

The Catholic Church in Nigeria and Social Media-Use: A Critical Juxtaposition

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Abstract

There is a perception that the Church is circumspect about the use of new technology. Perhaps this view stems from the understanding that the Church is traditional in nature in terms of accepting change or changing. The situation is even more interesting when it comes to embracing the world of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) with particular reference to the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. With this background in mind, the researchers embarked on a qualitative survey "The Catholic Church in Nigeria and Social Media-Use: A Critical Juxtaposition" to assess how the Church views social media in the country. Through the narrative approach, it discovered that the culture of secrecy, conservatism and fear are responsible for lack of taking advantage of social media platforms for evangelisation purposes. The study recommended openness to media protocol, debuting social media ethical codes and setting up a social media commission as positive ways through which the Church can engage social media meaningfully. It concluded that since social media has come to stay, the Catholic Church in Nigeria must set its own benchmark for engaging with the new technology while fulfilling its divine mission on earth.

Keywords: Church, Evangelisation, Media, Social, Nigeria.

Introduction

The 21st century has unleashed upon us explosion in technological advancements. The sudden rise in science and technology leading to high-tech innovations in the world of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has further created an avalanche of opportunities for digital components in various sectors of life. The speed with which information is shared between people living in various parts of the world takes place reveals the magic of the century under review. That is not all, the advances in medical sciences, ease of doing business as well as burgeoning teaching techniques tells the story more. What is more, the advent of social media as a new entrant into the world of digital technologies has made it easy for people to receive and share information which are laced with elements of text as well as audio and video. This reveals the multimedia nature of social media. The fact that social media is characterised by speed, interactivity and media-convergence makes it both attractive and exciting especially to young people.

This brings us to the high level of social media penetration in Africa and Nigeria to be precise. The upsurge in the number of

people who use social media handles particularly Facebook and WhatsApp is at an alarming rate. The manner in which individuals break away from parent-social media handles to create other smaller groups for those with like-minded views and opinions is interesting and calls for research. Perhaps the increasing availability of data connection, need for information-sharing and freedom of expression as provided by the Freedom of Information Act is responsible for the high profile in social media-use.

Despite the seeming advantages which social media-use in Nigeria presents, there are fears that the new platform is used for dubious reasons. Aside from the cases of some people who use Facebook and WhatsApp to defraud others of their money and valuables through "Yahoo-Yahoo," there are indications that these social media platforms are used for sexting among young people [1]. What this means is that, some youths are taking advantage of the medium to send and receive nude pictures of each other. Because of apparent weak extant social media laws as well virtual reality of these media, dangerous faceless people hide their identities to unleash harm on unsuspecting members of the public.

These challenges confronting the use of social media may be why some people are circumspect of using these platforms. This brings us to how the Catholic Church in Nigeria views social media and engages with it. While there is ostensibly no document which either proscribes or endorses the use of social media for priests, religious and laity in Nigeria, the tendency to be conservative about the use of these media is a recurrent decimal. This may be why various Catholic WhatsApp groups have their code of ethics which are written by the Group-Administrators and one or two members of the group. Without prejudice to these guidelines, the Church in Nigeria lacks an official position on the use of social media handles which its priests, religious and laity are daily indulging in.

Therefore, The Study Aims at:

1. Stating the exponential growth of social media penetration in Nigeria;
2. Establishing cases of wrong use of social media handles such as WhatsApp and Facebook for dubious purposes across the country;
3. Investigating how the Church in Nigeria views social media and engages with it;
4. Appraising the embrace of social media in Nigeria as a rich resource for evangelisation;
5. Suggesting better ways which the Catholic Church in Nigeria can take advantage of social media incursion for entrenching its evangelising mission.

This qualitative paper adopts the narrative approach which relies on existing body of knowledge by experts on the subject under review. After a thorough synthesis and analysis of their opinions, the researchers would make recommendations towards a better appreciation and use of social media by the Church in Nigeria.

Conceptual Explication

Social Media

Social media are applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and others which are designed for social interaction and information-sharing. They are considered as part of new media because new media are mostly computer-based digital gadgets or devices which have online access [2]. Social media often referred to as new or electronic media is an emerging field in media-studies. In this study, social media would be used interchangeably with new or electronic media because they are characterised by speed, interactivity and media-convergence with elements such as text, video and audio which transmit information to heterogeneous audiences. Social media is peer-to-peer communication which uses new media technology and allows users to share information, comment or critique [3]. For the purpose of this paper, we shall highlight secondary sources on the use of social media handles especially Facebook and WhatsApp as they affect the Church. For the purpose of clarity, in this study “the means of social communication” would also be used alternatively with social media.

Church

In this study, the Church stands for the Catholic Church estab-

lished by Christ on Peter the Rock of which he said: “The gates of the underworld cannot hold out against it”. It is the body of Christ which has the four marks of a Church namely: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church established in 33AD during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles which now has the Pope as its visible leader on earth with Bishops all over the world as the direct successors of the apostles and priests and religious as their collaborators as well as Papal Nuncios across the world representing the Vatican. The Church being referred to here is the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the context of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Collective Intelligence theoretical framework. Based on building online communities, this theory which assists social networking applications to develop a product or solutions to a problem has its recent developments in research. This theory deals with how online communities utilize relevant tools to ascertain the level to which “a community’s spiraling process moves from a given socio-cultural context through discourse, action, reflection, and reorganization toward socially mediated meta-cognition” [4]. The authors are of the view that Collective Intelligence helps to build a learning environment through five phases of the learning process. These include context, discourse, action, reflection, and reorganization which further leads to a socially mediated meta-cognition [4].

Methodology

The study employs the qualitative method of research which involves sampling views and opinions of scholars and experts through extant literature and interview. The researchers used probability sampling. The criterion of being Catholic and familiar with the variables of social media as they employ to usage by Christians in Nigeria was used to randomly select 13 persons as population for the study. All the members had an equal opportunity of being selected.

Literature Review and Discussion

Social Media Penetration in Nigeria

According to the extensive new collection of Digital 2019 Reports, “internet users are now growing by an average of more than one million new users every day, with all of the original ‘Next Billion Users’ now online” [5]. Some essential headlines to understand digital in 2019 are quite revealing. The details emphasize that:

- There are 5.11 billion unique mobile users in the world today, up 100 million (2 percent) in the past year.
- There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9 percent) versus January 2018.
- There are 3.48 billion social media users in 2019, with the worldwide total growing by 288 million (9 percent) since this time last year.
- 3.26 billion people use social media on mobile devices in January 2019, with growth of 297 million new users representing a year-on-year increase of more than 10 percent (Kemp, 2019).



The diagram above about global internet growth rankings puts Nigeria as 18th out of 20 countries with +3,572,903 users representing +3.8%.

Compared to January 2018, the Global State of Digital in 2019 reported that there are 98.39 million internet users in Nigeria. This means that there is a 4 million increase in the number of internet users in the country. Notwithstanding this increase, the overall internet penetration is low with only 50% of the country's population connected to the internet compared to the global average of 57%. Comparatively, while Kenya has a high level of (84%) internet penetration, South Africa has 54% and Ghana 35% in that order. The report further reveals that out of the 98.39 million internet users in Nigeria, 54% access the internet daily while only 12% (24 million) have active social media accounts. It also discovered that Nigerians spend an average amount of 3 hours 17 minutes on social media; higher than the global average time spent that is, 3 hours 14 minutes. The most active social media platform in the country is WhatsApp with 85% of users followed by Facebook with 78% then, Instagram with 57% and FB Messenger with 54% and YouTube with 53% [6].

Extant Church Documents on the Means of Social Communication
 Here, we shall review some extant documents of the Church on the means of social communication. It is crucial to note that while most of the documents came before the advent of the Internet or social media, their allusion to film and video relates to elements of social media. We shall underline the salient points of the following ecclesiastical documents - Vigilanti Cura, Miranda Prorsus, Inter Mirifica, Communio et Progressio and Aetatis Novae:

Vigilanti Cura

Being the first Pontifical Encyclical on the means of social communication issued by Pope Pius XI on the 29th June 1937, the three-part document addresses film as one of the modern electronic media which showcases the value of social communication to the world. Born out of the response to the yearnings and aspirations of some priests and religious in 1930 to counteract bad films, the Pope addressed the Bishops of the United States of America and other Bishops of the world to be vigilant.

The first part of the document points to how the Church pays much attention to the potent instrumentalities of motion picture which is capable of being of great advantage to learning and education if properly used. It, however, notes that its misuse could be incentives to evil passions. The Pope maintained that this is why the Holy See is continually vigilant on the abuse of motion pictures.

The second part addresses doctrinal issues. It observes that there is increment in the production and distribution of motion pictures in both developed and developing nations and calls for vigilance noting that these motion pictures could speak in vivid and concrete imagery which is capable of absorbing the mind effortlessly. The Pope called on those who are disenchanted by the misuse of motion picture to use same as means of social communication and education of the society.

The third part of the encyclical stresses the practical consequences

of motion pictures. It emphasizes that as panacea, the production of films should be inspired by Christian moral principles. The Pope called on priests and members of the laity to intervene where there is financial difficulty to achieve this goal by ensuring that all films which are produced are not harmful to religious, moral and social sensibilities [7].

Miranda Prorsus

As the second encyclical on the means of social communication in the 20th century about motion pictures, radio and television, the encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* was written by Pope Pius XII on September 8th 1957. Being an improvement on *Vigilati Cura*, the four-part document sets the background on issues relating to the means of social communication. It paints a vivid picture of the effects of electronic media and how the Church can utilize its benefits for its missionary activities.

Part one discloses the positive attitude of the Church towards the technical inventions of motion pictures, radio and television noting that when these arts first appeared, the Church welcomed them as a mother welcomes and watches a child to protect it from danger. The Pope maintained that this positive attitude is borne out of the Church's divine mandate which it seeks to use to ensure that the art influences the way people think and act positively.

Part two reveals that the Christian teaching on communication is a gift from God who as donor, dispenser and proclaimer of good tidings pours out his gifts on humanity out of his supreme generosity. Part three emphasizes that the Church's watchful eye on this matters should not be seen as limiting the freedom of individuals but rather, for the common good which the arts hope to achieve. Most importantly, Pope Pius XII advised that the means of audio-visual communication which includes motion pictures, radio and television should serve truth and virtue as well as disseminate information, teach, enlighten and entertain people. The Holy Father further recommended the formation of Church structures at both diocesan and national levels for directing the affairs of motion picture, radio and television.

Part four lauded the advances in inventions and technology such as film which emerged in 1889 and radio for its capacity to enable communication between people without restriction and delay. It highlighted the advantages of radio such as providing enlightenment, instruction and directing people's minds to higher spiritual goals. The Pope recommended selection of radio programmers which promote truth and goodness while discouraging the faithful from listening to programmers which draws them from fulfilling their moral obligations to the Church. It urges setting up of Catholic Offices for radio and taking advantage of Catholic daily papers and reviews to keep the faithful informed. The document mandates parish priests to forbid Catholics from listening to programmers that are dangerous to their faith belief even as they are encouraged to listen to those programmers which are capable of directing their minds to God.

The encyclical lauded the potentials of television because it has audio-visual components that make an effective means of communication noting that it provides pleasure within the family and serves as a powerful tool for information and spiritual upliftment. While stressing that active participation in a religious programme that is

transmitted through a media is not the same as the actual ceremony itself, the document, nonetheless, maintained that following religious ceremonies on television could strengthen the faith of those who for some reason cannot actually be present at such liturgical functions. The Holy Father went on to call on Bishops to help in selecting religious programmes that are morally acceptable for the Christian community and also ensure that offices and structures are created to inform, organise and coordinate all activities which could assist in sustaining Christian moral values [7].

Inter Mirifica

This is the Decree of the Vatican II Council on the means of social communication which was published on December 4th 1963. The document is divided into four parts. In the first part, for the first time, the press, the cinema, radio and television were referred to as "the means of social communication". It further states that the use of social communication is for "the enlightenment and enrichment of men's minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God".

In the second part, the Council Fathers emphatically dealt with doctrinal matters. They noted that it is the birthright of the Church to own and use the means of communication because they are helpful for the formation and pastoral activity of Christians. Taking into cognizance context, purpose, people, place and time, the Fathers recommended the formation of correct consciences by those involved in the media to mitigate controversial issues.

The third part contains the activities of the Church. The document urges members of the Church to put the media at the service of the Word by establishing an authentic Catholic Press, promoting films which showcase worthwhile entertainment for the youth, encouraging decent radio and television programmes which support Catholic family values and training of priests, religious and laity on technical, doctrinal and moral formation. For complete formation on the rudiments of social communication, for the first time, the Council Fathers recommended the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Communication, schools, institutes and faculties. The document decreed that at the discretion of the Bishop, a day should be set aside for the laity to contribute for the communications' apostolate.

By the same token, it mandates that a national office for the press, cinema, radio and television be created and supported. By way of conclusion, the document also advocated for the publication of a pastoral instruction which will help in effective implementation of the rules of the Council on the means of social communication which are entirely for the common good of humanity [7].

Communio et Progressio

Being the fruit of various reflections and work undertaken by experts at different times and places, *Communio et Progressio* is the Pastoral Instruction for the Application of the Degree of Vatican Council II's *Inter Mirifica* on the Means of Social Communication published by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication on May 23rd 1971. The document is divided into five unequal parts: The first part notes that the media is a gift of God which should be used according to his plan. It also maintains that it is a powerful instrument which shapes the way people live and think.

The second part gives a Christian and theological perspective of communication on its vertical and horizontal basis. It presents a Trinitarian dimension of communication as “the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live in a single divine life” [8]. In a Christological manner, the document presents Christ as the perfect communicator who through his incarnation gave himself in self-love at a most profound level. Arguing that communication media are powerful tools for human progress, the message states that the swift advance in modern technology offers people a great round table for entrenching human rights, forming public opinion and promoting human education, agriculture, medicine, hygiene and community development.

In part three, recommendations and conditions for working in media were spelt out. Although media-education and training for both workers (communicators) and others (recipients) was recommended, communicators were urged to constantly stand at the window to study facts, events, opinions, current interests and thoughts of their surrounding environment before presenting them to the public [9]. It maintains that if the recipients cooperate, authentic dialogue in the society can be achieved through the influence of the media.

The fourth part which treats the commitment of Catholics in the media charges members of the clergy, religious and laity to always write to the press, appear on radio and television shows and collaborate with those in the motion picture industry. Aware of the impact of the media, the Church calls for the training of both communicators and recipients on Christian principles so as to be true citizens of the age of social communication which is ongoing. In the fifth part, the Church calls on the people of God to beware of the latest technical developments and their challenges especially those that relate to sound, images and messages. At the end, the document traced its mandate to the proposal made by Vatican Council II. Although experts consider *Communio et Progressio* as the “magna carta” of social communication in the Catholic Church, it does not have the last word because advances in technology are dynamic and evolving [7].

Aetatis Novae

The Pontifical Council for Social Communication issued *Aetatis Novae* on February 22nd 1992 as a second pastoral instruction to commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. The document which was signed by Archbishop John Foley the President of the commission was a reflection on the implementation of *Inter Mirifica* and *Communio et Progressio* [8]. This was issued to catch up with the explosion in technology. The document has seven parts: Part one deals with evolution in human communications. The second part considers the cultural, social, political and economic contexts of social communications. The third part puts the media at the service of persons and cultures; a source of dialogue with the world; a means of promoting integral development and an instrument of forming ecclesiastical communities as components of new evangelization.

Part four was dedicated to the current challenges posed by the media. The document offers a critical evaluation of mass media and its impact on cultures while stating its negative influence such as the offshoot of media policies and structures. It urges the Church to speak for the poor and provide an alternative model of com-

munication for them. The fifth chapter focuses on pastoral priorities and challenges such as the defense of human cultures, the Church’s means of communication, education and pastoral care for communicators. It advocated for the promotion of folk media and other traditional forms of expression as newer media for spreading the Gospel. It also made a case for education and training of pastoral workers in communication as well as developing programmes in the area of pastoral care which respond to current challenges confronting media experts who are often under psychological and ethical dilemmas.

In part six, the document recommended Pastoral Planning which requires Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences or Assemblies to include components of communication in all their pastoral plans. Part seven contains guidelines for developing Pastoral Plans for Social Communications in a Diocese and Episcopal Conference or Particular Assembly which are capable of providing feasible plans that are able to enhance effective and efficient mass media evangelisation course of action [7].

An in-depth analysis of the documents reviewed reveals the Church’s interest in using Social Media. This evident in the caution offered by the Church regarding the use of social media. For example, the rules on the means of social communication set out in *Inter Mirifica* are for the common good of humanity. Also, in *Vigilanti Cura*, Holy See urges for vigilance on the abuse of motion pictures [7]. Communication is a theological concept. After all, the Bible reveals how God communicated with human beings [10].

The recent use of Social Media by Pope Francis gives testimony to the use of New Media by the Church. Begun by Pope Benedict XVI, the Twitter account @Pontifex has as of January 23, 2021 48 million followers; the Instagram account of Pope Francis, “Franciscus” has 58 million followers. In fact, according to Cindy Wooden in her article: “Resource not risk: Pope reflects on using social media for good” Pope Francis comes fourth among world leaders who use Social Media for the promotion of the faith. He came behind Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and U.S. President Donald Trump. Twiplomacy website listed Pope Francis as No. 4. [11].

The Catholic Church in Nigeria and the Use of Social Media

For two decades, studies in religion and media technologies in Nigeria have disclosed that Pentecostal Churches, most especially rich mega-churches have enthusiastically and astutely made mass media technologies like print, broadcast and computer-mediated messages an essential part of their ritual to preach, evangelize and communicate the word [12]. Although there is no statistical prove to show for it, there is a perception even among Catholic faithful that both Protestant and Pentecostal Churches have given them a run for their money in terms of the use of main stream and social media. Notwithstanding this challenge, Catholics are beginning to embrace digital technologies for the purpose of sharing information and evangelization.

To this end, the Directorate of Social Communications at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Abuja is the Public Relations arm of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Aside from hosting two websites, one for CSN and the other for CBCN, the Secretariat ensures the propagation of the faith through social media-use. It also

superintends over the Directorate of Social Communications or media outfit of the 55 Dioceses in Nigeria towards transmission of the faith [13]. Almost every diocese or religious congregation now has a WhatsApp page which it uses judiciously for easy dissemination of information. Most parishes now have Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp accounts for the propagation of the faith.

The Catholic Church in Nigeria has always upheld the use of the instruments of communication for effective evangelisation. For instance, in a Communiqué titled “Promoting Authentic Development in Nigeria” issued at the End of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Bishop Anthony Nwedo Pastoral Centre, Umuahia, Abia State, on 14th September, 2012, the CBCN advised that: “Our nation also needs to invest in media education, especially to protect our young generations from the ills of the new social media and equip them to engage the communications technology in a critical manner” [14]. Also, during the First National Catechetical Summit of the Church in the Nigeria which held last year at the CSN Resource Centre, Abuja, the Catholic Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Most Rev. Emmanuel Badejo who spoke on Tech in Catechesis: Towards Media Application in Catechesis underscored the vital role of the communication apostolate in revamping Catechesis in the Church in Nigeria [15].

He advocated that the most basic technology components of faith encounters such as, ensuring proper functioning of microphones, loudspeakers, lighting, notice boards, billboards, posters, fliers, tracts banners as well as producing catechetical resources, especially the annual Catechetical Week booklet in digital form with children format for easy management and sharing should be taken more seriously. The prelate argued that the impact of music and audio resources as vehicles for catechism should be rigorously explored in a way that artistes of Christian music and audio visual art are enlisted to the project to serve the need for group media resources and grassroots evangelization in families [15].

It is crucial to also note that: “Social communication has always been employed by the Catholic Church long before social media came into use. This in her (the church’s) own terms helps to understand communications as not just a set of messages dropped in the line of interlocutors but much more in the deeper sense of communication as making us responsible for one another. This is integral because it encapsulates the gospel message of taking responsibility for the well-being of the one who communicates and the one with whom he/she communicates. That’s where the “social” aspect of it makes meaning” [16].

The Church believes that social media and family life are essential tools for evangelisation and sharing of Catholic values. It is not surprising that some Bishops like Emmanule Badejo are of the opinion that: “We need to invent new means of forming people’s consciences. We need to form new means of confronting the agents of non-values that are among us. We need to form new means of colonizing the media so that people can hear the voice of the Church” [17]. The use of social communication is also evident in how many religious organisations relate with the faithful around the world, whether physically or virtually — via radio or television broadcasts or the Internet [16].

The positive side of the use of the new means of communication

include the ease of communication, improvement in learning and education, simplification of things, creation of artificial intelligence that can ease our work and the generation of big data while the negative aspect includes, the promotion of insensitivity, loss of empathy, promotion of false living, insecurity, loneliness, distractions, addiction, hatred, misinformation, disinformation, fake news and information pollution [18].

This brings us to the role that individuals play in creating and distributing news. Truth is, sometimes social media is used to divide communities, exploit and promote evil. Usually, “It depends on the man who is behind the camera, nor can the pen decide what to write, it depends on the one who is holding the pen” [17]. It has been observed further that: “Even though the new means of social communications, when well employed, are veritable tools for evangelization and human development, their wrong use has the potential to destroy human interaction” [18]. Therefore, “In the Catholic Church, the use of any media must be moral, which means it must be intended for good. The moral obligation is on the user, as well as the producer”.

The Catholic Church and Social Media-Use in Nigeria: Potentials and Limitations

This study sought the views of some clerics and members of the laity about the available potentials and or limitations of the Catholic Church as regards the use of social media for evangelisation. In this qualitative research, the researchers conducted intensive, in-depth interviews with 13 respondents to explore their perspectives on the above subject matter. Here is a summation of their views:

Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Mike Nsikak Umoh is the National Director of the Directorate of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) [19]. When asked how religious institutions in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular use media to communicate, he stated that they are trying their best but more needs to be done. On his part, Rev. Fr. Anthony Godonu, who is the Communication’s Director of Lagos Archdiocese answered the same question by disclosing that “the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos uses various means to communicate: TV, Radio, Newspaper, Social media and regular circulars and Press releases” [20].

Rev. Fr. Innocent Uwah, Head of Department, Theatre & Film Studies and Communication’s Director, Ahiara Diocese reacts differently as regards how religious institutions in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular use media to communicate [21]. He disclosed that in this context, the Church like other institutions within it such as religious institutions e.g., schools, colleges, religious communities, parishes, local stations and dioceses, “must be said to be using media and catching up with the new reality of media-saturated culture in vogue today. They do so by means of the application of social media networking strategies, communication as an aspect of evangelization such as when PowerPoint presentations are used to implode liturgical participation, etc.”

This opinion tallies with that of Rev. Sr. Dr. Theresa Tanko, SHCJ who is a lecturer of Pastoral Communication at St. Augustine’s Major Seminary, Jos. She noted that indeed, “Religious institutions in Nigeria use social media for evangelisation, proclamation of the good news, social interaction, education and exchange of information and ideas” [22]. On her part, Mrs. Amaka Okaro, a pa-

risioner of Mater Misericordiae, Port Harcourt Diocese said, the use of media by Nigerian institutions and general is quite excellent (especially Christians) [23]. She explained that “In many Churches today, you see the use of media gadgets for communication. Gone are the days when people got worried because they forget their bible at home. This is because, these days, the word of God is displayed on led-televisions for all to see.” She, however, observed that “It is paramount to note that some religions are still skeptical or find the text more useful using the media might negate some of their religious traditions.”

Weighing in on how religious institutions in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular use media to communicate, Fr. Malachy Clement Wache, a PhD student at the Center for the Study of African Culture and Communication (CESACC), Catholic Institute of West Africa, (CIWA), Port Harcourt, Nigeria made the point that the media in Nigeria is mostly used for preaching/exhortation of the word of God [24]. “Sometimes it is equally used to promote gospel music. This is usually done using the main stream media. The sporadic use of the new media is usually done by individual efforts and not the church as an institution” said he. Fr. Benjamin Achi is a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu and the Director of Communications' Enugu Diocese [25]. He agrees that religious institutions in Africa on the average have developed the consciousness of deploying the media in their communication needs and in the work of evangelization. Achi noted that that consciousness seems to be more. However, he stressed that “that consciousness is more among Pentecostals and Evangelicals than one would find among mainline churches. Many of the Pentecostal churches for instance have established radio and satellite television channels through which they reach much larger audience within the continent and beyond.”

Dr. Jude Udenkwo sees the Church in good light as far as the use of social media for evangelisation in Nigeria is concerned. He opines that, “The use of Media communication in Africa amongst religious institutions per se has been a successful means of information dissemination because of trust and originality.” Bearing his mind on the matter, Mr. Onyeka Uzowulu, said, “Yes, religious institutions in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular use media to communicate” [26].

Others think differently. For example, the Communication's Director of Zaria Diocese, Rev. Fr. Peter Ogwuche is of the view that “religious institutions in Africa and Nigeria in particular are yet to perfect the use of the media to communicate” [27]. He insisted that “while Catholics were not doing well, other Christian denominations are doing better.” For the Communication's Director of Sokoto Diocese, Rev. Fr. Chris Omotosho, “most religious institutions in Africa use the orthodox media methods to communicate viz planned and recorded programmes, films, etc” [28]. The two directors share the same opinion that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is not doing well in terms of the use of social media.

Another priest to support this view is the Communication's Director of Uromi Diocese. Fr. Leonard Elomien revealed that “Religious Institutions in Nigeria, in my view, do not use social media enough to communicate” [29]. Another lay Catholic from Lagos Archdiocese, Mr. Chika Alike, who was interviewed, stressed that

religious institutions in Nigeria use Daily Bible Reading/Teaching, through Social Media outlets to communicate. This perspective is corroborated by the Director of Communications of Ogoja Diocese, Cross River State, Fr. Emmanuel Eroh who insisted that “the rate of social media activities in religious circles in my view is low. We see fragmented use of media in Churches, institutions and among priests and sisters.”

When asked what about the giant strides of the Catholic Church as regards the use of social media, Fr. Dr. Umoh said, “Honestly, if there are any strides at all, of the Catholic Church in Nigeria regarding the use of social media, they would largely be pockets of efforts made by very few individual Bishops and dioceses, priests, Communication Directors and some lay Catholics” [19]. He further explained: “Because all these efforts are disjointed and uncoordinated without any meaningful structure, they are hardly effective or visible. That is what is lacking in the communication plan of the Church which consequently poses a major challenge to the office of the National Directorate of Social Communications” [19]. For Godonu, “at the moment the Catholic Church is present in all media communications even though it still needs to trickle down to the grass-roots Churches”.

On the same question, Uwah said, “The Church is yet to make some giant strides” while revealing that “The reason for the insignificant use of social media services in the Church is first of all because of the conservative nature of the Church and lack of adequate support and training given to youngsters in media use” [19]. However, he noted that “This can be overturned if the Church can empower her youths more by creating as a matter of necessity, blogs, Facebook platforms, YouTube channels that are made functional and active as a matter of urgency.” Sr. Tanko holds a different opinion: “Giant strides of the Catholic Church in Nigeria include, the establishment of the Directorate of Social Communication at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), administration of various social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube and existence of social media groups as SIGNIS, CAMPAN, Mission and Dialogue platforms (mainly for Priests and Religious – including those in the diaspora) that provide opportunities for shared knowledge, exchange of ideas and social interaction”.

Making a similar point, Mrs. Okaro argues that although the Catholic Church in Nigeria appreciates media-use such as “projector, television and public addressing systems” however, “all the words read by the ministers must be from the text” [23]. Another respondent, Wache takes the argument from there to insist that “There is no giant stride in the Church as regard the use of media” [24]. He contends that “The Catholic Church in Nigeria has not popularized social media. Very few dioceses, institutions and parishes have active social media accounts” [24.]

Fr. Achi holds a contrary opinion. He posits that giant strides exist in the use of social media in the Church in Nigeria such as “opening of social media handles which is now found at all levels beginning from the Holy See. Papal audiences or special celebrations at the Vatican can now be followed from the comfort of one's home just by a single click on a smart phone” (2021). He sustains this position by saying, “Back home, virtually every Catholic Diocese in Nigeria, for example, has at least a Facebook page through which they share volumes of contents for the consumption of the

faithful. Because of what a strong force the social media have become in our age and time, such channels usually get impressive followership as many now depend on those platforms for their information and enlightenment on virtually every matter and aspect of life, religion inclusive” [25].

Using concrete examples, Udenkwo maintained that the Catholic Church in Nigeria has made several bold statements as regards the use of social media like expanding the terms of reference for Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) to oversee excesses on the use of social media as well as encouraging the use of various social media platforms especially during laity week programme to further educate parishioners on the core ethics of communication. Ogwuche concurs that “Like any other human beings, and like any other human organizations, the Catholic Church also uses the social media to receive and disseminate information” [27.]

In his list of giant strides as regards the use of social media, Omotosho mentioned “creation of platforms on social media for the celebration of Holy Mass, preaching, teaching as well as inter and intra communication” [28]. Sharing a similar thought, Elomien disclosed that “the Catholic Church has developed a lot of theoretical frameworks to encourage the use of the social media [29]. Several documents have been issued.” He, however, decried that “What is lacking is a visible presence” [29]. Alike emphasized that what she considers as giant strides in the use of the Social Media in Catholic Church is that “more number of Catholic and non-Catholics are now able to access messages from the comfort of their homes” [30]. Toeing the same line, Eroh the presence of Catholic TV seems to have bridged the digital gap [31].

When asked what if the Church encourages Catholics to use social media, the Head of the Communication office of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Fr. Umoh stated, “Of course, the Church believes very much in not only the social media, but in the power of the media as a whole and encourages all Catholics, all pastoral agents to engage the media responsibly both for their social use and for the task of evangelisation. The Church has often been in the forefront of development and use of the media in the past, but slacked at a point in history, when it became suspicious of the media and adopted more of the censorship position”.

Speaking further, he clarified that “Many documents of the Church and papal letters on media and communications have very positive attitude to the media” but observed that “In spite of that, it is one thing to have these documents and recommendations, implementing the recommendations therein is totally a different matter. So it is the problem between theory and praxis. In theory, the Church strongly encourages the engagement with the media, but many Church personnel are yet to respond positively to the call” Umoh [19]. Godonu admits that necessary efforts have been made by all Catholic parishes and faithful in general in deploying social media as a veritable tool for evangelization [20].

While admitting that the Church has made some appearance on social media platforms, Uwah notes “there is need for improvement especially in Nigeria where Pentecostals are topping the lead in terms of ownership of broadcast media houses and hosting rights on television and radio channels” [21]. Another interviewee who

favoured the use of social media by the faithful in Nigeria, Tanko said, “Certainly, the Church encourages the use of social media very much in positive ways” [22]. She argued that “The existence of significant social media groups that are mainly Catholics for sheer purposes of education, information dissemination, exchange of ideas, thoughts and for socialization are appreciable” [22].

This position does not differ from that of Mrs. Okaro who stated that the hierarchy in Nigeria encourages the use of social media by the faithful but explained that “it depends on the exposure, experience and perception of the parish priest about social media” [23]. She also maintained that: “On a whole, contemporary priests welcome the use of social media; this is the 21st century. The world has gone digital; digitalization has come to stay”. Wache, a PhD student in Pastoral/Communication studies at CIWA agrees with the view above that “the Universal Church has been encouraging the use of social media since the publication of the document *Inter Mirifica* in the last century” but that “in Nigeria, the encouragement and usage are still at the theory level”.

For Achi, a Lecturer of Mass Communication and Communications Director, while the leadership of the Catholic Church partially encourages its members to use social media, “the Evangelicals seem to appreciate the efficacy of the media more than mainline Churches like the Catholic Church” [25]. He also explained that, nonetheless, “the consciousness got more in the past year with the unprecedented advent of the novel Coronavirus with the attendant lockdown. It was within the context of the lockdown on account of the pandemic, that some dioceses and respective parishes in Nigeria for instance, attempted a live streaming of their liturgical celebrations for the first time. Many have discontinued after the lockdown but some, however, have maintained the practice.”

Presenting a similar interesting perspective, Udenkwo said, “Social media recently has taken a near central stage as the fastest information dissemination. Most priests enjoy using it such that parishes have Facebook groups, WhatsApp group and so on” (2021). Taking a middle ground, Ogwuche observed that “There is no special emphasis particularly directed to Catholics to use the social media” but that “It is the product of the society to which the Catholics belong” [27]. He is not alone in this school of thought. This is because, Omotosho emphatically maintained that “The encouragement [of Catholics to use social media] is still skewed although it's allowed”.

Others who seem to suggest that the Church has not done enough to encourage Catholics to use social media think that “the Church needs to be more present in the social media space. Much is still to be done by religious institutions to explore the benefits of the media. This will further help to encourage more persons to come into the social media world” [29]. This is also the opinion of Eroh who lamented that “there are restrictions here and there” and the fact that “some communications Directors are not given the leverage to engage the public or government in the name of the Church” [31]. Uzowulu says, the Church has not done enough [26].

On the factors militating against effective use of social media by the Catholic Church in Nigeria, Umoh blamed the problem on formation when he disclosed that: “The strongest point would be the dearth of exposure of seminarians and Church personnel to

media training while on formation [19]. If for nine to ten years a seminarian is on training, very little or nothing is said about the media in the midst of so many wide varieties of ecclesiastical and secular courses he is exposed to, the natural impression would be that the media is of no relevance to his function as a priest. This alone has adverse ripple effect on the use of media in the Catholic Church and on the attitude of priests. This lack of exposure translates into lack of interest and value for media and communications and it was one great oversight in the Seminary curriculum. But it is heartening to note that some seminaries and formation houses are already correcting this.”

He also stressed that “The difference between the natures of the Church and of the media also causes apprehension of the media in the Church circle. In this regard, whereas the Church may be described as conservative, slow and dogmatic, the modern media is fast and always searching for new things and seems to operate on the free and liberal ideology. This causes a form of conflict particularly for a pastoral agent who is not exposed to the dynamics of the media.” Godonu identifies “the economic factor and the inability of the policy makers to make data cheaper and available to all” while mentioning the “factors of ignorance and poverty” [20]. Others blame the inability to use new media on lack of interest and expertise [21].

Other experts reveal the factors that militate against the use of social media as lack of media literacy among Catholics which is supposed to engender critical thinking skills in them in terms of accessibility and consumption of social media products, the spread of fake news, poor network resulting in the inability to access valuable information in time or at all times, quick consumption rate of data occasioned by GSM Operators’ manipulation of communications technologies [22]. Other factors are fake news which spreads false information/news fast, reduces or eliminates face to face socialization, brings about high risk of identity theft on social media, exposes people to inappropriate content such as pornography, causes distractions invasion of people’s privacy and mismanagement and or lack of funding by those in charge [23].

As well, lack of trained personnel, poor media infrastructural facilities, electricity challenge, poor internet penetration, and timidity on the part of Church leaders especially digital immigrants have also been identified as reason militating against the use of social media by the Church in Nigeria [24]. In a similar direction, Achi simply conceives the reasons militating against the effective use of social media by the Catholic Church in Nigeria lack of interest, lack of expertise or requisite skills, lack of adequate tools [25]. Fear, inadequate internet, lack of been media savvy are also to blame. There is also an impression that “The other millions of available contents on social media could be a distraction [26].

Umoh is of the view that “if the national office for Social Communications at the Catholic Secretariat repositions and redefines the communication structure and apparatus in the Catholic Church in Nigeria,” it better results would be achieved [19]. He points to “the growing consensus among the bishops of Nigeria (CBCN)” a positive step. “More Bishops are now paying serious attention to the communication office in their diocese by sending more priests for training as pastoral communicators, appointing those trained in this field to manage the communications office in the diocese

and financially supporting the offices. This is already a step in the right direction and should bear positive fruits in the overall attitude towards the use of the social media and even the traditional media” said he [19].

“To show how committed and determined the Bishops are towards uplifting the media culture in the Church in Nigeria, the CBCN approved that in 2022, there will be a Communication Week celebration instead of the usual oneday event. This will provide the opportunity to take media formation to the grassroots (parishes). It is hoped that through this programme, more Catholics will be more informed about the teachings of the Church concerning media and the youth will become more challenged and integrated to the Church as we open the avenue for them to learn and express themselves in their natural areopagus; a general growth of media culture in the Catholic Church Community in Nigeria is an urgent need” [19].

In attempt to find a road map for the Church, he stated that “Because the social media is a relatively new phenomenon, there is need for the national office to produce a social media policy for the Church where the rules and guidelines of how best to engage with the social media are clearly stated. This will save pastoral agents from falling into many possible dangers that dot the social media landscape” [19]. The diocesan directors and directors for religious congregations need to be formed into a cohesive unit under the national directorate and given a sense of direction. To this end, there should be a lot of training and retraining [19].

Others think that more public enlightenment on the proper use of social media and efforts at helping the young to understand prudent use of social media are key [20]. Situating the answer in the context of what economic hardship and insecurity in Nigeria, a communication expert “Because as a nation we are in a critical period, Catholics need to be encouraged by leadership of the Church to engage actively with all media so as to broaden their perspectives on happenings in and around their environment and the global world. This can take the form of advocacy, media literacy or education with the sole aim of empowering Catholics [20]. Mrs. Amaka thinks that: “The Roman Catholic Church should be more relative than rigid towards the use of social media”.

There are upcoming African scholars in communication who are of the opinion that the Church should train personnel in the field of modern technology to manage its social media accounts, establish a befitting structure which supports inclusion of modern means of social communication and work towards making internet accessible and affordable to her members [24]. Some teachers of Mass Communication feel that “the Church authority must see the need for the use of these platforms in the work of evangelization like publishing valuable content for faith-formation. The amount of followership and influence that the dedicated Facebook pages and YouTube channels of some individual priest’s command, tells us how much impact the Church can make when she rises to the occasion to make more effective use of social media channels [25].

Udenkwo recommends administrative control because he thinks that spreading information needs close monitoring. A media expert who is a priest is of the view that “a general social medium platform should be created for the use of Catholics in Nigeria, like

the Facebook. This will enable Catholics to have an account and participate at a general level. What we have today (WhatsApp) does not allow for a general participation [27]. A lay faithful feels that “a windowed and direct usage of social media by the Catholic Church would be beneficial [26].

Social Media in the Eyes of the Church: Summation of Views and Opinions

There are various views and opinions regarding the slow acceptance and use of social media by Catholics in Nigeria. However, for the purpose of convenience, we shall highlight five possible reasons for this development namely, secrecy, conservatism, fear, suspicion and ignorance:

- ❖ **Secrecy:** There is a perspective that the Church is slow in embracing social media because it is largely secretive in nature. It has been argued that: “This secrecy is meant to protect the external mission of the Church under difficult - sometimes even life-threatening-conditions. This has been brought into relief particularly in the West through blatant State meddling in ecclesiastical affairs over the centuries” [32]. The provision of The Catechism of the Catholic Church that: “[t]ruthfulness keeps to the just mean between what ought to be expressed and what ought to be kept secret, it entails honesty and discretion” (No. 2469) seems to provide reason why the average catholic is likely to use social media with caution. The argument which is sustained notes that because the Church operates within a diverse, multi-religious, cultural and political milieu, if it opens up too much to the world, other people might take advantage of the situation and paint her black. This mentality has affected some Pastors of souls to the extent that they always preach against the use of Facebook, WhatsApp et al in their Churches.
- ❖ **Conservatism:** The Church in Nigeria is largely conservative because it “holds on to conservative values, despite pressure from an increasingly liberal world” [33]. To this end, a good number of Catholics are conservative about the use of social media. Their lack of willingness to happily embrace the use of social media platforms for both personal and pastoral reasons is alarming. This behaviour is further reinforced by the refusal of some priests to personally use these media handles and so discourage their members from using them. While this is on, some Pentecostal churches are taking advantage of the situation for sheep-stealing and encouraging their members to make Church donations online.
- ❖ **Fear:** The profiling of Catholic priests in the United States of America as a result of the sex scandals of some few priests created fear in most members of the clergy. The biased and often exaggerated reportage of the said events by the international media and circulation of these views on social media platforms sort of intimidated many clerics. The ripple effects were felt in Nigeria. Currently, the way in which stories of Pastors of souls who are caught up in one scandal or the other are trendy on social media platforms creates fear in clerics who are often forced to maintain a low profile or go into hiding. As a result, there is fear of misuse and perversion of social media. Udenkwo is of the view that fear limits the Church from embracing social media for evangelization [34].
- ❖ **Suspicion:** Because there are a lot of fake Facebook, Twit-

ter and WhatsApp accounts, many people are circumspect of using social media. For example, some “mischievous people created social media accounts for the Pope and were posting things not said by the Pope. Even Archbishop Kaigama has had three Facebook accounts created using his name. I get people accepting friendship invitations I have not sent. Social media could be dangerous, but is quite useful. Religious organisations should simply get smart at out-smarting mischievous people and use the media to communicate positive values. We can’t neglect it because of the pitfalls” [34]. Besides that, the antecedents of the secular press occasioned by the fear outlined previously create suspicion between the Church and the secular media. What is more, it is crucial to note that what is reported by the secular media whether it is true or false is what is discussed on social media. After all, it is the media that sets the agenda for the society. Most social media handles rely on newsfeeds from traditional media. When those newsfeeds are anti-Church and some people take advantage of them to lambast the Church about certain issues, it creates suspicion between the Church and the said media.

- ❖ **Ignorance:** A lot of people are ignorant about the use or misuse of social media [35]. They are not aware that other people can take advantage of this perceived ignorance to put them in trouble; they are not aware that each message they transmit or receive through any social media platform is automatically stored and can be reproduced if there is demand for it; for instance, they are not aware of certain features on Smartphones’ Facebook handle which can merge the picture of two callers into one making it look real. In law, it is said, “Ignorance is not an excuse for breaking the law.” The same can be applied for the use of social media. As things stand, the explosion of social media platforms is not likely to abate. What this translates to is that, it is no longer fashionable to be ignorant about the use or misuse of social media.

The unwillingness of the Catholic Church in Nigeria to embrace new media may be as a result of what St. Augustine calls “the problem of deception in religious persuasion.” Augustine settles for the idea of employing persuasion for the mission of the Church even as he warns against deception which presently abounds on Social Media platforms [36]. Augustine calls for vigilance and diligence in the use of social media which he refers to at his own time as “persuasion.” This is the innocuous and subliminal danger inherent in the application of persuasion (social media).

Pope Paul VI’s Inter Mirifica enunciates the fact that the Churches in Africa and in this context the Nigerian Catholic Church have not shied away from embracing the application of social media. This is because it offers people a channel to share ideas, content and thoughts and also engage in various relationships online. As such, rather than abandon traditional media, it would be beneficial to employ both traditional and social media simultaneously for evangelisation. After all, the old traditional forms of media are still being used because they have been digitized into electronic formats (e-newspapers, radio, e-T.V. magazines, etc.).

Limitation of the Study

Given that this paper uses the qualitative method of study, it does not pretend to have the last say about the subject under investi-

gation. Suffice it to opine that qualitative surveys often rely on existing data for information upon which judgement is made. As it is, the researchers relied on secondary data from various sources as basis for argument. For this reason, the authors advocate for further quantitative survey on how the Church in Nigeria views social media. Since this method involves employing the instruments of research such as interview, pools and distribution of questionnaires, primary data from that research is likely to have greater impact since it would reveal phenomena the way they are.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the study discovered that the culture of secrecy, conservatism, suspicion and ignorance are responsible for the inability of the Church in Nigeria to take advantage of the proliferation of the tools of ICT to use social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp for the purpose of evangelisation. Given that the demands of new evangelisation gives leverage to priests, religious and members of the laity to fulfil their baptismal commitments of embracing the call to holiness and recruiting others for the kingdom through verbal and actionable witnessing based on the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:16:19), the study has suggested possible ways of mitigating slowness in taking advantage of the instruments of social media for the purpose of evangelisation.

In the light of this study, the Collective Intelligence theoretical framework is used in this study because it helps the people of God to use social media for the purpose of evangelisation. Knowing ones' environment is key to appreciating the use of social media. For example, where social networks do not exist or there is poor network, it limits the use of social media by all. Also, the learning process helps the people of God to be media savvy even as it assists them to appreciate the context, discourse, action, reflection of sacred scripture online towards reorganization of areas where social media is used for unwholesome reasons. Only a conscious socially mediated meta-cognition can make people appreciate which type of social media to use, at what time for what purpose.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

1. **Openness to Media Protocol:** While in the first part of *Inter Mirifica* the Council Fathers established the aim of social communication as the enlightenment and enrichment of people's minds for the consolidation of God's kingdom, in the second part, they noted that it is the birthright of the Church to own and use the means of communication because they are useful for the formation and pastoral activity of Christians. It means that without openness and sincerity, these cannot be achieved. The traditional nature of the Church makes it conservative. The down side of this is that social media which operates on virtual space creates a platform for faceless people to attack the Church or its policies. "The Church has often been in the forefront of development and use of the media in the past, but slacked at a point in history, when it became suspicious of the media and adopted more of the censorship position" [19].

To mitigate this, the Church through the Directorate of Social Communications at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) needs to create mechanisms for openness and transparency so as to engage with media protocol of the secular press. With these mechanisms in place, the erstwhile culture of secrecy

about matters of public interest relating to the Church and the State would be better handled. That way, important matters would not be left at the mercy of comments and opinions of amateurs on social media platforms.

2. **Debuting Social Media Code of Ethics:** While Pope Pius XII recommended the formation of Church structures at both diocesan and national levels for directing the affairs of motion picture, radio and television in *Miranda Provisus*, in *Vigilanti Cura* Pope Pius XI maintained that the production of films should be inspired by Christian moral principles which do not harm religious and social sensibilities. As such, the onus lies on the Church to as a matter of urgency come up with ethical principles guiding the use of social media handles. Advisably, these moral codes should be drawn from the rich ethical principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and contain things like prayer before and after using the internet, moral implications of surfing pornography and the benefits of showcasing Catholic Action online. These guidelines should empathize that "what is published must be true and there must be sensitivity towards any damage to reputation and dignity of individuals and groups [34].
3. **Setting Up a Social Media Commission:** In view of the provisions of *Inter Mirifica* which made a case for complete formation on the rudiments of social communication, publication of a pastoral instruction for effective implementation of the rules of the Council on the means of social communication and establishment of the Pontifical Council for Communication, schools, institutes and faculties, it has become expedient for the Church in Nigeria to set up a social media commission or committee under the Directorate of Social Communications with clear policies. "There is need for the national office to produce a social media policy for the Church where the rules and guidelines of how best to engage with the social media are clearly stated" [19]. The terms of reference for this commission or committee should include monitoring online activities which put the Church in bad light as well as neutralising the abuse of social media across the length and breadth of the country. If anything, the Church would by this action be rendering its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the Nigerian State.
4. **Media Training/Education:** It must be acknowledged that illiteracy impedes the application of social media for evangelization in places where it is high. Because non-literate citizens may not be interested in the use of the internet or social media, it is crucial to address the high level of illiteracy in Nigeria. This is because in many African countries, a greater majority of the population in the Church not too literate which minimizes the Church's attempt to employ social media extensively for evangelization.

In line with the provisions of *Aetatis Novae* and *Communio et Progressio* which made a case for education and training of both communicators and recipients on Christian principles so as to be true citizens of the age of social communication, the need for training and retraining of priests and would-be priests, religious and novices or postulants and members of the laity on the pros and cons of social media is a dire one. Since the abuse of social media for un-

wholesome reasons is often blamed on ignorance, giving capacity building through symposia, seminars and workshops on the effective use of social media handles would go a long way in reducing the menacing effects of wrong social media-use within and outside the Church in Nigeria. Media formation for young people at the grassroots (parishes) would help [19].

There should also be provision for appropriate and updated pastoral formation for Catechists, Catholic teachers and communicators who are adequately formed and trained to be competent in integrating the new age technology and the digital media in their work [15]. Part of this media literacy is: "Make diocesan newsletters, parish bulletins and notice boards attractive and interactive platforms for catechesis so as to encourage and facilitate faith formation, participation of the faithful in the discourse weekly presented in them, with children-compliant input as well. This requires considerable planning, expertise and goodwill" [15].

5. Social Media Legislation/Monitoring: Much as there are fears that social media legislation has the tendency to stifle press freedom and freedom of expression as enshrined in both the constitution and FOA, the lack of clear laws on the matter is daily increasing the number of criminals who cause harm and injury to unsuspecting members of the public. With the current code of ethics for journalists which has the approval of the Nigerian Press Organisation, this study recommends that the Nigerian Press Council, the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Nigeria Guild of Editors and other related government institutions should galvanise support towards demanding that the government through the National Communications Commission, Legislature, Judiciary and Executive come up with robust cyber-related laws to curb the menace [37]. This demand should also take into cognisance the voice of stakeholders within the media industry, NGOs, religious bodies, traditional leaders, captains of industrious and other spirited individuals. Most importantly too, because "there are lots of scams on social media - religious groups can take due advantage [of social media] ... [and] monitor to ensure the content is from them [34].
6. Implementation of the Provisions of Vatican II: As a matter of urgency, the recommendation of part six and seven of Aetatis Novae which encourages Pastoral Planning for Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences or Assemblies to include components of communication in all their pastoral plans as well as a tentative guideline for realistic plans towards mass media evangelisation strategy should be fully implemented by particular Churches and the CBCN [7]. Church leaders need to diversify their strategies for evangelisation like using social media as veritable tools for reaching out to those who cannot be reached physically or meeting young people in their comfort zone that is, in a terrain they are at home with [13].
7. Being an Active Participant in Social Media-Use: The Church cannot engage the new media for good if she remains a passive spectator. As such, she must take to the various platforms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, 2go, Pinterest, Snapchat, Skype, Facetime and blogs et al for the purpose of evangelisation [13]. The leadership of the Church needs to encourage the faithful to engage

actively with all media [22].

Conclusion

In attempting to critique the social media in the eyes of the Church in Nigeria, we saw that the media has limitless possibilities. The study revealed that while the Church is not opposed to the use of new technologies such as Facebook and WhatsApp platforms, it nonetheless calls for caution especially where using them infringes on both conscience and moral ethical codes of conduct as enshrined in the reviewed documents of the Church on the means of social communication. Despite this laudable provision, the study regrettably discovered that the Church in Nigeria does not have a blueprint legislation on social media-use for its teeming faithful. This is dangerous because of the large followership of its faithful in the use of these media handles.

In Aetatis Novae, the Pope urges the Church to speak for the poor by providing them with an alternative means of communication. A useful alternative means of communication would be social media as a tool for evangelization. Although there is an apparent misuse of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pininterest, etc. in the country, this should not deter the Church from employing to reach out to the younger generation in Nigeria. We have seen that there are interviewees who argued that the Church's use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is minimal. This position acknowledges that the Church employs "traditional Media" more as opposed to the use of "New Media." Eroh insists that the rate of social media activities in religious circles is low (2021). There is a perception that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is not doing well in terms of the use of social media, Therefore, rather than play the ostrich, the authors advocate for a careful review of extant ecclesial documents on the means of social communication in line with the ethical standards of the Church as basis for a holistic framework for social media legislation [27, 28]. Once again, it is expected that the CSN through the National Directorate of Social Communication would soon put to rest the lacuna on social media guidelines for Facebook, WhatsApp and other online platforms. This is likely to guide the faithful aright who hitherto were using social media with guilty consciences.

Beyond this, the erstwhile mentality that advances in mass media and communication are intrinsically evil is primitive and unacceptable. This thinking neither promotes scholarship nor does it enhance smooth Church-State relations. Fr. Evaristus Bassey is of the view that "Social media has come to stay [34]. If you are not there, you are cutting yourself off." It is safe then to conclude that since social media has come to stay. As such, in the light of the Collective Intelligence theoretical framework, the Catholic Church in Nigeria would do itself good if set its own benchmark for engaging with new media technologies while fulfilling the mission of Christ on earth.

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