infrastructure for the Church

When participants were asked about the digital media infrastructure of the church, these were some of the responses:

Strategy and structures: To effectively use digital media, I think we need to strengthen our structures and provide a working strategy and infrastructure for media use. We have been active in digital ministry but we did not receive help and guidance from the head office. We are left to our own, we need to know what the church expects us to follow. We lack some guidance from the head office, there is no information flow. I think we do not have specialists in the field of theology

⁴¹ Youth are considered active on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. Anderson and Jiang’s (2018), in *Teens, Social Media and Technology* Study in the US mention that 95% of teens own smartphones and spend most time online searching for information. They also spend time on social media to connect and communicate with friends and family members.

and media for that we do not have to play the blame game (ID-All Saints'). To fulfil the Great Commission in the digital space we need the strategy of the Church of Uganda but if we don't decide all the strategies are going to die away. For instance, when we are preparing to use media we have to make sure the plan is clear and can easily be followed. When we started digital media use, there was no plan and we made mistakes (KI-DK). We do not have a clear strategy; the Church of Uganda needs to be intentional. We need to be intentional and lay a strategy. A strategy is very important in how we can advance. Where there is no strategy we cannot effectively use media. The church needs to continue with digital media ministry because many people are using digital media. We are not very strategic in approach. We a lack strategy. There must be a strategy to guide the media ministry in the parish and diocese (ID-STL).

ICT upgrade: *The church requires an ICT upgrade across the province to be able to support the churches in the digital ministry. The church has discovered that many people are in the media, therefore some money needs to be invested in upgrading media facilities and studios at every church or diocese. It is a matter of urgency for every diocese to have a studio and media outlet to facilitate media ministry (KI-DK).*

Media strategists: *In the digital media strategy, media practitioners are crucial. The church needs to find out in our churches social media strategists and experts so that they can come in and help the church in the effective use of digital media. There is no way the church can maximise digital media use when there is a lack of social media infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, no connection with television and radio media houses and expertise in media ministry (ID-STL)*

Digital technology is rapidly changing our society and lives, therefore, there is a need for infrastructure to guide the usage of the technologies. In the participants' responses on strategy and infrastructure, they acknowledged the need for a strategy to guide digital media use. Participants indicated that many churches engaged in media in general but lack clear guidance, rules, strategy, infrastructure and support from the head office. There is a great need for the Church of Uganda to consider coming up with a unifying strategy and intentional investment in digital communication infrastructure⁴² to maximise the benefits of digital media use and minimise the challenges that

⁴² In the COU-Vision 2025, it is stated that the Church of Uganda shall advance ICT to enhance communication, initiate the development of communication policies and strategies for effective communication and initiate a capacity building programme for ICT for the entire province.

come with digital communications. Claydon (2005: 12) argues that the best strategy is that which may examine the fitness of media to match the audience's approach to media and life. With the evolution of big data, the internet of things and the usage of applications in the digital age, to allow effective use, the right digital communication infrastructure is crucial to meet the increasing demands, support economic growth, build a digital society, and allow effective use of new technologies (Vaisey & Deighton, 2014). The infrastructure as mentioned by the participant will entail the strategy to guide the use of media and show the actions to be taken in the media space. Despite having no strategy, the use of digital media has brought benefits to the COU.

6.3.1.2.6 Benefits of Digital Media Use for Gospel Communication

The interviewed participants reported the benefits of digital media use as follows:

***God's message brought close to people:** Through the use of digital media, God's message is brought close to the people. With digital media platforms, the gospel is a click away. The online ministry has made prayer, teachings and encouragement such as daily devotions easy to access and share through media. As a result, through the Zoom morning prayers, people are being blessed with many testimonies (ID-STL.)*

***Testimonies and miracles through digital media:** We have received testimonies about healing and deliverance through phone prayers. The testimonies sometimes are recorded and shared on platforms. Through Zoom, we are a fellowship of people that meet from different parts to pray. Personally, I have greatly benefited from the Zoom prayers (ID STP).*

***Church's presence:** Church's voice through the digital waves has given the church the platform to address vices in the communities. We have counselled many women suffering from domestic violence and the church started a media campaign against domestic violence. Through digital media messages against domestic violence the communities are sensitised (ID-STP).*

***Through online service,** the presence of God is brought close to us and into our homes, shops, cars and offices. During online fellowships, the gospel is preached from the comfort of one's home or studio and the message reaches all in the comfort of their locations. The media ministry brings the word of God close to meet people's spiritual needs, offers people prayer hours, and invites involvement and participation from the comfort of our homes. (Part 6 – FGD STL).*

Salvation of soul: *We have registered many people who have responded to Jesus Christ through online services. During online fellowships, altar calls have been made and we have seen some people give their lives to Jesus Christ. I remember in one of the online services about 10 people gave their lives to God (Part 3 – All Saints FGD).*

Online Christian communities: *We have seen a number of online fellowships or communities start. There is an Online Church in Uganda that conducts services throughout the week and three activities a day. I have seen people committed and now considering themselves as members of the online community of believers. People have become friends through that online fellowship and later met in the physical (Part 1 – Nateete).*

Gender-based Fellowships: *There has been a start of homogeneous fellowships. These fellowships are only for men, women, youth and children all happening through digital media. Through the Zoom and YouTube services, there are age and gender group fellowships that are active. Fellowships for children, youth, women, men, married and family on different days are actively attended by people of similar gender, status or age group (Part 3 – FGD-STL).*

Benefits of breaking boundaries: *Through Zoom and social media platforms, the gospel has continued to go beyond the geographical location of St. Luke's Church in Ntinda. Now those brethren from St. Luke's Church Ntinda and are in the diaspora are able to access the church's teachings and also participate in regular fellowships online. Therefore, if the person has been moved away geographically from St. Luke's (he/she) can still attend church services. Again, this zoom has really enabled people to get extra usage of their gadgets (Part 2 – FGD-STL).*

Immediacy and Speed: *Digital Communication is quick, easy, fast, instant and immediate. When we talk of digital media in the era of the digital age, we shall say it is the easiest and most convenient form of communication. Through it, the gospel can reach many people at once. In Uganda, almost everyone is on digital media, everywhere digital media is the song of the day across age brackets. This is the digital media era, the communication era has simplified and made the communication of the gospel easy (Part 1 – FGD-Nateete).*

Extending the pulpit beyond the four walls of the church: *The uniqueness of digital media is that this kind of communication is so instant that it goes viral. Through it the pulpit is extended in the media space, somebody preaching is within the church, but also to all those people who have gathered around their computers and phones to listen to the message. Since the digital media communication platforms are viral and instant you can preach to thousands of people just with a*

glance and all people are able to listen to the message (ID-Nateete). The digital media platforms are good supplements to the traditional methods of communication within the church. The digital media supplement traditional media and help the church's messages, services and activities to reach far and wide. The mix of technology and theology in fellowship allows the theological teaching from the church to reach the media space (Part 2 – FGD-STL).

Discipleship and mentorship: *The opportunity to continue with mentorship in the digital space. I have been ministering to university students through WhatsApp. Through my WhatsApp, I am mentoring a group of girls and discipling them through the word and prayer (ID-All Saints). Preaching the gospel through digital media allows all media users to be in a position to access the message. It includes anyone interested if they can afford the internet. We can reach out to many not only in Uganda; recently online children Sunday schools have been ministering to children in Nigeria (Part 4 – FGD-All Saints).*

Digital media has been considered by participants as new tools of communication that are necessary for the church, which is mandated to communicate the gospel message in all seasons, especially in the digital age. Through digital media spaces, the gospel message is brought close to the people. The presence of God is brought close to people through prayer sessions and fellowship in online faith communities. The testimonies are shared and the church's presence is evident in the digital space through the extension of the pulpit beyond the church building. The participants further mentioned that digital media use has brought several benefits, especially bringing the gospel, the COU and its ministry close to the people. With the church coming into people's spaces through digital media, the presence of God has come near and into homes. In her article 'Moving Online', Lytle (Lytle, 2010: 45) argues that digital media use by the church to disperse the Christian message is undoubtedly shaping the church and advancing the Christian story. Lytle (2013) argues that digital media tools enable the church to engage in theological discussions to inform, form and bring transformation in members' lives, reach many non-believers and introduce them to the faith community. The participants highlighted that digital media makes it easy for churches and Christians to access and share the message through media. Digital media has made the gospel a click away. With mediatisation, the COU ministers may create free online platforms to share the gospel with people who might never come to their churches. Once the message is

uploaded online, a participant mentioned, it keeps moving while you are resting. What an opportunity for the church in the digital age. Nevertheless, despite the many benefits of digital media, its use by church comes with some challenges

6.3.1.2.7 Challenges with Digital Media Use

The move to digital media use comes with some complexities and challenges. Below are the participants' responses:

Technological challenges: *Technological challenges and poor gadgets that are not upgraded are big challenges experienced. Some leaders have a type of IT equipment that is not upgraded and cannot freely engage in digital ministry due to technical problems beyond one's control. The lack of up-to-date technology has been a downfall on the part of the ministry. Sometimes, people can't access online ministry activities due to the type of gadget they may be using. Technological challenges are major issues for us as ministers both at work and at home. When at the Church Office, the IT team is in a position to help, but when ministering from home, it is a challenge. We, therefore, need IT infrastructure for a home to facilitate while at home (ID – All Saints).*

The unpredictability of technology: *Technology is sometimes unpredictable. On several occasions while moderating or coordinating an online service we have experienced technological challenges. Also, during the editing and processing process of a recorded video before it is uploaded on a platform, technology presents certain challenges that are beyond control. The hardware and software challenges have hindered us in ministry but we are improving each day (Part 4 – FGD- STL).*

The lack of digital media gadgets: *One of the key challenges is that some priests, leaders and parishioners do not have smartphones, therefore, they cannot access or download the app that allows one to get into the digital community to participate in the online ministry. Nevertheless, some pastors have received donations of smartphones to start and continue with the ministry (KI-Nateete).*

Internet challenges: *The challenge of internet coverage/ network due to the location has hindered free involvement in digital media ministry. Very often as we have participated in Zoom meetings and fellowship, the internet is on and off. It gets frustrating to be on and off so sometimes it is better for one to fall off completely. Sometimes, when I am ministering at my home, the network*

tends to be unstable. I have decided to do online ministry from the church where the internet is stable. I am also solving my home internet. Therefore, some location with poor network hinders free participation in online ministry (Part 6 – FGD- All Saints).

Poor IT infrastructure: The infrastructure is still an issue, these are factors that are beyond our ability. So even if you have the IT gadgets, but with no internet connectivity then a challenge arises in digital media ministry (KI- ND).

The Cost: The cost of data and gadgets challenges parishioners' participation. Many people want to join in online church activities, but the challenge of costly data stands in the way. The data is proving to be costly for the people, thus hindering free participation. Sometimes, people cannot access Zoom fellowships or download YouTube ends due to data challenges. The daily devotions shared on WhatsApp tend to fail to open due to data challenges. Internet and network challenges: High-resolution content consumes high data for the media consumers, thus hindering massive consumption of the gospel content uploaded (Part 3 – St. Luke)

Content creation and packaging: Good content creation has been a challenge in the church's use of media since most churches do not have good editors. Content in form of written, video, audio and image is used in the digital media environment (Part 4 – FGD- STL). The major challenge in digital communication has been trying to package content for the audience. The viewers desire attractive and well-packaged content. If the content is not appealing then, they will ignore it. The packaging of the church content still is lacking, it is not so interesting and captivating. It is only about sharing gospel information in boring ways, yet in digital media, attraction plays a key role (Part 10 – FGD – STP)

Immorality: There have been intruders that have shared immoral images, vulgar and uncensored messages. These messages come from hackers who manage to beat the security of the online fellowship and post obscene and vulgar messages. This has been a challenge. One time they posted abusive content during the online children's fellowship. We are praying to God to help us deal with them once and for all (Part 5 – FGD-All Saints').

Interruptions: General interruption from members who tend to unmute themselves for example during Zoom fellowships. The other interruptions come from hackers who come in intending to interrupt the digital media ministry. During our Zoom fellowships, we have been disturbed by hackers and very often they are abusive and immoral. They come on with immoral pictures. The good thing is the Zoom app has an opportunity to tighten security. We have tried to tighten security

and also train the online church community to practise online service etiquette. So now security is tightened nevertheless the hackers are still a challenge (Part 2 – STL).

Government Ban on Facebook: *Another challenge comes from the ban on some social media platforms such as Facebook. The Government of Uganda banned Facebook use due to political reasons, thus affecting the media ministry through Facebook, yet research shows that the most used social media platform is Facebook. Nevertheless, the IT teams go past the ban and use VPN but it tends to consume a lot of data (Part 4-STL).*

Character assignment: *Possible cyberbullying and character assassination are evident in the digital media space. Some members do not engage in digital media simply because of the cyberbullying and destroying one's character and image. Negative and wrong messages tend to move around about certain ministers, thus affecting their reputation and ministry in the digital media environment. (Part 2 – FGD-All Saints).*

Lack of a strategy: *We use digital media as we know or have copied from others. The church has not shown us what to do. There is no media use strategy to follow (ID- All Saints). As a theologian, I think the church leaders have not guided us on how to use media. Many people misinterpret scripture and share it widely through WhatsApp. When you listen in, the teaching is false. Yet, I may not have the mandate to call the person to order (ID-STP). The school of theology has not helped us with information. We need training on how to use media. we face challenges and not know how to address them theologically, yet the Christians expect us to understand everything (ID-STL)*

According to the participants, there are several complexities as the COU integrates digital media into church ministry. The participants stressed these challenges including, the internet, data costs, interruptions, lack of information, lack of training, lack of strategy, and social, economic and technological challenges as key issues. However, Edwards (2015) asserts that although some of the digital media challenges resulting from the social, cultural, technological and economic environments are unavoidable, they can be addressed. Intentional training to facilitate a clear understanding of digital communication complexities, and new technologies may guide the use of contemporary media (Lewis, 2014). Calling for training for youth in videography and photography, and upgrading particular communication styles is a requirement for the digital age (Lundby, 2008, 2012). The challenges that come with technological, economic and IT

infrastructure are likely to increase the digital divide among people and geographical areas. Nevertheless, the government of Uganda is upgrading the Information Technology and internet infrastructure to bridge the digital divide gap (NITA, 2017: 39). Intentional improvement in technology and reduction in costs of phones and internet by the government may improve digital media use, thus making digital theology, digital religion and digital ministry possible through the COU.

6.3.1.2.8 Digital Media Training

The participants were asked what the church must do to address digital media challenges to maximise its use for the gospel. Below were the responses:

Training of clergy: *I think training the Church ministers on how to use digital media in ministry is essential. Therefore, the training for all church leaders should be made compulsory so that they can learn how to use digital media to effectively communicate the gospel. The training should cover the hierarchies of leadership within the church structure from Archbishop to Lay readers. The classes have to be for every leader for when the top leadership are not involved they will not support and encourage digital media use within their jurisdictions (ID-STP). Our Bishops need to lead the way and be trained first (Part 3 – FGD-Nateete).*

Training IT and communication officers: *In many churches, the leaders cannot afford the cost of hiring IT experts in using media in ministry, therefore, training of leaders is important. At All Saints' Cathedral, the IT and communication experts needs to undergo continuous training since technology changes all the time. The staff of the cathedral have to be trained so that they can effectively use the gadgets for ministry, thus certain technological challenges will be addressed (ID-All Saints).*

Theological and Technological training: *The training in the use of social media, the internet and smartphones for the gospel and theology is long overdue. I request that the findings of this study be accessed by all, or if possible, bring all ministers together and give us a training. Bishop Tucker Theological School of Uganda Christian University should train the ministers in how to use digital media in spreading the gospel so that as they are sent into the parish, they have that training for media ministry (ID-STL). The training to be done also for church members. It helps when all church members are trained. It becomes a great team for digital ministry (Part 9 – FGD-STP).*

According to the participants, there is a need for training for the gospel communicators, implying that many gospel communicators lack adequate information and training in the use of digital media. The participants assume that relevant training in theological and technological areas might help to deal with the complexities that come with digital media, thus maximising digital media use. Szabo (2014:38) states that poor skills' training for media communicators, lack of qualified editors for online content, few content managers and failure to catch up with technological advancements and the latest updates pose a serious challenge to communicators. Edwards (2015:8) argues that different digital media platforms require different digital designs that can facilitate the style of communication on the platform. There is a need for specialised training for digital media communicators to understand the media logic to further proper the digitalisation of the gospel.

6.3.1.2.9 Adapting to the culture

Below are the participants' views on the adaptation to the digital media culture

***Adjusting to the culture:** As an ICT person, I encourage people and the church to adapt to the new culture because it is here to stay. The earlier we adjust to the new way of operation, the better it will get (Part 1 STL).*

***Mindset change:** All church leaders need to have a mindset change about the digital media culture. The training of the leaders is important for it will expose the leaders to the digital media, thus encouraging a mindset change. Digital media cannot be incorporated into the church minus a mindset change. The mindset changes proceeds adaptation of the media for ministry. The leader's understanding of media use within the church will help the leaders to embrace and target social media platforms or digital media to do the mission (ID-STL). The mindset of the leader determines the adoption of the media for the church's use. The leadership mindset and creative approach to digital media cannot be overstated (Part 8 – FGD-STP).*

Children and youth content must be packaged attractively and posted on social media platforms that are populated by young people. The young people's content must not be delivered as adult content (KI-DK). Children and youth's content must be packaged tailored for the young people. The content for the adults must have an adult kind of packaging. Then, the church must facilitate the content creation and packaging (Part 5 – FGD-STP).

The participants stressed the importance of mindset change about digital media culture, and digital media ministry. In the digital culture, the participants mentioned that adaptation is impossible without a mindset change in the leaders. Dailey (2014:4) argues that there is a need for digital

discernment when adapting digital media culture to address the underlying challenges within the digital space to effectively engage in evangelism. Understanding and adapting digital media culture enables the smooth spread of the gospel and different theologies via digital media. Adapting to the culture, language and operations of digital media allows the use of all digital media's best attributes to the advantage of the church. The church, therefore, needs to keep pace with understanding digital media culture, language, attributes and characteristics. The leader's discerning and prayerful engagement cannot be overstated with digital media usage.

6.3.1.2.10 Conclusion Relating to Digital Media Use

In this study, digital media is conceptualised as new tools of communication that thrive on the use of new technologies, and internet. It is also considered a new space for interaction, digital ministry, fellowship and communication. The digital media has become a place for interaction, connection, fellowship and communion among people with similar faith, and values to advance the gospel message. They are new tools for communication and a new space for creating online communities to engage in faith formation activities to meet the new challenges in sharing and preserving the gospel. Several scholars have presented digital media technologies as new tools for religious communication (Campbell, 2017: 2; Blondheim & Rosenberg, 2017: 48; Lewis, 2014: 10), participate in media theology (Soukup, 2019: Wise, 2004: 35), and digital religion (Campbell, 2013: 13), which are facilitating spiritual formation (Lewis 2018: 524; Cloete, 2015: 7; Campbell, 2005: 17) through the convergence of media (O'Sullivan & Fortunati, 2021: 42; Lanigan 2015: 95; Raja, 2011). The convergence of both new media and old media might accelerate the spread of the gospel message in the media space to reach a wide coverage of digital media users.

To understand the COU's use of digital media, the findings exposed what happens in the churches. From the findings, it was noted that the COU has a positive attitude towards digital media use for ministry. The leaders with a positive attitude towards digital media use integrated it into church ministry to share the gospel story. It was reported that although the COU uses digital media, it has not received clear theological guidance from the top leadership of the church. Yet, the mediatisation of the COU's ministry, theologies, services and fellowships continue to spread the church's messages and rituals into the media space and attracts media users to engage with the shared messages. With the active use of digital media, the COU daily engages in digital theology

and digital ministry with media users knowingly and unknowingly. Therefore, the mediatisation of the COU's services and ministries has positively impacted the way the COU communicates the gospel in the digital age. The mediatisation has enabled the creation of the Online Church of Uganda, which is mandated to conduct services in the digital media space considering the media logic to reach all digital media users from different parts of the globe. It is notable that although digital media use is beneficial to the church, it may disorganise leadership structures and church authorities, therefore, theological and technological guidance is necessary to minimise complexities and maximise the opportunities to reach the entire world with the gospel, and engage in theological discussions.

6.3.1.3 Understanding the Theological Motivation for Digital Media Communication

When asked about the motivation for the use of digital media, the participants had the following to say. Figure 6.3 below presents the participants' responses concerning the theological motivation for the use of digital media.



Fig 6.3: Themes of the category of theological motivation

6.3.1.3.1 *The Great Commission*

The participants shared their views about the Great Commission as a motivation.

***The Great Commission is the Communication mandate:** The Great Commission in Mathew (28:19), Mark (16:15) is the communication mandate to spread the gospel. It is the Christian's call to respond to the Great Commission. The early church used oral and written communication, now digital media technology is an opportunity to fulfil the mandate (ID-STL).*

The Great Commission is to start with our friends. Jesus said we shall be his witnesses in Jerusalem (our community where the friends are). Since digital media facilitates friendship creation and communication, it can help us in reach our friends. If the phones and digital media platforms connect friends when used well it can be helpful in fulfilling the Great Commission, especially through friendship evangelism (Part 2 – FGD-STL).

The Great Commission is a key motivator for the church communicators. The Great Commission is the command from Jesus the sender. The church and the Christians are to go and make disciples of all nations. I think the theological motivation comes from the gospel itself of Matthew because we are commanded by Jesus Christ in the Great Commission to go and preach the gospel (KI-DK).

***Digital media as a tool to fulfil the Great Commission:** Digital media has come to stay and it is a great tool for communication. In the Great Commission, Jesus did not theoretically and methodologically define what we are to use when we go into the world. He commanded all disciples to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Therefore, he expects his disciples to be innovative and use all necessary media to proclaim the gospel and fulfil the mandate (KI-ND).*

According to the participants, the Great Commission⁴³ is the key motivation for using digital media in the communication of the gospel. All the followers of Jesus must participate in the Great Commission by communicating the gospel. Communicating the gospel in today's world by employing all media is to be done out of conviction and belief so that technology does not dictate the values (Lewis, 2014:4). As Guttenberg's printing press greatly facilitated the communication and spread of the written texts of the gospel, the digital media influx is in a position to advance the

⁴³ In His last words found in Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8, Jesus instructs his disciples to go into the world, proclaim/communicate the gospel, be his witnesses and make disciples of all nations. Therefore, Christians and the whole church considers the Great Commission as a command to communicate the gospel. This is to be obeyed by all Christians in different generations.

gospel message across the globe (Lytle, 2013: xx; Drench 2011:57; Bowman, 2003:25) in the digital age. The Great Commission which is a communication task (Soogard, 1993) must be fulfilled. It is, therefore, mandatory for every disciple to go into the world using all available media to communicate the gospel. Claydon (2005) states that the whole Church and all Christians are called and commissioned to take the whole gospel into the world. Drescher (2011: 108) advances an argument that God commissioned the church to go into the world and not the world into the church. The Church and all Christians are sent into the world according to the Great Commission, “Go into the world” and communicate the gospel message to all people of the world using all media.

6.3.1.3.2 Interactive Communication

The participants gave their views about the interactive aspect of communication as a motivation.

***Church and Interactive communication:** Digital media allows interactivity. In Uganda, we like to converse and we connect in digital communication to converse with friends. Digital media brings the church in interaction with digital media users. The digital media brings the presence of church so close to digital users through online worship and prayer sessions (Part 2 – FGD-STL).*

***Reintroduction of interactive communication:** Digital communication reintroduces active interactive communication. Interactive sessions are effective for all, including adults, teens and youth. Exchange of information and giving feedback enriches the discussion and allows growth and progress for the participants. It destroys the spirit of passive communication to active speaking and listening for feedback (KI-DK).*

***Participation of the audience:** The digital communication aspect of interactive communication and invitation to people’s participation enriches fellowship among believers. In digital media ministry, we have learnt that children and youth like fellowships that allow participation. Where people can speak or write a comment and receive immediate response makes one feel part of a fellowship. I remember a friend of mine missed the live online service and was directed to YouTube, but he said he misses the real fellowship in real-time. (Part 10 – FGD Nateete).*

At the cathedral, they try to broadcast services on television and on Zoom. The television is simply passive but with digital media platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, we all participate in the chat and sometimes they ask us to unmute, and we give our responses. In the participatory and

interactive aspect, everyone brings their understanding about a given message making the discussion rich. This approach to learning and communication makes activities livelier and more interesting. The relational aspect is cultivated in interactive sessions (ID-All Saints).

Yes, we are social beings and we like to interact. Yes, through digital media we have interacted with people and with God. During the Zoom prayer meetings, we interact with God and with fellow men. Any activity that allows participation is welcome. When online services are advertised, people come and they feel a sense of belonging (Part 3 – FGD-STL).

Interactive communication is good because it opens up the space to real-time participative communication and people ask to be unmuted so they can contribute to the conversation. Digital media is predominately interactive. So, I think I'm appreciating that aspect of digital communication and the fact that it's interactive. It helps one to connect with someone geographically far and apart. Through online interactions, we remain close and together. With interactive real-time communication, we are widely scattered but close through digital communication. wider but closer (Part 1 – FGD- All Saints).

I would say that when it comes to interaction, the youth that attend the online fellowship through Zoom freely communicate and they bring in entertainment during their interactive fellowship. So, the youth like it when there is interaction and entertainment in an online fellowship (ID-STP).

The participants pointed out that digital media allows interactions and that they were motivated to engage in digital media to connect and interact with other Christians online. The opportunity to interact with other Christians with similar values and engage in fellowship is a motivation for digital media use in ministry. During the interactive sessions, participants are allowed to participate in a faith-based activity. Therefore, digital media promotes active communication around the word of God instead of passive reception as with broadcasting media. It is not simply one person speaking to many but one speaking and allowing others to give feedback and present their responses (Lundby, 2012: 38). The interactive aspect motivates many people to participate in digital media ministry. Claydon (2005) states that digital media does not only extend information but allows people to interact and connect. When interactive communication is employed in digital media ministry, people are likely to contribute to a discussion, thereby leading to effective communication. All human beings created in the image of God are social and communicate interactively, as God. Interactive sharing of our lives, testimonies, and stories is tied into God's

story when using media to draw others to God (Claydon, 2005). To be created in the image of God is to be able to interact with fellow humans and with God. Therefore, digital media provides this opportunity that ought to be explored by the church.

6.3.1.3.3 Church's Incarnational Presence in the Media Space

In response to the motivation of digital media, participants expressed their views and opinions concerning church leaders' intentional presence in the digital space.

Church leaders' presence: *The Bishops, clergy and church leaders are to be present in the digital space as Jesus became present on earth. The presence of the bishop or clergy in the digital space makes the online church activity authentic. It makes one feel God's presence is close and real through the gadgets. When the gospel is communicated online by the priest it makes the audience receptive to the message (Part 6 – FGD- STL). Our Archbishop with a Twitter account makes him close to us. I am following the archbishop and his presence in the digital space makes him accessible. It is good to have a leader we can run to with a problem through the Twitter spaces. Some clergy on Twitter are present to help us through social media platform. I have received counselling and prayers through social media. I follow many clergy on social media and I am happy that I do not have to go to church to speak to the clergy. I can send a message and I receive a prayer. God and His Word are brought close to us on social media platforms (Part 4 – FGD-STL).*

The presence of the priest in the digital space and online community makes a difference and indirectly deals with the negative fears and vices that some people might have about their involvement in the digital media ministry (ID-STP). I wish that ministers are being trained to make their presence evident in the digital space. The leaders' presence in the digital space is important so the leaders need to be taught how to engage in the conversation on the different social media platforms (ID-STL).

Accessibility of Church leaders: *The leader's presence in the digital space makes them easily accessible. Influential leaders such as Archbishop's presence will attract people towards his social media page. The spiritual figure in the online Christian fellowship is important. When certain spiritual leaders are announced as the preacher or speaker for the online fellowship, they attract many of their followers to come and attend the online fellowship (Part – 9 FGD-STP).*

God is brought close to people. One does not have to first drive to church to pray and connect with God. Digital media ministry has made it easy to access God. The presence of God is now in homes, cars, shops, hospitals and on the road. I join the service from anywhere and at any time. When I miss the real-time online meeting during lunch hour or morning prayers, I normally go and access the recording through Facebook and YouTube. Digital media ministry has brought, church and God near and close to people. Through the gadgets, I am able to connect with God as one is leading in prayer, worship and fellowship (ID-STL).

The church of Uganda needs an online Bishop or an ordained minister who is responsible for online activities and monitoring what is going on. The online minister is to be present in the space and actively engage in the communities online. They should monitor who is saying what even if he is a preacher like me. The clergy or Bishop responsible must work with the team that is theologically trained to help and guide ministry in the digital space. The authority guiding digital ministers is important and making sure that theology or biblical theme are discussed well in the media space (ID-All Saints).

According to the participants, digital media use is motivated by creating an online presence to connect and reach people far off, especially long-lost church members. The participants expressed a need for an active and present clergy in the digital space. They expressed that the presence of the clergy makes church activities and God's presence close to people. By connecting with an online clergy, counselling, prayer, discipleship and Bible study are made possible through the digital space. The participants expressed that if Jesus could come and live with people on earth, what about the church ministers? Therefore, the clergy are requested to be present in the digital space to reach people in the digital space. Claydon (2005) states that God used the incarnation as the perfect medium to reach out to humankind. Most of the respondents were advocating for the presence of Bishops and Priests in the digital space to bring God and the Church closer to people. Lytle (2009) argues that being present is being incarnational, which God demonstrated through the presence of His son on earth. Lewis (2014) argues that all believers ought to be incarnational in the digital environment to interact with digital natives, both Christians and non-Christians, in the digital space instead of being visitors to do evangelism and mission and leave.

6.3.1.3.4 Online Faith Community

Below are the participants' views and perspectives about Online Faith Communities:

***Conversation in online communities:** The conversation with people through the online communities are real and happen on different platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp and phone calls. Using friendly conversations among online communities, people connect through phone call and social media platforms. Through the phone and some social media platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Twitter, people meet and connect as community through which counselling, fellowships and prayers take place. A phone call, text message to offer a prayer or counselling encourages a believer makes and uplifts his/her spirit (FGD – All Saints 3).*

***Online fellowship on digital platforms:** Through mobile phones, computers and social media platforms, one can connect with the church and be a part of church activities. Through WhatsApp pages, inspirational bible teachings, preaching are shared. The introduction of Zoom has seen the rise of online fellowships, which are now daily. To invite people to the online fellowships, the links are often circulated through WhatsApp, email, Facebook and Telegram so that people can use the link to join a particular fellowship that is happening on Zoom at a particular home. Media for the gospel doesn't require movement but can be done in the comfort of home or office. Encouragement and preaching are made easy through the phone, a call, an SMS, a WhatsApp text, Zoom conferencing, audio, video, and image, or a message on social media platforms such as Twitter (Part 8 – FGD-STL)*

Through the digital media online fellowships, prayer sessions, services, bible studies and praise sessions are conducted. As a result of online fellowships people are sharing their testimonies of what God has done through online fellowships. The testimonies are encouraging many people to attend the online communities and participate in the fellowships. At the Cathedral, regular prayers through Zoom and streamed on YouTube are conducted and people attend while in their offices, cars and homes (ID-STP).

We have seen a number of online fellowships or communities start. There is an online Church of Uganda that conducts services throughout the week and three activities on a daily basis. People are committed to the fellowship and now considering themselves as members of the online community of believers. People have become friends and have come back to God through that

online fellowship. Online faith communities are established by different parishes on different social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and other platforms. These pages allow people to engage in discussions and conversations concerning different topics (Participant 5 – FGD- STL).

According to the participants, Christians are part of online faith communities where they are participating in spiritual activities such as prayers, fellowships, Bible studies, counselling and intercession prayers. The activities through the online faith community as mentioned by participants are about God, spiritual, theological and faith formation conversations. Sutinen et al. (2021:19) argues that biblical conversations are regularly offered by church leaders on digital platforms and spiritual guidance is offered online. Digital religion that facilitates religious activities is circulating on digital media platforms (Campbell, 2013:12), together with faith formation activities such as discipleship (Soukup et al., 2019:4; Lytle, 2013) and spiritual nurture through the platforms (Smith, 2020). Dyikuk (2020:36) argues that the key reason why online faith community platforms are created is to allow conversations around biblical themes concerning what is happening in the everyday lives of digital media users. Kleining (2008) argues that the Triune God invites his people into conversation upon accepting Jesus. Therefore, the presence of the online faith community in the digital space allows people to join in the conversation about God's word, and participate in church ministry via technology.

6.3.1.3.5 Online Sacraments and Rituals

Concerning the sacraments, the participants expressed their views on participation in online sacraments and Anglican rituals.

***Sacraments:** The Anglican Church is mainly known for its rituals and sacraments. One wonders how the online fellowship engages in the sacraments. The Anglican church in using digital media still faces challenges in participating in certain sacraments. The Anglican church celebrates Holy Communion, but it is not yet seen in online services (Part 9 – FGD-STL).*

Participation in the sacrament requires deep guidance from the leaders. As the Church of Uganda, we have canons and people might want the communion and elements consecrated in a sacred space like a church. However, what does the house of Bishop say concerning communion online?

The advice of the authority of the Bishop is very important. Therefore, if the Bishop has not authorised us to do that then we can't do it (ID-All Saints).

Concerning Holy Communion, it is a matter of faith and participating in the sacrament by faith. A sacrament is the outside demonstration of an inward faith, so it is faith. We are to encourage people to lift their faith and participate in communion even through digital media. I shared with the Bishop about giving communion through media ministry. The Bishop allowed me to administer communion through media during the lockdown of churches since people were not coming to church. We were innovative and consecrated the bread and wine through media and people participated in the Holy Communion sacrament. We needed to innovate, but Holy Communion was becoming obsolete. When we administered Communion, people were very happy, blessed and liked the whole arrangement (ID-STP).

Church Rituals: *There are church rituals that can still be done easily online. I think those that can be done freely, of course, preaching, teaching, discipleship, prayer, fellowship, evangelism and giving. I think we need to do a lot of preaching, mentorship, discipleship, teaching and training on rituals and sacraments, but not participating in the online sacraments. Some rituals such as Baptism and Holy Communion cannot be done, instead, we can encourage and teach the people about the ritual and call upon them to participate in the sacraments when they visit a physical church (KI-DK).*

Concerning Anglican sacraments and rituals, the majority of the participants mentioned that although some rituals can be done, certain sacraments such as Holy Communion and Baptism cannot be conducted through digital media. On the other hand, some participants argued that sacraments are a matter of faith, therefore, can be conducted online as long as Christians are sensitised about the sacraments, especially Holy Communion. Sutinen and Cooper (2021: 30) argue that technology is influencing the way churches worship and carry out certain church rituals. The church is adopting new approaches to continue with ministry within the digital age. Nevertheless, although digital ministry and online fellowship are growing through the Church of Uganda, certain church sacraments, i.e. Holy Communion, might not be done in the online space until the Bishops pronounce their position on the sacraments. Claydon (2005) argues that online faith communities cannot operate independently of physical faith communities. Therefore, what cannot be practised in the online church fellowship according to the COU can be found in the

physical churches. Sutinen and Cooper (2021:20) argue that although churches are engaged in online church activities and some in online sacraments, there are still theological debates on the validity of the eucharistic sacraments blessed via video links. Therefore, the COU is to engage in theological debates concerning sacraments to guide the church's online fellowship members. Although the COU is integrating digital media and conducting fellowship online, there are key sacraments that cannot be done online until the Church authorities advise on the matter.

6.3.1.3.6 The Church and Authority

To understand the authority of the church as it operates in the digital space to do ministry. Below are some responses from the participants.

Church's Authority: *The clergy in the Church of Uganda has God-given authority. Therefore, they are to use their position well in the media and avoid giving misleading information. The Church authorities, when present in the media space, they give weight to the activity. The people in authority must be at the forefront in demonstrating thorough knowledge of the word of God in the media environment. (KI-DN). In Uganda, there are a number of denominations, but the Anglican Church is still an authority and people still respect the authority of the church and its leadership. Therefore, I think the authority the Anglican church has, cannot be taken away by any not even digital media and the self-proclaimed religious figures and authorities in the digital media age. The Church of Uganda is a genuine church and has an image in society (Part 6 – FGD-STL)*

Authority is from God: *Authority comes from the Lord. Digital media doesn't give or take authority. The leader will remain a leader no matter the community. The ordained ministers have the authority to preach the gospel as they were instructed on the day of ordination. Church leaders are listened to carefully cause they have authority so digital media cannot take it away (Part 3 – FGD- STL)*

Authorisation: *For one to go on air he/she must be authorised, so that media content is censored by the church and managed well, now for example who gets to record and share the message on behalf of the church authority? All authority is given by God. Jesus said all authority is given to*

me now go and proclaim the gospel. If God has given you the authority you should maintain that authority and use it well (Part 6 – FGD- Nateete).

The authority is within the person, it's a matter of knowing who you are and what you are doing. The authority of the church leader is not determined by social media. Although social media allows everyone to share and interpret the Bible message, those from recognised religious bodies and churches are received and accepted easily. The Church leaders with the authority to interpret scripture need to come out and use media severally to become an authority in media. The digital media messages go viral very instantly so if you sit in your house and say for me I am an old man and I can't use media, you hinder your influence. Those in the COU authority can't afford to simply sit back and do nothing but come and use the media for the gospel (ID – Nateete).

Setting the Agenda: *The need for an authority to set the agenda in the media space cannot be overstated. The authority is important to guide the people of God concerning the teaching. To address topical issues that the public is dealing with. The church needs to come out and teach people about issues of marriage (Part 4 – FGD-STL).*

Although Christians are given authority to preach, we have heard a number of sermons and teaching through media which are misleading and offering dangerous information to the audience. Therefore, authorities in religious organisations must be present and advise the unsuspecting masses about certain teachings and doctrines (ID – All Saints).

I think digital media use for ministry checks the authority of the church since anyone can now record a sermon and post it without permission from the religious authorities. I think religious leaders can help to check the posted messages by putting measures, strategies and guiding rules in place concerning who posts and what is posted. The church leaders can intentionally speak against the misuse of media and any misinterpretation of scripture or false teachings in media to advise digital media users. It is important that recognised the COU leaders with authority are present in the media space to teach the media users the authentic word of God (ID – STL).

In addressing the issues concerning religious authority and digital media, participants expressed their views by arguing that authority comes from God not social media. They further stated that religious leaders have God-given authority which cannot be taken away by digital media. They emphasised that the presence of the church leaders in online activities makes the activities authentic and easily acceptable to people. To a certain degree, digital media is considered a threat

to church authority for it is a tool that empowers other people to share their convictions (Campbell, 2012:14). Hence, since church authority comes from God, therefore, social media cannot usurp the religious leader's authority. Nevertheless, traditional church authority risks being destroyed due to the fluidity and transience of online communities (Campbell, 2010:251). The participants further stated that authority can be usurped if the leaders do not come in to teach the gospel clearly in the media space. Dyikuk (2020:35) further argues that literature is necessary to further understand the aspect of authority in online activities that agree with the beliefs, vision and mission of the church. Therefore, as discovered in findings and literature, authority can be usurped in case religious leaders abandon their duties. Nevertheless, religious and church leaders have authority that comes from God. Notably, authority in the digital space goes hand in hand with authenticity.

6.3.1.3.7 *Authenticity*

When asked about the aspect of the authenticity of what is done in the digital media space, the participants expressed their views as mentioned below.

***The Word of God for authenticity:** To remain true and loyal to the word of God is what will help the digital minister in the Church of Uganda to be authentic in the media space. The word of God must be the standard as one gets in digital media. It is the audience who can test every word along with the word of God, then they will determine the authenticity of the message through digital space (Part-5-FGD-All Saints). Is the message share online in agreement with the word of God? I believe that is how authenticity is determined (Part 9 – FGD-All Saints).*

To deal with an authentic message, the Church is to continue recording authentic and attractive messages, which are in line with the word of God and circulate the messages through digital media platforms (KI-DK). It is possible to maintain authenticity in the digital media space. We simply need to go back to the word of God. The online teachers are to teach the word of God and nothing else. From the Christian perspective, authenticity cannot be maintained when we run away from the scripture. When the word of God is taught as required authenticity will be attained (ID – STL).

The gospel communicators in the digital space must be authentic, fun, creative and real, with no pretence in their content delivery. If the activity such as prayer, discipleship, worship, music, dance and drama is done in a certain way in the physical church they should be done that way or

in a better way and well packaged for online space. When people come to the digital platforms and find good and deep worship as in the physical church, they will want to continue accessing that authentic content. There should not be a big discrepancy in the way we do church offline and online (KI-DK).

Authenticity is attained when the digital media ministers prepares very well before they come to record or live stream any Christian or church content in the digital media space. The audience that search for spiritual content although need spiritual nourishment, they are drawn to well packaged, attractive, appealing, and well-presented content. Therefore, preparation and delivery are very important in achieving authenticity (Part 7 – FGD-Nateete).

According to the participants, authority leads to authenticity. The majority attached authenticity to the authority of God's word and activities that promote God's purposes. Participants expressed that authenticity is attained as long as the shared message is in line with the word of God. Miller (2013: 288) argues that in religion, authenticity is attained when religious teachings agree with God's word and fulfil God's purpose. Further, authenticity is determined in terms of originality with excellent quality (Tan, 2016: 47). Gilpin et al. (2010:265) argue that authenticity is determined by the closeness to the identity of the physical institution and clear knowledge about an institution. Without a physical church authorising an online fellowship, with a clear and similar identity between offline and online fellowship the authenticity of an online church may be doubted. The message and activity, be it worshipping, or a sermon done in an online fellowship or church must align with the theology and doctrine of the offline church then the online church and its messages will be considered authentic. The message or church activity shared online that lacks sound teaching as per the standards of God's word, far from the teaching of the physical church, lacks authenticity. Therefore, in digital media ministry, authenticity can be attained when the content provided is in line with the word of God and shows the identity of the Christian faith. Faith messages in the media space are often considered authentic when they agree with the word of God and His mission for the world. Therefore, in digital media use for the gospel, authenticity cannot be detached from biblical teachings, Christian authority, Christian beliefs and Christian traditions. The online activity is to operate in line with the ethos and values of the offline institution.

6.3.1.3.8 Conclusion Relating to Theological Motivation for Digital Media Use

Considering the participants' responses about their motivation for digital media use, I deduce that theological motivation is the reason and inspirational factors informed by the Bible, theology and community of faith that enable the individual Christians and church to use digital media to communicate the gospel. Theological motivation involves a variety of reasons that draw people to participate in a given activity and factors that determine the Church's involvement in a particular programme (Cartledge, Dunlop, Buckingham & Bremner, 2019: 255–256). Theological motivation relates with and to faith and biblical teaching. According to the participants, the theological motivation for digital media use includes firstly, the Great Commission, which instructs all disciples to use any media to communicate the gospel message; secondly, the opportunity to interact with digital media users to share the gospel message; thirdly, the opportunity to dwell among digital media users and become incarnate in digital space to bring the gospel story close to people; fourthly the opportunity to create, belong to and participate in the online faith community and advance conversations about the word of God. In the online community of faith, authenticity is gained when sharing and preaching agrees with God's word. When digital media users continue to listen to the authentic message from the online COU, it becoming an authority in the media space. Notably, clergy leading and participating in the digital media service and fellowship makes the activity authentic and the regular presence of the clergy makes him/her an authority in the media space. Therefore, it is argued that theological motivation for media use is informed and inspired by biblical and theological examples and reasoning to communicate the gospel and fulfil the great commission. The authenticity of a message is determined when the message agrees with the Holy Bible and the Christian teachings of the founding physical church.

6.3.1.4 Understanding of the Approaches to Digital Communication

This category captures the approaches and methods the Church of Uganda employs in digital media to communicate the gospel.

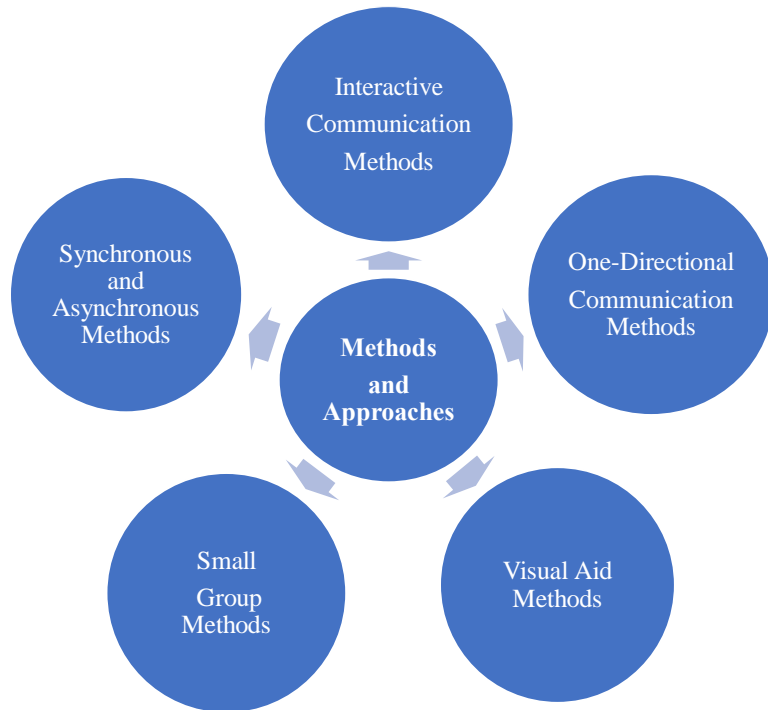


Fig 6.4: Theme in the category of Approach in digital communication

6.3.1.4.1 *One-directional Communication Approach*

When asked about the one-direction approach in preaching by the church in the media space, the participants responded as below.

Sermons Live-streamed and Uploaded: *The church has engaged in one- directional preaching and teaching with one speaking to many through digital media, through Zoom, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Preaching is a key ritual and an activity of the church. It is through a number of sermons in form of preaching and teaching live streamed and uploaded that the gospel is communicated one-directionally to the audience. The Church of Uganda's sermons by different priests are uploaded on YouTube and Facebook. I think the one-directional communication approach has its benefit and place with preaching and teaching in the church and on digital media platforms (KI-DK).*

One-direction: *As the Church of Uganda, we have mainly used one-directional approach in the delivery of the sermons in the church buildings and now in the digital media space. However, I am learning that digital media requires interactivity, so we need to employ interactivity in the gospel*

delivery. At Namirembe Diocese, we use the pulpit to share the good news with the people in the church. The sermons shared at the pulpit are normally recorded and shared online and also broadcast. Therefore, the one-direction approach we use does not give room for feedback, so you do not know whether people are understanding the message or not. It is mainly one way with no feedback, but it is about delivering the message (KI-ND).

One-directional teaching in media space is relevant as an additional or supplement to the church pulpit. Nevertheless, as a teacher, I believe in people-centred communication where the speaker allows people to participate in the communication process and exchange information for everyone to participate in the conversation (KI-ND).

As a clergy, I have recorded many devotions and uploaded on Facebook and YouTube and for television. I often record 20 sermons for two weeks and then upload them on different platforms at different times and dates. Sometimes it gets so exhausting. I have to record for the online ministry and also be present for the physical church ministry. There is a heavy demand on us as ministers who are engaged in Online ministry and yet involved in the physical offline ministry (ID-All Saints).

One direction allows wide coverage. *One message sent to a wide audience through media. The active use of the media for preaching allows us as church to do ministry to people so far away from us. The sermons uploaded on the social media platforms go so far and keep moving from the time they are uploaded. Once the message is uploaded it is available online and can be accessed by anyone anytime. What a blessing! The gospel message remains on the social platforms for a long time for anyone to access (ID – Nateete).*

Traditional methods, *such as radio and television are mainly one way. One will preach and the people will only listen to the radio and cannot give feedback. On television, people will watch and listen passively but can't listen. Zoom services during preaching and teaching people can give feedback and the speaker can respond to the comments (Part 1 – FGD-Nateete)*

According to the participants, the COU employs in a one-directional communication approach to preach and teach the word of God in the digital space. The one-directional approach is common in churches and is now employed in digital media space. On some social media platforms, through a one-directional approach, the sermons are streamed and uploaded into the cloud. The one-directional approach is considered to be helpful in addressing the big groups of people through

media platforms either by streaming or uploading pre-recorded sermons. The participants recognised that although one-directional communication is actively used by the church through digital media, it can be supplemented by interactive approaches that draw members into participation. The one-directional approach is passive and keeps the audience on the receiving end with no comment (Claydon, 2005). Yet, digital media features allow communicators to engage with the audience by inviting feedback, responses and comments, thus achieving effective interaction communication (Claydon, 2005; Campbell, 2013:17; Lundby 2012:30). The digital age allows interactive communication, causing people to shift from a purely one-directional approach to incorporating interactive communication in the communication process by encouraging people share and exchange information through digital media platforms during discussions and teachings (Dailey, 2015:4).

6.3.1.4.2 Interactive Communication Approach

The participants in their response to interactive communication of the gospel through digital media.

***Interaction:** In some online fellowships conducted by our church, there are interactions, especially through Zoom fellowships, WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook where messages and comments are exchanged. One speaking as others are typing their comments is a great opportunity for members to participate during the online fellowship. During the interactive fellowship, people are drawn into the discussion and are encouraged to actively participate. Some speakers who normally take note of the comments tend to respond to points mentioned in the interaction room. I believe interactive fellowships work better in reaching out to online communities and making people feel close to each other, and present in real-time although geographically separate (Part 5 – FGD- All Saints).*

I have preached and taught discipleship classes interactively mainly through WhatsApp and Zoom. During the classes, I present the content and call the students to engage with it and respond accordingly. In these classes, I ask questions and the students respond so we keep interacting on WhatsApp and Zoom. This is a new way of learning and doing ministry, I think we are relational people and want to relate and interact. The platforms give us an opportunity to interact (ID – All Saints).

Being able to ask questions and give feedback during fellowship is an attribute I have enjoyed in the use of digital media. After a certain presentation in some online fellowships, the people ask questions. So, I think I am appreciating that aspect of digital communication and the fact that it's interactive, it helps one understand a given teaching and as a result one grows because of the feedback (Part 5 – FGD- STL).

I advocate for people-centred teaching and preaching. The use of digital media by church allows the people-centred teaching and preaching, where the communicator and the audience are able to engage in the discussion and participate. Feedback is important in communication, digital media incorporated in church ministry both offline and online can allow interactions. Yes, one-directional communication is commonly used, but the two-way communication for us online is ideal and necessary in the digital age (KI-DN).

According to the participants, the COU sometimes engages in interactive communication while sharing the gospel. Although the church occasionally engages in interactive communication during online Zoom fellowship, prayers, Bible studies, and youth and children's sessions, the participants desire that the church engages more often in interactive communication activities to spread the gospel in the digital media space. The interactive approach to communication allows people to connect interact, and give feedback during a session. This is made easy with media communication through comments and responses sections. The interactive approach to communication is deeply rooted in God and is advanced by the theology of communication that presents God as an interactive communicator who invites people into the communication process (Claydon 2005; Soukup 2002:27; Soogard 1993:5; Quentine, 2000:10). God's interactive nature is imparted into human beings, thereby making human beings interactive. Therefore, digital media shares the interactive attribute with God and humans and so the interactive communication within the digital media space is likely to attract many people into an ongoing conversation online, either in big communities, small groups or interpersonal conversation. Furthermore, digital media communication that promotes interactions (Lundby, 2012:26) allows the church to communicate to its audience using interactive activities, thus re-introducing interaction in the church's communication practices.

6.3.1.4.3 *Small-Group Methods*

The participants mentioned that there are small homogenous fellowships that meet online through Zoom and YouTube. Below are the responses about small groups.

Age Group Fellowships: *Through the Zoom and YouTube services, there are age group fellowships such as children, youth, women, men, married and family fellowships. It is amazing how different groups are meeting together through online fellowships, to discuss age-appropriate topics and pray together. In these fellowships, people meet and pray together. The church has allowed people to develop prayer groups online to which they are committed (Part 6 – FGD- STL). There are fellowships for children, youth, women, men, married and family. It is amazing how different groups are meeting together through online fellowships, discussing topics relating with the group and pray together (Part 3 – FGD- All Saints). The Youth and children fellowship happen through Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube but they are mainly interactive and participatory to allow all members to engage in interactive communication. They like testimonies, stories, singing, dancing and quiz (Part 4 – FGD- STL).*

Friendship with phone: *The youth love their smartphones and they are always with their phones. Actually, phones are becoming their friends because through phones they make friends and belong to a virtual community. Some youth use their phones for school and church; generally, to a youth the phone is not for only communication, but for church, school, research, entertainment and interactions. Therefore, we engage with youth through activities that are interactive and fun. The gospel message is packaged in a panel discussion, question and answer sessions, relationship talks, storytelling, music and gaming for the youth (KI-DK).*

Interaction with adults: *At the cathedral, I have interacted with adults that are on WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Zoom with the gospel. I am above 60 and I use social media platforms to share the gospel and also listen to teachings. There is a 90-year-old lady who is active on the online services. She never misses the online lunch-hour prayers. The digital media ministry has not left elderly people behind. Their children are helping them to connect to online services (ID-STP).*

Gender-based fellowships: *The small groups and small homogenous groups are good for effective interaction. We have a prayer group which brings together both males and females of about 25 in total. In this group we pray and everyone can participate. It is a weekly fellowship conducted by*

a Reverend. It has been in existence now for three years, but we have grown tremendously. The small groups allow us to participate freely. I cannot trade this fellowship for any physical fellowship (Part 1 – FGD STL).

According to the participants, the small-group fellowships made up of different categories such as youth, children, women, men, marrieds, different age groups, professions and other categories are reported as another approach through which the COU communicates the gospel in the digital media space. In the small group fellowships, participants reported that the sharing is often interactive and participatory. In addition, the teachings in the groups are sometimes recorded or live-streamed on different social media platforms for the media community to access. Unlike in big congregations, in small group fellowships, members are allowed to contribute and participate in the discussions. Among the categories, children and youth are reported to engage a bit more in interactive discussions on topics concerning relationships, prayer, Bible quiz and counselling. Digital media communication is good for interaction between the communicators and the audience in various ways such as instant messaging and in activities that allow immediate responses concerning a topic under discussion (Lundy 2012:30). Participants reported that in some churches, different age groups are reached through digital media platforms. It is reported that the ages active in online activities range between 5 to 90 years of age, but with group activities of different ages happening at different times. Amongst the groups are different age groups including children between 5 to 12 years, teenagers between 13 to 19 years, youth between 20 to 34 years, and adults are 35 and above. All these age groups are reflected in the digital ministry within the Church of Uganda. The participants mentioned that to all different age groups online ministry is mainly done one-directionally and on a few occasions interactively. It is mentioned that youth and children are mainly drawn to interactive and visually aided online activities. To reach the children and youth, therefore, the COU is to invest time in more interactive activities that will attract those age groups to participate. Although digital media is commonly considered to be dominated by youth and young adults, according to this study, many adults were reported to be actively involved in digital ministry. Some adults now find online fellowships and services more conducive and convenient than physical fellowship. It was reported that there were active online fellowship members between 60 and 90 years that were regular in online fellowships. It was reported that an elderly lady of 90 years finds online services a blessing and convenient for her since she does not have to

go to church due to her weak body. The Zoom fellowship give her an opportunity to pray, connect in fellowship and speak when given an opportunity. Therefore, with intentional approaches to reach different age groups through digital media, even the elderly will be ministered to through digital media ministry.

6.3.1.4.4 Visual Aids and Images

Regarding the approaches employed in digital media, participants gave responses about the use of images and visuals. Below are the responses:

Children's online fellowships: *In the children fellowships, the teachers use storytelling, video clips and visual aids to pass the message to the children. The methods in form of audio, video, and images are used although they tend to be very costly. The use of visual aids during online children fellowships, keep the children active, participating and involved in the teaching session (Part 4 – FGD- All Saints).*

As the children's teacher, interactive sessions with visual aids keep the children entertained, facilitate learning better and encourage participation. When the children participate and ask questions, then I will know that the children have understood. We cannot use a teacher-centred approach with children but a children-centred approach. Online children's teaching and lessons require images and interaction (Part 9 – STP).

Video and images for youth: *With the youth, we have asked the youth to send in video clips and interesting images about certain topics with a Christian message. The clips are often uploaded to online Christian platforms such as Tik-Tok, WhatsApp and Instagram. The video clips and well-designed images are used to communicate the gospel message through digital media platforms (Part 7 – STL). Interesting and well-designed images with scripture are designed and shared on youth WhatsApp pages and statuses, through which a message is shared (Part 5 – FGD-Nateete)*

Posters: *Well-designed posters with Zoom service links and a Christian message are often posted on social media platforms such as WhatsApp pages, groups, status and Facebook to communicate a certain message and event. These posters and links tend to make rounds on WhatsApp pages, thus making the quotation viral and, thus sharing the message (Part 5 – FGD- All Saints). Well-designed posters with scriptures and prayers are often posted on social media platforms and later widely circulated across platforms (Part 3 – STL- Nateete)*

According to the participants, visual aids such as images, posters, graphics, video clips, and animated stories are methods used to communicate the gospel appealingly. The use of emojis, photos, images, videos, quotes and life stories stimulate and attract the audience, thus drawing the audience to participate in a post shared; by reading, listening, downloading, retweeting, liking and sharing the post. It is important that the ministers internalise the gospel and then integrate it into real-life stories and share the Christian message interestingly and attractively to spark interaction with the audience (Dailey, 2015: 5). In the digital ministry, the use of images, well-designed posters with a Christian message, video clips, audio-visuals and images which are often shared on different social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter have advanced Christian messages. Through social media platforms, the Church sends visually aided messages using texts, audio-visuals, images and quotes to encourage or respond to teachings. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp as a messaging application helps to send messages, recorded devotions, posters and online service links to different people.

6.3.1.4.5 Asynchronous and Synchronous Delivery

Regarding the methods and approaches used to communicate the gospel, the participants reported about the asynchronous and synchronous methods. Below are their responses.

***Pre-recorded sermon:** During the church services, the church photography and video personnel record the preaching and teaching sermons, edit and upload the pre-recorded sermons on YouTube for the online community to access, listen and share with others. The pre-recorded sermons were used mainly during the COVID-19 lockdown. When the sermons are uploaded on YouTube, the subscribed members are alerted with notifications to go and listen to the uploaded content. The Church devotion links are shared via WhatsApp for them to access the teachings by downloading them from YouTube. The uploaded sermons helped sustain the Christians through the lockdown of churches (Part 1 – FGD-STL).*

When COVID-19 led to a lockdown of churches, many of the churches had to live-stream the services. Our Church did not have live streaming equipment, but we used our phones and streamed the services on Facebook. The church started using Zoom for services and later learnt to live stream through Zoom to Facebook and then YouTube. So, to date, the church still live-streams

Sunday services on YouTube and Facebook for the online community to access. The Live-Streaming helped the church to deliver the messages to the audience and its parishioners throughout the lockdown. The Zoom and live streaming services allowed the parishioners to participate in real-time services as they were aired by Church (Part 4 – FGD- STL).

The priests tend to record devotional teachings and upload them on social media platforms for people to download and be spiritually edified. The devotions are often shared from YouTube through WhatsApp to be accessed by social media users (ID-All Saints). I personally share recorded devotions easily through WhatsApp. Through WhatsApp, many people can access teachings which were pre-recorded and uploaded on YouTube. The recording, uploading, viewing, downloading and sharing of the sermons through audio, video, text and images allows the wide spread of the gospel. I always share the downloaded sermons with my friends and relatives through WhatsApp (Part 8 – FGD- Nateete).

The participants reported that churches often live-stream real-time services and teachings and also upload pre-recorded services, sermons, teachings and devotions. In digital media use, the churches synchronously live-stream fellowships and services happening in real-time through Zoom to either YouTube or Facebook or both through restreaming software. Synchronous communication allows real-time interactions, permits spontaneous interaction and allows immediate feedback (Lim, 2017). Real-time communication through digital media allows people to access the message from anywhere and people are free to interact during live-streaming, through live chats, video conferencing and video calls. This has been made possible through digital media such as Phone calls, Zoom fellowships, live-streaming, live chats, WhatsApp audio and video calls and real-time fellowships.

The participants mentioned that churches pre-record services, teachings, and devotions and upload them on different social media platforms, especially YouTube and Facebook, where they are later accessed by digital media users. With the uploaded pre-recordings, the church can facilitate asynchronous communication of gospel teachings. Through asynchronous communication, digital media consumers are able to access church teachings and preaching anytime from anywhere. The pre-recorded sermons and teaching keep making rounds even when church doors are closed and leaders sleeping. Asynchronous communication is available anytime anywhere (Lim, 2017). It is

communication that happens in one's own time and allows one to listen to a teaching and reflect upon it anytime anywhere.

This synchronous and asynchronous communication method employed by the church facilitates the spread of the gospel message across the globe. The church's live-streaming and uploading services are accessed by both parishioners and non-parishioners from their different locations and they reflectively engage with the teaching at leisure. This was very common during COVID-19 and it sustained the church through the lockdown. The synchronous and asynchronous methods allow people to listen to the gospel message from anywhere. With the mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2008:4), the gospel can be accessed synchronously and asynchronously in different media logic. The synchronous and asynchronous possibilities in the digital media age allow the audience to engage with the sermon in real-time and also after the service is done (Claydon, 2005).

6.3.1.4.6 Conclusion Relating to Digital Media Approaches

The leaders reported that the COU employs different approaches such as one-direction, interaction, small group methods, synchronous and asynchronous, and the use of visual aids as approaches in preaching, teaching and sharing the gospel. The dominant approach used by the COU was reported as one-directional. One-directional, which is one speaking to many as used in Church buildings, is taken directly as is and used in the communication of the gospel in the digital media. Although the one-directional method is used as the main approach for digital communication, it was not reported as a contributing factor to the dwindling numbers of COU members as they appear in the Census of 2014. Nonetheless, the COU was called upon to actively employ a variety of approaches to communicate, but with an emphasis on approaches that promote interactions. Christian communicators are to engage in interactive, small group, community, and visual communication to communicate effectively in the digital age (Stollery, 2009:9). Reflecting on the approaches employed, the participants showed how important the approaches are in digital communication but presented the interactive approach as the most effective approach since it allows the fellowship members to engage and contribute during an online activity. For continuous and effective use of digital media, the participants mentioned the need for integrating more interactive activities through which the gospel may be communicated via digital media. Therefore, since the COU

leaders actively use digital media to share the gospel employing different approaches, intentional use of interactive communication may spread the gospel message further.

6.3.1.5 Most Effective Communication Approach in the Digital Age

Among the approaches employed and mentioned, the participants reported the interactive approach as the most effective method of communicating the gospel in the digital age.

Interaction and participation during online fellowships and services is considered effective since those far in different parts are brought close through their active participation in service (Part 9- FGD- STP). I believe interactive fellowships work better in reaching out to online communities. Interactions through some digital platforms such as video conferencing application as Zoom, allow members to have interactive interfaces and makes them feel close in real-time fellowship although geographically separate. The digital media platforms bring people close to each other (Part 5 – FGD- All Saints).

Being able to ask questions, comment and give feedback during an online fellowship is an attribute I have enjoyed in the use of digital media. After a certain presentation in some online fellowships, people ask questions, make comment and respond. So, I think I'm appreciating the interactive aspect of digital communication. It helps one understand a given teaching and as a result, one grows because of the feedback. In the interactive session, the audience can openly share and participate in the ongoing conversation (Part 5 – FGD- STL). As a teacher, I advocate for people-centred teaching and preaching. The use of digital media by the church allows the people-centred teaching and preaching, where the communicator and the audience are able to engage and interact in the discussion. Feedback is important in communication, digital media incorporated in church ministry both offline and online can allow interactions. In church, a pulpit is a big bother, you are telling people what you know, and you are like the centre of knowledge, you don't even understand what they are taking in, what their perceptions are of what you are saying. Yes, one-directional communication is commonly used, but two-way communication for us online is ideal and necessary in the digital age (KI-DN).

In the children online fellowship, children participate in different ways, the teachers often ask children to read the scriptures, lead in prayers, ask questions and mention their lessons. As we

conduct the online children services through Zoom, the children keep their videos on, while muted until one is asked to speak (Part 9-FGD- STP).

The youth enjoy interactivity in the fellowship, where they are given an opportunity to engage. We often design participatory activities, life stories and panel sessions for youth fellowships (Part 6 – FGD-STL).

As a leader, I have asked the leaders that work with youth to make the youth online fellowships more interactive than ever by allowing the youth to participate in the service by leading the service, do music, dance and drama and also preach (KI-DK).

According to the participants' responses, the COU employs different digital media approaches and platforms to communicate the gospel. The different digital media platforms are employed but the majority of participants expressed how the Zoom application has been a timely video conference application through which different approaches are used. All the churches that engaged in the study reported that they paid for a Zoom license and used Zoom for Church services, fellowships, prayer groups, counselling and different church activities. Sometimes, through the Zoom application, the services are live streamed on either Facebook or YouTube. Churches with established social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter use them as avenues for the church to share church information with digital media users from across the world (Chiluwa, 2013). In addition to the use of one direction, the COU is yet to engage in more interactive activities to engage the media audience.

The online fellowships and services allow people to connect and interact with different people, those they know and those they have never known. Participants mentioned that they enjoyed the synchronous (real-time) fellowships and preaching. Online fellowships bring Christians together from across the globe to fellowship, learn, interact, discuss, pray and connect. The fellowship members connect, communicate, relate and develop a sense of communion in the community of believers and a sense of belonging to a community. Campbell (2020:28) argues that people join online communities to gain a sense of belonging, connection and fellowship with people from all over the world. During the online fellowship, the preacher might come from abroad, a worship leader from a different district and the leader from another district, but all are brought together in one fellowship to pray together and listen to the same preacher. Therefore, it is deduced that online

churches and fellowships have brought the church and Christians together and fed the members from the same plate of food – the word of God.

As the church engages in online ministry through digital media, the participants stressed different approaches that the church employs. They stressed one-directional, interactive, visual aids, small group, asynchronous and synchronous communication approaches. Of the mentioned approaches, the one predominately used is the one-directional approach, which is evident in Zoom preaching and uploaded sermons on Social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. One-directional is promoted by the transmission theory of communication that highlights sending of information linearly from sender to receiver (McQuail, 2013:5). In one-directional approach, it is one speaking to many receivers, considering the audience as passive (Jensen & Neuman 2013: 231). One-directional communication is when the sender is the only one giving the message and the receiver does not give feedback but passively receives, as depicted in broadcasting media (Sulaiman, Hussin & Amir, 2019: 80). The one-directional approach is common with broadcasting, which enables the communicator to speak to many while others are simply listening and receiving the message (Claydon, 2005). The one-directional sharing of the gospel was mentioned as an approach that helps one to speak to wider audiences and expect no feedback. The one-directional approach as done at physical church during services through the pulpit is directly extended into digital media platforms ignoring the media logic for the platforms. Although digital media communication allows one-direction, it greatly promotes interactivity in its logic.

Concerning the most effective approaches for digital media ministry, majority of the participants mentioned interactive communication approaches as the most effective. To the participants, the interactive approach is evident in interactive teaching sessions that encourage people to ask questions, tell stories, and have discussions in small group fellowships and Bible study fellowships. Interactive communication both online and offline allows all participants to engage in the communication process, giving room for feedback and responses (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2019: 81). The two-way and interactive communication is instrumental in social media communication, and creates the right environment for relationships and sharing information (Zhang & Lin, 2015: 670). It was mentioned that during the interactive activities in an online fellowship, people are

drawn into the discussion, and they actively participate by asking and responding to the questions in the comment and the chat room section.

In arguing for an interactive approach, the participants stated that an interactive approach is relevant and helpful to children and youth sessions. Social media networking platforms are increasingly connecting teenagers and youth, thus allowing them to connect and interact with other people for career and business life (Lad, 2017: 19653). Digital media and its features are changing the way youth learn, acquire information, socialise, dialogue, communicate, create relationships and engage in spiritual formation (Koh, 2011: 96) (Smith, 2020). Nevertheless, parents are encouraged to monitor the social media sites that children and teenagers visit since they are likely to become addicted to social media, victims of cyberbullying and prey to different predators (Lad, 2017:19654). The interactive approach to teaching the children the word of God has made the children's online sessions interesting although physically apart. From the findings, it is deduced that interactive approaches are ideal in the online children and youth session, therefore, any activity that stimulates interactivity such as storytelling, dialogue and visual aids is crucial in online children and youth fellowships. Consequently, the COU's interactive communication activities with children and youth online will avail to youth and children spiritual information necessary for meaning making and knowing life's purpose.

The interactive communication approach, which is highly advocated for, agrees with the human desire to interact, Carey's (2009) ritual view theory of communication, which advocates for interaction in the community to promote fellowship and communion. It also agrees with the characteristics of digital media (Lundby 2012, Drescher, 2011; Lytle, 2013). Therefore, the digital age in which the church operates thrives on interaction. It is increasingly connecting people in interactive communication, facilitating the exchange of information and connecting people within online communities (Dresang & Koh, 2009: 32). Hence, the influx of digital technologies has resulted into networked communities, attracting different people into the networks to interactively share a given message. This is a challenge to church's approach to communication in the digital age.

6.4 Conclusion

In general, the findings of the empirical study show that the Church of Uganda actively employs digital media in the communication of the gospel to both Christians and non-Christians. Digital Media has become an accepted channel and space for the communication of the gospel, participation in online worship and creation of online fellowships by the Church of Uganda. According to the discoveries, the COU communicates the gospel in various ways, including traditional methods, old media such as radio and television, and new media technologies such as social media platforms. There is no doubt that digital media is a new tool and space to communicate the gospel that has found acceptance in the COU. In addition to the offline communication of the gospel in the physical churches and communities, the COU extends the communication of the gospel into online communities through digital media. Different digital media gadgets and platforms such as computers, mobile phones, smartphones, tablets, social media platforms, video conferencing applications and websites are employed to supplement the traditional forms and also give Church communicators access into the digital space to share the gospel. Among digital media gadgets used, phones, computers, the Zoom application, and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, and YouTube have become key avenues in spreading the gospel by the church.

Although the COU is actively involved in digital ministry and experiencing several benefits including theological, missiological and sociological, the participants expressed that digital ministry is saturated with some challenges including technological and theological. From the findings, it is deduced that the challenges hinder the wide and effective integration and use of digital media to communicate the gospel in the digital age. Therefore, although, the churches are braving and bypassing the challenges, to continue with the communication mandate in the digital age, the participants request for training of all gospel communicators. They further mention the need for a clear strategy to guiding in use digital media to communicate the gospel. Addressing these challenges is considered crucial in the maximum use of digital media to disseminate the gospel message effectively in the digital age.

Another deduction is that no particular approach or method is given to the church as it employs digital media. Leaders are expected to be creative and know the approach that works well in digital media ministry. To engage effectively in digital media ministry, the participants advocated for

more interactive approaches. It is deduced from the participants' responses that people that engage in digital media want to be actively involved and invited to interact. Digital media tools give people an opportunity to interact in the form of text, audio, and images during online services and fellowships. According to the findings, digital media has re-introduced an interactive aspect to the church's communication practice in sharing the gospel, thus making the church interesting, involving and lively. Therefore, digital media opens up new spaces for dialogues, discussions, and debates about topics such as religion and theological discussion in the media. The interactive aspect of digital media is appreciated and celebrated by many digital users. It is actively employed to provide moral, spiritual and emotional guidance and invite people to participate in church activities through digital media space.

The findings of the study partly support the work of Animante et al. (2021) which investigated the use of social media by leaders of charismatic churches in Ghana. They found that WhatsApp and Facebook platforms are the most popular and cheapest platforms used by leaders and that members are often encouraged to join the WhatsApp platform to access church activities. In this study, it was found that Zoom, WhatsApp and YouTube platforms are widely used in the communication of the gospel and are considered cheap. The findings also support the study by Uchechukwu and Chinyere Eke (2019) that focused on the use of social media by a religious organisation in Nigeria: *Lessons for Libraries and Information Centers*. They argued that religious organisations that belong to non-profit organisations actively use social media to disseminate information and promote church programmes and services. However, the findings of this study contradict the work of Ngozi (2011) who argues that church ministers are out-of-date, unaware of the benefits of technology and say technology has no place in the church. The findings report that majority of the COU's leaders have a positive attitude towards digital media use, understands the gospel message and communicates it through media and extend worship in online space, However, the COU' needs improvement in its digital media use, a communication strategy and theological guidance to optimally communicate the gospel in the digital age. The next chapter discusses how the church can engage digital media and improve the use of digital media to communicate the gospel effectively and also presents a theologically informed communication strategy that informs digital communication to bring about transformation in the practice.

Chapter 7: A Theologically Informed Digital Communication Strategy for Communicating the Gospel in the Digital Age

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the theoretical and empirical data of the study in response to the research question and aims of the study. Considering the pragmatic task, this chapter presents a theologically informed communication strategy to offer guidance to the communication of the gospel in the digital age. To present the theologically informed strategy, the research draws from the interpretative and normative tasks discussed in previous chapters to respond to the pragmatic task that suggests a practical transformation in the practice of digital communication. The chapter offers contributions, draws conclusions from the study and makes appropriate recommendations.

7.2 Revisiting the Research Question

The study sought to answer the question: What is the Church of Uganda's understanding, attitude and approach towards the use of digital media for communicating the gospel in the digital age? To answer this question, the research was structured into six aims, namely: 1) To offer the historical overview of mediums used in the communication of the gospel; 2) To offer a critical discussion of media theories to introduce the complexities of digital media; 3) To present communication as an aspect of practical theology and ministry; 4) To ascertain the COU's understandings, attitudes and approaches to digital media use; 5) To identify the most effective digital media approach by the COU; and 6) To present a practical theologically informed communication guideline to improve the use of digital media. A summary of how each aim was addressed is presented below.

7.2.1 Aim 1: Historical Overview of Communication Media

Having read and analysed literature, I understood that the church's communication of the gospel has always moved with the technological advancements of the time. The media of a given time is believed to bring a shift in the way the gospel is communicated in that particular time (Lytle, 2013:x; Drescher, 2011:57). However, the advances in communication media do not always wipe away the use of previous media. Instead, they supplement the existing media. Historically, the media of communication have progressively evolved from purely oral to written, printing, broadcasting, and digital media (Wise, 2014: 168; Lytle, 2013). In Uganda, digital media usage is

growing due to the wide use of smart mobile telephones, improved mobile networks and broader internet coverage across villages (Uganda Ministry of ICT, 2014: 12). The penetration of digital media usage in everyday life has extended to the church ministry and the communication of the gospel.

Within the COU, the gospel was first orally communicated by missionaries and lay evangelists (Coppedge, 2019:157; Niringiye, 2016: 35). In addition to oral and written communication (Stanley, 2017), mass print media communication (Coppedge, 2019:157; Stanley, 2017:14; Lytle, 2013; Soukup, 2002:27), broadcasting communication and digital media (Stanley, 2017:15; Lytle, 2013; Soukup, 2002:28) are in usage throughout the COU. The COU is integrating digital media to supplement other forms of media in communicating the gospel within the church and beyond church buildings. With digital media, online faith communities are established using digital media platforms through which community members are connected, networked and interactively participate in Christian activities. Digital media is presented as a new tool used by church communicators to supplement the old media and bring spiritual experiences and church services close to the people, thus extending the gospel to the people, leading to faith formation and spiritual growth (Campbell, 2013: 14, Cloete, 2020a:27; Dyikuk, 2017: 43; Shepherd, 2020: 36; Zsupan-Jerome, 2011:25) Digital media communication can be either synchronous or asynchronous for speech, audio, written, print, radio, television and video communication. Digital media with its *modus operandi* bypasses the limitations of other media and connects people across the globe in constant interaction and information sharing.

7.2.2 Aim 2: Critical Discussion of Specific Media Theories

To respond to the second aim, Five Communication media theories were discussed to understand the theoretical perspectives in determining the complexities of digital media. According to the Ritual View Theory (Carey, 2009), communication is conceived as a daily ritual of sharing in communities. To Carey, communication is a conversation in the community that thrives on commonality, interaction, participation, fellowship, communion and possession of common faith to facilitate transformation and sustain community. Couldry's (2003:2) Media Rituals Theory proposes that media stands in for an organisation to connect people by bringing mediated rituals close to people but with tightened boundaries. The media rituals theory is about transmitting and

passively delivering information instead of sharing and interacting to attain meaning. The Cultivation Analysis Theory by George Gerbner (Moreno & Koff, 2016: 130) also considers media as a conduit to transmit and distribute a given message, shared belief and lifestyle. The theory assumes media users' behaviour changes due to heavy consumption of media. Mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2008: 2, 2011: 121, 2017: 108, 2018: 3) tends to offer a more balanced approach to the use of digital media beyond media logic. According to mediatisation, digital media as a widely recognised medium is integrated into everyday life and the church. Mediatisation promotes the relationship between media and social and cultural change. It enables the communicative nature of digital media to influence everyday operations. Mediatisation of religion facilitates the mediatisation of the gospel bringing it close to digital media audiences. The mediatisation of church activities allows hypertextual interaction to happen continually about Christian messages and conversations, thus allowing a constant exchange of Christian information (data) from one device to another, consequently resulting in the long-term transformation of individual, society and culture due to mediatisation.

With the increase of mediatised content, the Uses and Gratification theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009: 979) becomes a great consideration in the study of digital media use. The theory presents the audience as active media users in search of information relevant to meeting their needs and goals, leading to personal satisfaction. It implies that the media audience is no longer passive but actively searching to meet personal needs and attain gratification. The theory seems to offer the necessary information to content developers and communicators to consider before content mediatisation. Therefore, mediatisation of needed Christian content as informed by the Uses and Gratification theory may provide mediatised information to the online Christian communities to facilitate interaction and fellowship as guided by Ritual theory, thus enabling digital communication in the digital age. The consideration and focus of theories in digital media inform the church's digital communication of the gospel. The theories present interesting lenses through which digital media can be applied in institutions such as the Church of Uganda.

7.2.3 Aim 3: Towards an Understanding of Communication as an Integral Aspect of Practical Theology and Ministry

Chapter 3 discusses communication as part of practical theology. The communicative nature of God, the gospel, practical theology, and the church are discussed to respond to digital communication. The Great Commission makes it imperative to communicate the gospel. Sogaard (1993) argues that the Great Commission is a communication task that ought to be considered carefully. Practical Theology as a discipline of theology is responsible for practice and theory, thus the communication praxis of the church's message finds roots in the discipline. Grethlein (2016:10) states that Practical Theology's main role is to communicate the gospel message and is concerned with the way the gospel is communicated. Practical Theology in its epistemological orientation is in praxis (Kim, 2007: 422), which is concerned with the communicative praxis of the church in a congregation and the world. The communicative theology derived from God's self-communication presents and reveals God's communicative nature (Ranher, 2008:141; Soukup, 2019:26), which is revealed in the Trinity (Boff, 2000:22), incarnation (Hess, 2010:141; Lytle, 2009:7; Doyle, 2006:241), interactive communication by Jesus (Grethlein, 2016:215), and the use of visual aids in communication by God (Kanu, 2018:11) may be extended into the digital media space. This chapter argues that the communicative attributes in the Trinity, incarnation, interaction and visual aids may be employed in digital media as approaches for digital communication in the digital age by Church of Uganda.

7.2.4 Aim 4: To Ascertain the COU's Understanding, Attitude and Approach towards Digital Communication

To respond to the aim, the empirical aspect of the study was done. This study was a qualitative case design. Qualitative methodology was employed, where different data collection methods were used to collect data from the sampled population. To collect data for the empirical section of the study, data collection methods were conducted, namely in-depth interviews and FGDs. The interview guides were divided into four sections to address the aims, including 1) Communicating the gospel in the digital age; and 2) Digital Media Use, Theological Motivation and Digital Media Approaches to collect the data. Within each section were semi-structured interview guide questions

that were used for data collection⁴⁴. Below are the concluding summaries on the empirical part of the study.

7.2.4.1 Communication of the Gospel

Concerning the communication of the gospel, I found that the COU believes that the gospel message from God ought to be communicated in every generation using the available media. The COU digitises the gospel message and church services to extend them beyond the church walls and geographical boundaries to reach different people across the globe. The gospel message can no longer only be shared at the pulpit on days, via digital media it is shared widely. With digital media, the gospel transcends space and time. To discuss the communication of the gospel, different themes were derived from the data, such as the gospel message, traditional methods, digital media use and convergence of media. The COU integrates different media in the communication process, including traditional, broadcasting and digital media to communicate the gospel to wide audiences making the church present in the media space with the gospel message. The majority of the COU leaders with a positive attitude towards the use of digital media actively use it in ministry. Therefore, with digital media use, more Christian content, church services, theologies and the gospel message are mediated for media users to access and interact with it to easily gain guidance in life.

7.2.4.2 Digital Media Use

The Church of Uganda generally holds a positive attitude towards digital media use, with a clear understanding of digital communication and its ability to advance the gospel message. It was noted that the leaders' attitude determined the level of integration of digital media in church ministry to extend the gospel beyond the four walls of the church into the digital space. Different themes that were derived from the data were discussed, namely digital platforms, digital ministry, digital presence, online community, challenges and benefits. Church communicators consider digital media as a tool for communication and a space to engage in digital ministry, service and fellowship. The dominant social media and video applications used were Zoom, WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook. With internet connectivity, churches engage in online fellowships,

⁴⁴ Addendum D and E have the detailed interview guide questions that were followed during the interview and FGD sessions during the data collection process.

services, prayer sessions, discipleship, counselling and evangelism. With the influx of digital media use in everyday life, the Church of Uganda has established an Online Church of Uganda, which conducts services, fellowships, counselling, prayers, discipleship, and children, family and youth sessions in the online space. The digitisation of religion and spiritual information has broken new grounds for the COU. Additionally, the mediatisation of religion has caused the church to consider the media logic of different digital media platforms to guide in Christian content delivery.

7.2.4.3 Theological Motivation for Digital Media Use

It was discovered that biblical and theological understanding motivated church leaders to participate in digital media and integrate it into church ministry to communicate the gospel. The themes derived from the data included, the Great Commission, interaction based on the word, to belong to the online fellowship, making a digital presence, authority of the church and authenticity in the digital communication of the gospel. The theological motivation that compelled digital media usage aligned with the scholars' views that advocate for theological support for digital media approaches and involvement. It was clear that church authorities are needed in the digital space to share the authentic word of God and become established authorities recognised in the media space. To engage in digital theology and digital ministry, it was argued that the presence of church leaders and ordained ministers in the digital space was a need in the digital age. Church ministers are to be incarnate in the digital space to engage in online ministry and theological discussion, thereby inviting media users to participate in the conversation initiated and guided by the digital present Church minister. The present and active church minister may become an authority in the digital space, and available to offer spiritual guidance to the digital media audience.

7.2.4.4 Approaches to Digital Communication

The Church of Uganda is reported to use different approaches in communicating the gospel in the digital space. The themes about approaches used include one-direction, interactive, small group fellowships, asynchronous and synchronous communication, and the use of visual aids. With the approaches, the predominant approach employed in media use and space is the one-directional communication approach. However, an interactive approach was highly recommended for the church's digital media use in the communication of the gospel in the online space. The asynchronous and synchronous approaches allowed the church to participate in uploading pre-

recorded sermons on social media platforms and live-stream services. The live-streaming opportunities allowed members to participate in service and fellowship in real-time while in the comfort of their different locations, thus allowing the church and God's presence to be experienced in different places. On the other hand, the uploading pre-recorded services option allowed the digital media audience to download recorded messages any time anywhere. In digital media communication, different approaches may be employed by both church ministers and Christians. It was noted that the communication of the gospel in the digital age is not restricted to church ministers but all Christians must be trained to participate in the dissemination of the gospel message. As mentioned above, different approaches when taken further may allow the church to advance its message in the digital age. Although, the interactive communication approach was mentioned as the most effective approach for digital communication. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the digital age, it is important to note that the media logic of the digital media platforms may determine the approach to employ in the sharing of the message in the digital media space.

7.2.5 Aim 5: To identify the most effective digital media approach used by the COU to communicate the gospel to reach different age groups

Communication in Uganda thrives on interaction. In the past, Ugandans participated in interactive communication around fireplaces, therefore any activity or platform that facilitates interactive communication is likely to attract Ugandans. The interactive trait in digital media appeals to Ugandans and no wonder the participants advocated for an interactive and participatory communication approach. Digital media activities that allowed the audience to interact with the communicator were considered the most effective approaches in the spread of the gospel message. The interactive approach was highly advocated for and suggested to the COU to employ for further digital media communication. The interactive approach agrees with the Ritual View of communication that advocates for communication in community. Therefore, the COU is to introduce activities that allow interactive communication to happen in the digital media space. The interactive approach may be employed either by a community of believers (small or big fellowship groups) or by individuals to share the digitised message.

7.2.6 Aim 6: To Present a Practical Theologically Informed Communication Guideline to Improve the Use of Digital Media in Communicating the Gospel by the COU

Having engaged in the study as highlighted above, in the next section, I propose a theologically informed digital media communication strategy that can be used by the COU.

7.3 Theologically Informed Digital Media Communication Strategy

This research was an informative and improvement focus study on how the COU and any other church can use the information from the study to improve the use of digital media in communicating the gospel. To engage in digital communication for the gospel, the digital media communication strategy is crucial to guide the Church. The strategy aims at guiding the church on its use of digital media and depends on what is acceptable within the organisation (Animante *et al.*, 2021: 12). The church leadership has a responsibility to direct its media users and media representatives on how to engage in the media space (Andema, Kendrick & Norton, 2013: 7). Therefore, the strategy designed from this study comes in handy to direct the COU's digital media users. The strategy entails the proper guidelines for digital media use. The guidelines are to help the Church communicators and Christians to engage in digital communication, develop digital communities, effectively communicate the gospel and engage in church ministry and ritual in the digital media space. Figure 7.1 shows the proposed properties of the theologically informed strategy for digital communication.



Fig 7.1: The Theologically informed digital communication strategy

7.3.1 Digital Evangelists' Training for Digital Communication

The church's digital communicators are referred to as digital evangelists, those responsible to share Christian information, communicating the gospel, connecting with the audience, and interacting with digital media users. According to the findings of the study, majority of the participants expressed a positive attitude toward digital media use and its integration into church ministry but stressed a lack of skill and knowledge as a downfall for their active digital media use. They mentioned a gap in knowledge and being inadequately furnished with the necessary information by the COU on digital media use for gospel communication. The participants expressed a need for training, refresher workshops, and information about digital media use for all church communicators and Christians. This implies that Christians and Church leaders lack relevant information and skill to engage in digital media. Therefore, all church digital media users ought to be trained to engage effectively in digital evangelism. Conducting training for church communicators to use digital media effectively and relevantly is a critical aspect (Animante et al., 2021:5). The need for ICT training and providing information for all communicators and teachers with relevant material is a matter of urgency (Andema *et al.*, 2013:8)

Digital media is fundamentally different from other forms of media and calls for guidance on its use. Unlike old media that sends the message passively to the audience, digital media comes with traits such as interactivity, and connectivity, that allow the audience to respond and participate in the conversation. In the digital age, the influx of digital media use is obvious to everyone, but some people use it unadvisedly thereby failing to explore all digital media traits. To engage in evangelism, discipleship and spiritual formation in the digital media space, training for digital communicators is important. I, therefore, argue that training church communicators and parishioners is a great need so that leaders and Christians can engage in digital communication with understanding, skill and discernment. The place for continuous theological and technological training for church communicators cannot be overstated. Having continuous seminars, conferences and short course training for digital ministers, digital evangelists and digital communicators might improve the use of digital media to communicate the gospel effectively and relevantly.

7.3.2 Digital Faith Platforms for Digital Communication

Digital media platforms are communication websites and interactive sites through which people are connected by the internet to interact and exchange information. These include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp and Video conferencing applications. According to Plantin and Punathambekar (2019: 171), digital media platforms are communication infrastructures facilitated by the internet to enable interactions and connections with people. Different digital media platforms are evolving their operations on internet and increasing their influence by developing infrastructure capacities (Plantin & Punathambekar, 2019: 173). Digital media platforms are considered to be very interactive, promote relationships and connections (Lewis, 2014: 12). Hutchinson (2016: 3) argues that different digital media platforms are shifting from only text to a blend of text and visual content. According to Chukwuma (2018: 10–11), Christian pastors and religious leaders are using different social media platforms such as Facebook to spread the message, participate in religious activities and spiritual renewal in virtual spaces. According to global social media statistics, Facebook is considered the leading social media platform, having around 2.9 billion users⁴⁵. With global statistics rating, the youth between 16 to 34 years are very active on Instagram, those from 35 to 44 years spend the most time on Facebook and WhatsApp, and the ages from 45 to 64 are active on WhatsApp⁴⁶. However, according to the empirical finding, WhatsApp and YouTube social media platforms were the most used platforms for the dissemination of the gospel. Although Ugandans and churches use Facebook for several reasons, it has seen a decline in Uganda due to the Government ban on it. Nevertheless, it is still being used for the spread of the gospel. On the other hand, Zoom has facilitated the COU's active use of social media platforms since via Zoom, the gospel message is shared on different social media platforms.

Digital Faith Platforms are infrastructure that the church ought to set up intentionally and establish to engage in digital media ministry. Without digital media platforms, digital media engagement is next to impossible. By developing digital media platforms, the COU would be able to tap into the traits of digital media platforms such as community creation opportunities. Through the different digital media platforms, the gospel is widely shared, and connections made. The platforms such as

⁴⁵ Facebook is the world's most widely used social media platform, making it the leading social media platform as per Global Statistics.

⁴⁶ The favourite social media platforms by age group as presented on Global social media www.datareportal.com/social-media-use accessed on 5 June 2022

Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Tik-Tok and applications such as Zoom, and Google Meet may be intentionally employed by the church to advance the Christian message. Through the platforms, daily devotions are uploaded and shared, live streaming of services happens, and pre-recorded sermons are uploaded for digital media users to access and use. Digital media platforms as infrastructures ought to be established, managed, handled well and followed up by active church administrators to monitor the activities on the platforms. The established platforms ought to be monitored to respond to comments, responses, reactions, prayer requests, engagements and applications from the audiences. Digital media platforms have become new places for people to meet, connect, interact and worship (Galang & Macaraan, 2021: 8–9). The church communicators with discernment ought to increase their engagement on digital platforms to connect, interact and engage with people they would never have met in the church buildings and offer ministry to them.

7.3.3 Digital/Online Faith Community Guided by the Trinity

The findings from the empirical study showed that people enjoy communicating in communities. Kizza (2010: 10) argues that historically, Ugandans have communicated in communities around fireplaces with a mediator moderating a conversation. During community communication sessions, different people were given opportunities to speak and respond. From the findings, participants expressed that they communicated freely in groups, and in online fellowships. It was clear that participants valued communication within a community and, therefore, belonged to different online and offline groups for fellowship. Although in history, the physical church has been known as a place for faith communities in the world (Chang, 2015: 94–99) and especially in Uganda, digital media has emerged as a space where people can create a community to meet in the name of Christ and fellowship (Kurlberg et al., 2022: 4).

The Church referred to as ‘ekklesia’ in the New Testament is to gather and assemble people into a community (Kurlberg et al., 2022: 4). A Church is that community of people in any space that is brought together to relate and connect with Christ and with one another (Kurlberg et al., 2022: 4). Church is an intimate community, which meets in the name of Christ to engage in faith activities and worship (Lytle, 2013). Despite geographical separation, through digital media, people are brought together to create an online community of people with common values and purpose to share and engage in communication (Peter et al., 2013). Online communities and churches are

increasingly being established by religious institutions, churches and Christians to talk about Christ and share their life stories (Chiluwa, 2013), although accompanied by certain challenges. In the digital age, church does not only depend on physical presence to fellowship, with the virtual communities' people meet any time to fellowship. Online Churches may qualify as legitimate ecclesia (Estes, 2019: 1–4), they are communities of believers. Online faith communities are groups of Christians that use digital technology to meet, connect and practise their faith (Sutinen & Cooper, 2021: 19). Through online spaces, intimate communities and fellowships can be formed across generations to connect, care and reach out to people in the digital space (Kurlberg et al., 2022: 4). The online communities may be created to advance a particular message and promote interactive communication by sharing, participating, associating and fellowshiping with each other (Campbell, 2020c).

The creation of online faith communities to communicate and form fellowships agrees with Carey's (2009:26) Ritual View of communication which advocates for communication in a community. Carey's view promotes fellowship, connection, communion, participation and interaction, which transforms and sustains community. The findings revealed that some of the churches have online fellowships although not intentionally cultivated as online faith communities. Campbell (2020a: 4) argues that online church and faith communities are established to strengthen the sense of community, fellowship, relationship and belonging. Cooper et al. (2021:7) argue that online communities strengthen emotional connection and interactive communication. Consequently, Lytle (2010:4) argues that the church is to tap into the new digital tools and intentionally form online communities that will allow the story-keeping, story-sharing and story-making to fulfil the Great Commission. Nevertheless, it is important to note that to create and engage in online faith communities, prayerfulness and theological reflections are crucial.

The Trinity lays a theological basis for establishing online communities to connect, relate, and engage in faith and spiritual formation via digital media. The Theology of the Trinity presents a community in which communication occurs. Boff (2000: 5) argues that God is a community within himself and communicates in Trinity. The Three Persons in the Godhead are each equally important; unique in operation, and yet perfectly united in operation (Aklama, 2001:2). God is communion and not solitude; operates in communion, communicates and invites humans into the

community to participate (Boff, 2000:6). Central to the Trinitarian model in communication is the notion of indwelling in unity and relationship in the community (Cali, 2013:61). Aklama (2001:3) asserts that the community of God promotes mutual trust, honesty and participation of members, thus allowing the members to get close, united and transparent. The Trinity approach that advocates for community and relationship might advance the message in the digital communities when employed reflectively in consideration of the key aspects. The Trinity approach to communication presents both the individual and the community as equally important aspects of mutual trust and calls for continuous reflection. In the Trinity approach to communication, every person is equally important, communicates within the community and responds when called upon. When advanced as the theological basis for an online faith community, every individual may be welcomed into fellowship to participate in the communication process within the community with both the believers and God. In that online faith community, the communicator and church leader may moderate the conversation as others participate.

To engage in any digital media communication, the COU ought to establish an online faith community on the different social media platforms and video conferencing applications through which people are brought together to engage in the conversation around God's word. I argue that online faith communities are established in the media space on the foundation of the Trinity and people are invited to belong and participate in the communication process around God's word via media. Digital media spaces have become sacred places for online faith community formation and participation in interactive communication among believers. Through the online faith community such as the established Online Church of Uganda, people may be invited to belong, participate, listen to the gospel message, interact, connect and advance the shared message in other online groups. The members of the online faith community may be encouraged to invite friends and also share the message with other communities to which they belong. Therefore, when the COU establishes online faith communities, communication within the community may take place but ought to be guided by the values of the COU. In any online community, individuals may engage with other members of the community to interact and participate in the communication process. Also, the message from one online community can be taken further by any individual into other communities of communication thereby advancing a given message beyond a particular community. Notably, the Trinity model in communication is not one-directional (Carl 2013:63)

but interactive, with all members participating at different times. The lens of Trinity is a significant approach in digital media communication. It presents traits of digital media such as relational, interactive, communion, community and immediacy that may facilitate the spread of the gospel message in the digital age. I strongly recommend that the COU approaches digital communication through the lens of the Trinity, which promotes communication within a community.

7.3.4 Digital Present Priest Informed by the Incarnation

The presence of an ordained minister emerged from the participants as a need for effective communication in the digital media environment and communities. The participants expressed a gap for an active and present minister in the digital space – one to engage with the digital media users within the digital media space on different platforms, to offer guidance and spiritual support. Digital media space has become a common place for worship services and spiritual engagement, and when used well it may facilitate the spiritual growth of the members (Campbell, 2013:12), which was especially highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the lockdown, several church leaders streamed and uploaded their teachings on digital media platforms as noticeboards as there were no resident church leaders to attend to the needs of the digital users. The presence of an ordained minister in the digital space goes beyond the idea of using digital media as a noticeboard to interactions (Phillips et al., 2019) and connection with the audience to engage them in spiritual and theological discussions through digital media platforms. Previously the message was kept in the four walls of the church and it did not reach beyond, but with the mediatisation (Hjarvard, 2016:8) of the church activities, the teachings and preaching are extended into the world at large. With mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2017: 106), online clergy presence and ministry are possible and may be done throughout the week and the day since it is conducted and attended from anywhere and anytime. The daily online services and prayers through digital media help in spiritual formation leading to maturity for Christians and the growth of the church. In digital media ministry, the church can communicate the gospel, engage in faith formation (Lylte, 2013) and provide spiritual nourishments (Cloete, 2015: 4–7) to the growing population of netzines and digital natives.

The theological basis for the priest's presence is derived from God's incarnation on earth. In the incarnation God makes Himself known in that act of communication and desires to be known as

He revealed Himself through His son (Sogaard, 1993:6). Through the incarnation, God revealed himself to the human race and interacted with people daily. Stollery (2009:6) argues that in the incarnation, God is revealed as a perfect communicator. In God's incarnation, Jesus Christ becomes the centre of Christian communication. The incarnation of God is a key point of communication theology and is viewed as the greatest medium of communication used by God when He lowered himself and bent down to communicate with humans (Claydon, 2005: 16). Soukup (1995:83) argues that true communication is reflected in the incarnation of God on earth. Communication was altered dramatically when God came into the flesh in the form of a man to interact with all humanity. Church communicators ought to understand incarnation as one of the most effective ways of communication in a certain culture. It suggests that one is embodied in one particular cultural context as clearly demonstrated by God the Son's presence on earth (Toren, 2015). God's incarnation through Jesus, His earthly life and the cross are symbols of communication of the salvation message and redemption for the world. Jesus, the image of the invisible God came (Colossians 1: 15) and made his dwelling among men to communicate the message of God, which was done in communities and interactions. Jesus set an example through the incarnation that all communicators of the gospel are to emulate (Van den Toren-Lekkerkerker & Van den Toren, 2015). The incarnation lens may facilitate faith formation, discipleship, evangelism, preaching and teaching (Lytle, 2009) in the digital space. The incarnation of the church and the priest in the digital media space brings the priest close to the people and dwells with the people. The ordained minister comes into the digital space not to be conformed to the patterns of the environment but to share the transforming story and impact lives.

I, therefore, urge that it is important for the church and church ministers to bend low and come close to the people and live amongst them. The online ordained priest's presence allows the church and its minister to interact with people, share the gospel story, listen to the people's problems, provide counsel, and pray for the sick and heartbroken in the media space. Having the presence of the ordained minister in the digital space, ready to engage with users and provide necessary information may aid the meaning-making of the seekers, and offer guidance to help the audience to meet their spiritual needs. The media users are likely to access the platform with an active and present online minister to receive guidance, thus meeting their needs and receiving gratification as suggested by the Uses and Gratification Theory. The incarnation of the church in the digital space

requires the church and its communicators to understand the culture and language, invest time to be present and adapt to the lifestyle of the community. Incarnation, however, does not imply adopting the habits practised in a particular community. Van den Toren-Lekkerkerker and Van den Toren (2015) argue that the incarnation model in mission presence requires that both the host and the missionary community realise and accept the differences that operate between the two groups. Communicating effectively calls for ministers and churches to intentionally have a digital presence, share the gospel story in different forms, and interact with people in the digital space, but not diverting from the ethics that govern the Christian communities. Making an impactful presence in the digital space requires that the church communicators clearly understand the values, norms and ethics that govern Christian communities and engage the ethics of the digital community with discernment.

7.3.5 Digital Christian Influencers in Digital Communication

Digital influencers are active users who have gained a certain number of followers. Social media influencers are bloggers, vloggers, and active social media users who have gained large audiences interested in their personalities and lifestyle (Siuda, 2021: 6). Siuda (2021:3) further states that some social media influencers are religious leaders, including clergymen and women who are open to participation with other users. Social media influencers represent party and brand endorsers who have big followings and shape audience attitudes through tweets, blogs, and videos (Freberg et al., 2011:3). Musicians, artists, and televangelists have become social influencers due to the number of followers they have. During data collection, participants mentioned that the church needs to develop Christian social media influencers to be resident, active and ready to share the gospel message in digital media space. In the Ugandan history of communication, during communal communication, the moderators were important members of society. Therefore, the moderator (communicator) is central in communal communication to facilitate a conversation. The participants stated that the church's social media influencers (communicators) who are dynamic, creative, and charismatic in moderation of a conversation might attract digital media users to the Christian message.

Digital communication is possible when the traits and features of digital media are considered. The church interested in sharing the gospel message in the media space can train and deploy its social

media influencers ready to attractively communicate and share the Christian message on different social media platforms. When the church trains and commissions its people as digital apostles (Galang & Macaraan, 2021: 6) to become influencers in the media space, the church might build a base of digital influencers to channel the Christian message across social media platforms. To share the message effectively, the COU's Christian digital influencers are to become incarnate and communicate. Christian digital influencers need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the assignment (Acts 1: 8). The more the digitally present and active COU communicators engage and share the message by the power of the Holy Spirit in the digital media space, the more they grow into being digital media influencers. The COU's digital media influencers may gather a wide audience due to active participation in the media, thus becoming available and relevant in the online community to offer spiritual guidance, counsel, and prayers to the searching masses in the digital media space.

7.3.6 Digital Christian Content Packaging and Design

In the church's use of digital media, the participants mentioned that the content to upload on digital platforms must be revised. Digital media technologies make content creation easy and affordable, thus allowing decentralisation of content creation and bringing creativity onboard (Bustamante, 2004: 800–812). The Media logic (Krotz 2017:110) for the digital platforms is an important aspect in packaging and branding. It must be considered when creating content for a particular social media platform, for example, Twitter and YouTube employ different media logic. Cloete (2020:28) in digital ecclesiology argues that media platforms have different media logic and it determines the content shared on particular platforms. Cloete (2020: 30) argues that certain digital media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook are associated with a short but compact message that stimulates the audience. It is important to note that the way the content is presented online is crucial and ought to be well-prepared, focused and combined with beautiful elements. Raj et al. (2013:75) argue that the content of the gospel must never change but the delivery via digital media must change to encourage a conversation and interaction. Although the COU engages in digital media, the content creation, packaging and delivery on the different digital media platforms ought to be thoroughly reviewed. The Church of Uganda needs to improve its packaging and presentation of content in the media space. Therefore, the COU's media practitioner must

know the needs of the media audience according to the Uses and Gratification theory to prepare, plan and share content that may meet the needs of the audiences.

The COU's content was reported as non-attractive, not well packaged and with low viewership. This implies that the content creators and church editors do not consider the audience's need, and media logic for the digital media platforms engaged. Cloete (2020: 29) in digital ecclesiology argues that replicating normal services or sermons through different digital media platforms is not wise but requires the content to be packaged differently for each platform. In packaging digital Christian content, the packaging should be carefully considered. An attractive image that leaves an impression on the audience may serve the purpose of delivering digital Christian content. In addition to content packaging, the COU is to know what to stream during the service, as streaming a whole two-hour service might affect the viewership. I argue that content producers, media personnel and IT experts of the COU should carefully pay attention to the audience's needs, branding, graphics designing, creativity, viewership, and packaging of content for the media users to access the church content easily. Raj et al. (2013:80) argue that the gospel message should not change but the method of delivery, packaging and branding must change. Online content stored on the online platform must be appealing, well presented, attractive and able to meet the needs and thus provide spiritual satisfaction.

7.3.7 Digital Interactions for Digital Communication

Digital media use and social media interactions challenge the dominant transmission view of top-down communication or one-directional communication (Drescher 2011: 58) since even ordinary church members can freely share their faith and Bible lessons through online conversations (Lewis, 2016) and spark a conversation. The COU digital communication has mainly been in one-directional. The findings showed a demand for more interactive activities in digital communication to spark an interaction with digital users. The participants advocated for interactive instead of one-directional communication. In reaching digital users such as millennials, the church's willingness to engage in interactive conversation may determine whether the Church will reach out to them or not (Raj et al., 2013). Millennials engage in digital communication to interact and connect with friends. Therefore, the digital media attributes of interactivity, immediacy, community, inclusivity, and commonality allows the online community to thrive and grow intimately together (Lundby,

2012: 45; Drescher, 2011: 25). Claydon (2005) argues that digital media works effectively well when it is interactive and not just one-way transmission of information. Digital media's maximum benefit is interactive communication (Lim, 2017:37). Interactive media enables the instant messaging method and advances discussions due to their quick, inexpensive, and immediate nature (Barrow, 2009:3). However, Jasmin (2020:3) argues that digital media conversations can tend to be impersonal if the identity of the person is unknown and distracting to individuals, which might result in immoral behaviour and cybercrime, especially among vulnerable groups such as children. Nevertheless, Campbell (2005:21) argues that in the online communities, discussions about the nature of community, participation and interconnectedness, beliefs, and values guiding the online community requires intentional reflection and consent. Campbell (2005:6) further argues that people tend to choose the communities of choice to participate in and interact with for a particular purpose.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus communicated the Kingdom's message through his teachings and preaching by employing interactive and persuasive communication styles (Reddy 2004:90–95). Jesus did not consider his audience only as passive listeners but he drew the audience into the conversation using parables, stories, and figures of speech to bring the mysteries of heaven close to them in their different contexts. To participate in the interaction, the digital natives and immigrants are not simply passive consumers of information but active consumers of media (Tarimo, 2016: 21). The church cannot effectively use digital media if it continues to consider the audience as passive (Dyikuk, 2017: 22; Wise, 2014:44). It is important to note that digital media engagement thrives on interactivity and involvement (Kwak, 2020: 45; Campbell: 2016:4; Cloete, 2015:5; Lundby, 2012: 9; Campbell, 2011:234.). Therefore, I argue that to engage effectively in digital communication, the communicators need to know the culture and language of digital media, which is predominantly interactive. The church communicators are to increasingly engage in interactive communication to share the message with digital users. Grethlein (2016:192) argues that communication theories have shifted from only one-directional to dialogue/interactive focusing on mutual understanding. Communication is not simply the transmission of information as with one-direction but a conversation and interaction (Carey, 2009: 13). This calls for activities that are people-centred and spark interactions within the online community through digital media communication.

7.3.8 Building Digital Media Infrastructure

Digital media infrastructure is concerned with communication technologies, systems and the internet necessary to facilitate digital media use (Plantin & Punathambekar, 2019:19). Internet and communication technologies in the digital ministry are key infrastructures that are important to digital media ministry. Digital media ministers must have the digital infrastructure that includes the internet, smartphones, computers, cameras, editing software, graphic designers and IT experts to help with the facilitation of digital ministry. Without good and well-set infrastructure, digital media or online activities cannot function well. The investment in digital media infrastructures allows for increased access to the world of the internet and digital media and nothing can happen in the digital world without an infrastructure (Plantin & Punathambeka, 2019:3). Vaisey and Deighton (2014:30) state that to remain effective and leading in digital media engagement, the institution needs the right digital media infrastructure in place to meet the user's demands, build a digital community and allow digital activity to flourish. This implies that for effective digital media engagement in the digital age, the COU ought to improve its digital media infrastructure to improve its efficiency in digital media use for the ministry. For example, digital media users such as church leaders need to be facilitated with the necessary infrastructure for digital media ministry. Equipping digital media users with the necessary infrastructure such as digital media strategy and necessary Information Technology (IT) equipment is necessary for the effective use of digital media.

7.3.9 Digital Witnessing with Multimedia

'You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:8).' All Christians are to become Christ's witnesses in the digital space. Digital communication of the gospel brings with it several advantages associated with multimedia. If well utilised, digital media can combine different content forms such as text, audio, images, animations, or video into a single interactive presentation. The participants reported on the place of posters, images and visuals during the digital communication of the gospel. Well-designed posters, short text, short clips, pictures, images and symbols are integrated into the communication of the gospel in the digital space. The images with scriptures are shared and are considered appealing to different audiences on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, making it easy for people to receive the message delivered in visual form. The

videos of Christian messages are often uploaded and streamed on different social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp, which attract viewership from digital users. In addition to posting on the pages, the participants expressed that the use of images and short video clips were also common in children and youth online fellowships and discussions. The participants further stated that the use of different images, clips and symbols in young people's fellowships made the online sessions very interesting, interactive and involved young people.

Digital witnessing requires that all Christians and Church leaders employ all the forms necessary for digital media to share a given message. Digital media with its ability to be synchronous and asynchronous can be used to advance any message in real-time and beyond time. The ability to engage in digital communication through speech, audio, written, print, radio, television and video communication is an opportunity for the church to advance the gospel message in any form through digital media. The unique *modus operandi* of digital media and the mediatisation process come with ways to deal with possible limitations to advance the gospel message, thereby continuing in constant interaction and information sharing through the internet, an advantage to gospel communicators. Digital media communication allows every user to access and share any information. The church is to tap into all human resource within the church and invite them to join the priests in communicating the gospel message across the globe. Therefore, digitally elite Christians with priests must be trained to engage in communicating the gospel and witness for Christ. With the training, the Christians are to engage in digital witnessing within the digital media space using multimedia to share mediated content in different artistic ways to deliver the gospel.

7.3.10 Convergence of Media for Digital Communication

The findings showed that there is a possibility to use all different media in communication, by converging media in the pursuit of distributing the gospel message. According to the findings, the COU communicates the gospel using different media but only a small section of the church had explored the possibility of converging all available media to communicate a given message. Digital media allows a possibility of converging technologies, networks, and analogical media to deliver a given message across a wide coverage (Raja, 2011:112). Convergence brings mobile phones, computers, television, radio and the internet in collaboration to disseminate information and offer communication services by blending data in different forms of media such as audio, text, image and video at the same time and wired through a high-speed network to facilitate interactions (Hadi,

2020: 58). As Guttenberg's invention of printing technology created impact on the Renaissance and the Reformation, so the digital media revolution has caused an impact on other media enabling the convergence of different media to communicate to wide audiences (Betiang & Akpan, 2018: 16). The findings showed that the churches needed help on how to converge media to use digital media optimally for the benefit of the church. The churches tend to use one medium at a time not knowing that technologies exist that may facilitate all media tools to converge into one to share the message with a wider audience. Most churches used Zoom applications and enabled live streaming, thus bringing Zoom and YouTube into collaboration. Lately, a new software allowing restream to different platforms is being introduced allowing Zoom, Facebook and YouTube to stream a similar service at the same time. There is software that can enable one message to appear on Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, radio and television at the same time. The church leaders need skilling to engage all possibilities, such as live-streaming, restreaming, breakout rooms, and merging Zoom to broadcasting media to explore what technology can do.

The possibility to integrate digital media, broadcasting, and print in a single medium into digital media communication is useful and brings interactive and transmission technologies together to deliver a message. Convergence possibilities bring oral, print and broadcasting media together into a closer relationship with the people and organisation for effective communication and operations in everyday life (O'Sullivan & Fortunati, 2021: 42). Through different multimedia forms, any message can be sent across to different platforms to people across the globe. In the church context, the gospel message can be shared in any form with all digital media users from different parts of the country. In Uganda, 13.92 million Ugandans were using the internet by 2022⁴⁷, and 27.67 million on mobile phone connections. This implies that a good number of Ugandans are using digital media in the form of mobile phones and many are actively connected through the internet, and, therefore, can access any given message through their phones and the internet on any platform.

To participate in digital communication, the COU ought to develop the necessary skills, updates and software to guide the convergence of media by integrating certain aspects from different media such as broadcasting media into the digital media environment. The COU is to make use of written

⁴⁷ According to datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-uganda. The internet penetration rate stood at 29.1% of the total population by 2022. The internet usage in Uganda has grown.

text, images, audio, video, and instant messaging to share a given message through the convergence of media. With the convergence abilities, digital media may enable the sharing of the gospel message in different forms such as stories, music, video, audio, text, and image in digital space. The invention of Guttenberg's printing press allowed reformer Martin Luther to produce and distribute his 99 theses, sermons and the print of the Bible thereby resulting in the Protestant Reformation. The convergence of media by the COU presents great benefits including allowing the gospel to disperse quickly, instantly, easily, immediately and globally through digital media. Therefore, I argue that with the digital media influx in everyday life and communication, the convergence of all media forms into digital media has the potential to spark a digital reformation within the COU and the global church. Nevertheless, it is important to note that digital media use for the gospel is not to replace church meetings but rather to supplement to physical church activities, therefore, requires careful consideration in the convergence process.

7.3.11 Online and Offline Church Relationship

The online faith community is not a replacement for physical fellowships but an extension of faith communities into online spaces (Campbell, 2012, 2017c). The use of digital media tools to engage in digital ministry by the church is an extension of the church's pulpit from the church building into the digital media space to reach an audience far from the church. Digital media space allows priests, pastors and theologians to get close to the people, educate and explain theological concepts to the online community and their acquired knowledge equips them for the work in the physical spaces (Kurlberg et al., 2022: 9). The involvement of religious and church authorities into digital media space to engage with the online audience allows the physical church and church leaders to use their authority to share knowledge and offer direction to the digital audience thereby strengthening the position of the church and leaders. Online faith communities and activities ought to be guided by the ethics, principles, values and identity of the physical church (Campbell, 2020a: 6). Therefore, for the physical church to remain relevant in the digital age, serious reflection on the relationship between online and offline churches in all areas is vital to maintain authenticity. The physical church is to make the choices on how to digitise church ministries, documents and services to remain relevant, but considering the attributes of ecclesiology, practices, and traditions, deciding on the activities, rituals and sacraments to be or not to be administered through technology.

To engage strategically in effective online faith communities, the COU is to participate in a hybrid approach to church services to remain relevant in the digital age. Since operating in the online space breaks diocesan boundaries and jurisdictions for denominational churches such as the COU, there must be a known and recognised Online faith community established and supervised by an ordained minister and Bishop. The established online COU is to co-exist with the offline COU, support each other and not engage in competition so that COU intentionally continues with digital communication of the gospel, digital witnessing and digital discipleship. The established online COU is to offer oversight and guidance (technological and theological) to the dioceses and parishes participating in online ministries to avoid confusion and false doctrine and keep consistent with the ethos and identity of the offline founding church. Therefore, the online faith community and activities ought to be guided by the ethics, doctrine, theology, principles, values and identity of the physical church. The identity of the online church community must reflect the identity of the physical church. The established Online Church of Uganda as a result of the lockdown is progressively gaining influence and authority in the media space. Therefore, with the oversight of a clergy or Bishop, the Online COU may be in a position to guide other online COU faith communities started by different dioceses and parishes. When the hybrid of the online and offline church is handled well, it may lead to the spiritual maturity of Christians and encourage the participation of all believers in Christian activities through different spaces, thereby equipping Christians to advance the acquired knowledge and join in the proclamation of the gospel to individuals, friends and other communities in online and offline spaces, thus fulfilling the Great Commission.

7.4 Theological Focus and Contribution of the Study

As a practical theology research, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing new literature from the empirical study of the COU's digital media usage in the communication of the gospel. Academically, first, the study attempts to meet the gap in knowledge of practical theology about the church's perspectives, understandings, attitudes, opinions and approaches to digital media use. Second, this study contributes to the field of practical theology by expanding the knowledge about digital communication practices by the church in the world, specifically in the digital media world. Third, as a Practical Theology study, it calls for theological reflection on

ministry activities done in the digital media, such as prayer sessions, church rituals, and spiritual formation done in the space. Fourth, the theologically informed communication approaches propose to provide new knowledge in the church's approach to communication, especially digital communication. Fifth, since the digital media space allows for the creation of online communities, where theological dialogues happen, this calls for theological reflection and engagement in the new spaces or 'worlds'. Sixth, this study highlights the need for more focused theological training of church leaders and digital evangelists that will equip them with skills and knowledge relevant to optimally engage the digital media space for faith formation, mission and evangelism. Seventh, if adopted within a faith community, the proposed theologically informed digital media communication strategy can go a long way in helping the church understand the mind of God concerning digital communication, transform their communication practises and train the church communicators to theologically engage in digital communication to advance the gospel message in the digital age.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, this study was limited to the Ugandan context. Within Uganda, the study was limited to the Church of Uganda and within the Church of Uganda, it was limited to the dioceses of Kampala and Namirembe. In following the qualitative study, I engaged in a deep study of the two dioceses and parishes to understand the communication process and how digital media is used. Secondly, although the study was done in Uganda, a literature search brought literature from Africa and across the globe in the area of religious use of digital media. In Uganda, literature about communication of the gospel in the digital age was scanty but the necessary literature was acquired. Thirdly, although the study represents a national and global conceptualisation of digital media use for the gospel, the data was collected in two dioceses from which participants from the selected dioceses shared their attitudes, understanding, opinion and approaches employed in digital media communication of the gospel. Fourthly, the study as the first inquiry into the Anglican Church of Uganda and its communication of the gospel in the digital age selected particular leaders within the selected parishes. The interviews were limited to the COU leaders such as diocesan senior priests, parish priests and fellowship leaders of the selected parishes under study to understand the present situation of the COU's communication of the gospel in the digital age. This allowed the research to attain the validity of data through data triangulation.

7.6 Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend that practical theologians engage in research in the field of converging media and its relevance in communicating the gospel. Theological reflection on media usage and its relevance in communicating the gospel to different audiences far and near and all scattered in different areas, rural areas, including adults, children and youth will inform practical theologians in equipping church leaders for the communication task. It will also engage theological reflection on how the blended media facilitates online faith community, spiritual and faith formation for people that receive online content in different parts.

Concerning recommendations for training, the Church of Uganda and its theological colleges should create a programme that trains and equips church leaders and parishioners with theological and technological skills for digital media use. Theological skills and knowledge are key to digital communication; therefore, theological training is needed to enable theological reflection on media use in ministry. The theological schools should offer refresher courses for church ministers and leaders to use media and technology effectively in communicating the gospel, teaching and engaging in theological discussions online. The theological schools will be responsible to help all church communicators to approach digital communication from the theological perspective.

Recommendation concerning the collaborative research study that brings different fields together to understand and provide knowledge that will equip the church with the necessary knowledge to advance its message in the contemporary age: I recommend that research studies be done among theologians, media experts, communication specialists and computer scientists to provide knowledge to aid the communication mandate of the church. With relevant research and information, the church will be in a position to remain at the cutting edge and remain relevant in the communication of the gospel at different times.

Recommendations concerning theological studies about online spirituality: I suggest that studies and research be done in the area of church online spirituality growth. With the growing online faith communities to which different Christians belong, information about spirituality ought to be made available. It is necessary to understand the challenges and opportunities that come with online faith

and spiritual formation, and to understand how the online faith community contributes to physical churches.

Concerning theological studies on the relationship between online and offline churches and how they can feed into each other for the work of the church in the contemporary age: If digital media is an opportunity to extend the pulpit into the digital media space, reflection is needed on the two churches and spaces to know how members benefit from the online church and how it affects the offline church; also to understand what and how church activities and rituals such as Holy Communion may be communicated and celebrated in the digital media space.

Recommendations concerning online content creation: Digital media communication thrives with content creation, packaging, management and sharing. I recommend a study in content creation, management, packaging, branding, uploading, distribution and follow-up so that the church may find out whether the content is accessed and if so, how many people it has reached. The church should research how its content may be attractively presented in the media space so that it is easily accessed by many media users. The church should identify gifted Christians, IT experts, graphic designers, photographers, and video editors to train them through the normative lens to use their skills to participate in content creation, packaging and distribution.

Recommendations for further empirical studies: Practical theologians and researchers should engage in empirical studies that will provide more research in the area of communication and media to further understand how the Christian message can be communicated and preserved for the next generation in contemporary times, and also to understand key themes that come with the church's digital media use, such as authenticity, authority, community, privacy, identity, interaction and self-identification in the participation in online communities.

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ADDENDUM A: Permission to conduct the study in Church of Uganda

CHURCH OF UGANDA
PROVINCIAL SECRETARIAT

OFFICE:
Archbishop: 0393 216 199
Provincial Secretary: 0393 216 200
Front Desk: 0393 216 198


Self-Governance

EMAILS:
archbishop@churchofuganda.org
pschurchofuganda@gmail.com
provincialsecretary@churchofuganda.org

22nd July 2021

**The Bishop
NAMIREMBE DIOCESE.**

**The Bishop
DIOCESE OF KAMPALA.**

My Lord Bishop,

Re: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Greetings from the Provincial Secretariat in Jesus' name!


I certify that **Rev. Lydia Nsaale Nabunya Kitayimbwa** is a doctoral student in Theology and Media Communication at Stellenbosch University with Students ID No.: 23419946. Lydia is a Priest in the Diocese of Kampala.


I hereby introduce and recommend to you Lydia to undertake the research study in the Province of Church of Uganda specifically in the two Dioceses of Namirembe and Kampala.

By copy of this letter, I also request the Diocesan Secretaries to assist and allow Lydia access information to conduct the study in the Diocese.

You are free to contact my office for further inquiry.

Yours Sincerely,





**Rev. Canon William Ongeng
PROVINCIAL SECRETARY**

Cc: Archbishop
" Vice Chancellor, UCU Mukono
" Diocesan Secretaries

Vision: A Faster Growing Sustainable Christ-Centered Church
Plot 837 Willis Road, Namirembe, P.O. Box 14123, Kampala, Uganda
www.churchofuganda.org

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ADDENDUM B: Ethical Clearance certificate from Stellenbosch University**NOTICE OF APPROVAL**

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

6 December 2021

Project number: 23203

Project Title: Communicating the gospel in a digital age: A case study of the dioceses of Kampala and Namirembe in the Anglican Church of Uganda

Dear Ms LN Kitayimbwa

Co-investigators:

Your response to stipulations submitted on 08/11/2021 15:29 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
26 August 2021	25 August 2022

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:**INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (23203) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Budget	Lydia's Field Research Budget	27/07/2021	Final
Non-disclosure agreement	Non-disclosure agreement	27/07/2021	second
Default	Covid management strategy	27/07/2021	second
Proof of permission	CamScanner 07-27-2021 20.38_1	27/07/2021	first
Data collection tool	Lydia Interview guide for Parish Priests and DS (Ed)	21/09/2021	Third
Data collection tool	Lydia FGD Guide for fellowship leaders (Ed)	21/09/2021	Third
Default	UCU-REC Response	29/09/2021	1

Research Protocol/Proposal	Lydia's ethical Clearance proposal	04/11/2021	Final
Informed Consent Form	Informed Consent Form	04/11/2021	Final
Default	Lydia's Response Letter to REC	04/11/2021	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

Principal Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

Conducting the Research: The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

Participant Enrolment: The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

Informed Consent: The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

Continuing Review: The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

Amendments and Changes: Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

Adverse or Unanticipated Events: Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

Research Record Keeping: The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

Provision of Counselling or emergency support: When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

Final reports: When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits: If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

ADDENDUM C: Ethical Clearance certificate from Uganda Christian University on behalf of Uganda National Council Science and Technology (UNCST) to undertake the study



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**
A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

28/09/2021

To: Lydia Kitayimbwa

Stellenbosch University
0755573235

Type: Initial Review

Re: UCUREC-2021-201: Communicating the gospel in a digital age: A case study of the diocese of Kampala and Namirembe in the Anglican Church of Uganda, 1 , 2021-09-03

I am pleased to inform you that the Uganda Christian University REC, through expedited review held on **28/09/2021** approved the above referenced study.
Approval of the research is for the period of **28/09/2021** to **28/09/2022**.

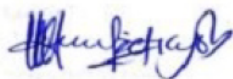
As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and addenda to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes.
3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or any new information which could change the risk benefit: ratio must be submitted to the REC.
4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by participants and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Continuing review application must be submitted to the REC **eight weeks** prior to the expiration date of **28/09/2022** in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. You are required to register the research protocol with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for final clearance to undertake the study in Uganda.

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by Uganda Christian University REC:

No.	Document Title	Language	Version Number	Version Date
1	Administrative Clearance	English	1`	2021-09-03
2	Risk Management Plan	English	1`	2021-09-03
3	Prior Ethical Approval	English	1`	2021-09-03
4	Interview Guide	English	1`	2021-09-03
5	Informed Consent forms	English	1`	2021-09-03
6	Data collection tools	English	1`	2021-09-03
7	Protocol	English	1`	2021-09-03

Yours Sincerely



Peter Waiswa
For: Uganda Christian University REC

ADDENDUM D: Interview Guide for In-Depth Interviews

Interview Guide for the Priest and Diocesan Secretary

The communication of the gospel by your Church Congregation

1. According to Church of Uganda, what is the gospel?
2. How is the Gospel communicated in COU?
3. What is Church of Uganda's opinion and attitude for communicating the gospel using digital media.

Understanding the Complexities with digital media communication and possible theory

1. What is your understanding of digital communication?
2. As an African minister, what is the perspective for using digital media for gospel?
3. What digital media platforms and media outlets do you use as a church and why?
4. When and why did you begin using digital media for the church?
5. Mention the main media platforms and outlets used by church to communicate the gospel.
 - a. How are they used?
 - b. how is the gospel communicated on the platforms?
6. What are the key discoveries and lessons learnt when using digital media?
7. Are there challenges for using Digital media? mention any!
8. Has the church addressed the challenges? How?
9. Mention any observed benefits from using digital media to communicate the gospel.

Understanding the Theology or biblical view that motivates the church to communicate the gospel using digital media.

1. According to you what do you think is the theology of using digital media for gospel communication?
2. What religious rituals can be done in media space, how and why?
3. How is authenticity maintained while using digital media?
4. How can church establish and maintain a community in the digital space
5. Is digital media for unidirectional or interactive communication? Explain
6. How can we attain the best communication style say Interaction or Uni-directional?
7. How is church authority handled with digital media communication?

Understanding the Media approach for different age Groups

1. What method is the church using to communicate the gospel in the digital space?
2. If you are media user, what outlet is appropriate for you and why?

3. What outlet, platform and method are appropriate for communicating the gospel to; The Adults 50 years and above, The Adults 30-50 years, Youth 20-30 years, Teens 13-18 years, Children 6-12 years and Children 0-6 years?
4. What unique thing is your church doing through media to reach people? How is it impacting societies and individuals?
5. How do people participate in the church online activities?

ADDENDUM E: Focus Group Discussion Guide

FGD Guide for fellowship leaders

The communication of the gospel by your Church Congregation

4. What is the gospel message according to Church of Uganda?
5. How does the Church communicate the gospel to people?
6. What is the target audience when communicating the gospel?
7. What is Church of Uganda's opinion and attitude for communicating the gospel using digital media.

Understanding the Complexities with digital media communication and possible theory

10. What is your understanding of digital communication?
11. What is the Ugandan Christian's perspective in the use of digital media for gospel?
12. When and why did you begin using digital media for the church?
13. What digital media platforms and media outlets do you use as a church and why?
14. What are the key discoveries and lessons learnt from using digital media?
15. Mention the main media platforms and outlets used by church to communicate the gospel.
 - c. How are they used?
 - d. how is the gospel communicated on the platforms?
16. Are there challenges for using Digital media? Mention some observed challenges.
17. Has the church addressed the challenges? How?
18. Mention any observed benefits from using digital media to communicate the gospel.

Understanding the Theology or biblical view that motivates the church to communicate the gospel using digital media.


8. According to you what do you think is the theology of using digital media for gospel communication?
9. What religious rituals can be done in media space, how and why?
10. How is authenticity maintained while using digital media?
11. How can church establish and maintain a community in the digital space
12. Is digital media for unidirectional or interactive communication? Explain
13. How can we attain the best communication style say Interaction or Uni-directional?
14. How is church authority handled with digital media communication?

Understanding the Media approach for different age Groups

6. What method is church using to communicate the gospel in the digital space?

7. What is the appropriate method and platform for communicating through digital media to; The Adults 50 years and above, The Adults 30-50 years, Youth 20-30 years, Teens 13-18 years, Children 6-12 years and Children 0-6 years?
8. What unique thing is your church doing through media to reach people?
9. How is it impacting societies and individuals?
10. How are people participating in digital media platforms?
11. Mention any church activity that attracts the most participation from the online community?

ADDENDUM F: Turnitin Digital Receipt



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Communicating the Gospel in a Digital Age: A Case Study of
the Theology of Reception of News in the Anglican
Church of Uganda

By
Lydia Nabunya Nsaale Kitayimbwa
PhD Candidate, Stellenbosch University

Submitted to Stellenbosch University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in
Theology

Supervisor: Prof. J. H. Coetzee

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ADDENDUM G: Originality Receipt

Lydia Kitayimbwa Communicating the Gospel in a Digital Age

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