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Implications of Cyberspace Technologies on the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kenya

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Abstract:

Traditionally, direct physical operations were the main ways churches used to enlarge their presence. However, today, this has been assumed by cyberspace technologies, thereby giving the church another way of being and realizing her mission. Many church congregants, particularly the youth, are found in cyberspace technological platforms for various purposes, and many church activities are realized through cyberspace technologies. However, the critical gap that this study endeavored to investigate is that Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) churches in Nyanchwa Station employ cyberspace technologies sometimes without a proper understanding of their negative implications. Also, the church seems to be doing little to overcome the limitations of cyberspace technologies for the good of its congregants. The study employed the critical theory of technology to evaluate the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church.

Keywords: *Implications, cyberspace technologies, church reality, internet*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, direct physical operations were the main ways churches used to enlarge their presence. However, today, this has been assumed by cyberspace technologies, thereby giving the church another way of being and realizing its mission. Through internet-related technologies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, live streaming media, a collection of blogs, texting, and so on, church congregants can overcome the boundaries of space and time. As argued by Tan (2009), social interactions have become part of the church's pastoral ministry. Therefore, if it does not embrace cyberspace technologies, then she is bound to be left behind. Under this caution, the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) churches, in their attempts to fulfil the missionary mandate of Christ to go out to all nations to preach the Good News, have opted to embrace cyberspace technologies to reach out to uncharted horizons to share the message of Christ. Therefore, this study sought to evaluate both the positive and the negative implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station in the spheres of religious experience, symbolic and ritual life of the church, internet connectivity, church attendance, individualism and human interactions, knowledge of ICTs, worship wars among believers, misuse of cyberspace technologies, spiritual development of members, religious instructions, religious data storage, financial management and formation Church communities.

1.1. Statement of the Study

In today's technological society, the use of cyberspace technologies has greatly changed the operations of the church. Many people, particularly the youth, are found in cyberspace using cyber technologies for various purposes. Many church activities are realized through cyberspace technologies. For instance, church members and others who cannot attend face-to-face activities can partake in the same activities. Cyberspace technologies have multiple implications on the operations of the Church, especially in the areas of worship, pastoral worship, formation of religious communities in cyberspace platforms, proclamation of the Word, religious instructions, and fellowship (Ossai-Ugbah, 2011). There is no doubt that cyberspace technologies have tremendous positive implications for the church.

However, the critical gap that this study endeavored to investigate is that SDA churches in Nynachwa Station employ cyberspace technologies sometimes without a proper understanding of their negative implications. Also, the church seems to be doing little to overcome the limitations of cyberspace technologies for the good of its congregants.

2. Literature Review

Cyberspace technologies have multiple implications for the operations of the Church, especially in the areas of pastoral worship, the formation of religious communities in cyberspace platforms, the proclamation of the Word, religious instructions, and fellowship (Ossai-Ugbah, 2011). Laney (2005) had earlier affirmed that religious websites offer a wealthy depository of religious issues available to serve various interests ranging from and not limited to religious radio and television channels and the websites for churches and ministry, organizational and personal homepages that offer religious content for the spiritual development of users and other secular material that address other aspects of the lives of the Church congregants.

Churches have websites that allow users to post messages and communicate with each other on church matters, especially those sites that include message boards and forums. Such websites serve the purposes of reinforcing religious beliefs, establishing relationships, and engaging them more on church issues. This is emphasized by Adebayo (2019), who observes that websites have multiple usages such as posting of church sermons, Bible study outlines, devotional messages, prayer wishes, outlines of Sunday School lessons, short quotes, announcements, information about the church and its educational ministries, and so on. Jones (2011) posits that emerging cyberspace technologies are creating a new form of congregationalism – a virtual 'relational ecclesiology'. This means that online church engagements should not be construed as merely a new type of media outreach but, more fundamentally, a modified form of being a church and carrying out its operations beyond traditional physical forms.

Through cyberspace technologies, Church members and others who do not have the possibility of attending face-to-face activities are able to partake in the same activities. Ukah (2003) affirmed that multimedia evangelical activities involve concerted use of graphics, text, audio, video, data projection, PowerPoint sermons, Webinar, Zoom, teleconferencing music slides, sermon recordings, music recordings, WhatsApp accounts, Twitter accounts, Facebook accounts, sermons on YouTube, bulk SMS, advertisements, and animation to communicate the Gospel message. However, then, all these operations need technological tools such as telephones, digital cameras, microphones, amplifiers, loudspeakers, projectors, screens, television sets, tape recorders, video or VCD recorders, computers, iPads, iPods, iPhones, and tablets.

Technologies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Badoo, Instagram, etc., offer an incredible opportunity for the Church to reach out to members all over the world. Through them, online communities of the faithful who share common interests and/or activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others are enabled. The use of these social media platforms and technologies by the Church is to engage congregants and communities and motivate and encourage them to virtually share their issues with those they consider apt. Jewell (2004) claims that instant messaging (IM) apps are used with smartphones and other technological tools that support them, like WhatsApp Messenger, Telegram Messenger, Skype, and the like, are used for various purposes, including giving the Church a voice to reach a worldwide audience. They enable Church members easy access to any kind of information they want to have that builds their faith and also enable the church to operate with ease.

Despite the tremendous contribution of cyberspace technologies to the well-being of the church, the same technologies are accompanied by negative impacts. For instance, Dawson (2005) contests that the culture of cyberspace technological arrangements, with its individualistic, pagan approaches and iconoclastic tendencies, is abstemiously opposed to the traditional physical expression of religiosity. Dawson further argues that with cyberspace technology used in the church, there is a tendency to reduce inter-community spiritual activities to mere provision and exchange of emails with less sharing and discussion of inspiring religious content. The embracement of cyberspace technologies with all the virtual activities that define it has the tendency to reduce or even undermine the sense of a true sense of religious gathering in terms of verbal exchanges of religious experiences. Dawson (2005) recommended a qualitative study on virtual rituality that enhances religious worship for the formidable religious experience, entailing real physical time for participating within the context and determination of face-to-face interactions. The same sentiments are reiterated by Nilles (2012), who argued that the use of cyberspace technologies creates a situation of Church gadgets without human interactions. In Nilles' thinking, human communication, whether interpersonal or group, is crucial in defining the church.

Since social media communication is often a private affair, individualism tends to override any other community aspect of the church. The self-determined activity promoted by cyberspace technologies reflects the concept of 'networked individualism' for the understanding and regard of online religion. Wellman (2001), explaining the problem of individualism brought by cyberspace church operations, argues that 'rather than fitting into the same group as those around them', 'each congregant has his/her own "personal church community', supplying 'the essentials of community separately from other church congregants that use the technology: support, sociability, information, social identities, and a sense of online community belonging'. However, the great implication of this is that the sense of real face-to-face communication disappears endangered.

Fitzgerald (2014) contented that using cyberspace technologies in the church leads to a decline in Church attendance with all its entailed meanings. He explained that in countries like the United States of America, fewer Christians go to face-to-face Church because the rest are busy logging into the internet to feed themselves with the religious content they deem right. According to Fitzgerald (2014), there is a tendency for some Christian faithful, especially the young, to be lazy by not going to Church under the pretext that they can access the Church Service or prayers on mobile internet applications. This leads to a reduction in church attendance, which affects other aspects of the Church, like financial contributions. For instance, Onyulo (2020), referring to poor church attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic, asserted that offerings and tithes will continue to be low each week, affecting various outreach programs of the church.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo, Gmail, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, just to mention a few, are privately oriented, apart from the false sense of community they create through information sharing and communication with people we may not know or have seen, they equally entrench individualism in the church. Dawson (2005) argued that the creation of online church communities erodes the embodied social and natural actions of the church, such that cyber-religion and church may turn out to be more of an individual intellectual endeavor that has the danger of being agnostic.

There is also the challenge of Internet Connectivity. On this, Egere (2012) explained that in some African and Middle Eastern countries, the usage and installation of internet services are very poor. It is even more worrisome in rural Africa, where internet signals could disappear for days and weeks, and in the case of its presence, it is very slow. The 3G and smartphones that support internet communication are not easily available for everyone everywhere. This adversely affects the life of the church such that pastors and church members who are cut-off face serious challenges in the life of the church (Swain & Badenhorst, 2020).

3. Methodology

The study evaluated the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference. The study employed the critical theory of technology by Feenberg, which helped to critically bring out both the positive and negative aspects of cyberspace technologies used by the church. The study used a descriptive research design and data were collected using both a questionnaire and interview schedules. The sample size of the study was 178 participants from multiple clusters - 125 informants responded to the questionnaire, while 53 participated in the interview schedules, as shown in table 1.

Target Group	Sampling Procedure	Sample Size	Percentage
Pastors	Censors	13	7.3%
ICTs Technocrats	Purposive	22	12.4%
Old Lay Christians	Purposive	66	37.1%
Youth	Purposive	66	37.1%
Church Clerks	Censors	11	6.2%
Total		178	100%

Table 1: Target Group, Sampling Procedure, Sample Size and Percentage
Source: Researcher (2023)

Table 1 illustrates different categories of participants with the sole purpose of having a significant and varied representation of the respondents for the authenticity and accuracy of the study findings. Data was analyzed and presented using frequency tables and percentages.

4. Results and Discussions

Informed by the Critical Theory of Technology, the study evaluated the implications of cyberspace technologies on the reality of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kenya. The discussions of the results were facilitated by the Likert scale approach on specific themes as exemplified progressively by letters, where D=Disagree, SD=strongly disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA= strongly agree as shown in table 2 and corroborated with those from the interviews.

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Mechanization of Religious Experience	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.2%)	25 (20.0%)	57 (45.6%)	32 (25.6%)	125 (100%)
Reduces Symbolic and Ritual dimensions of the church	7 (5.6%)	12 (9.6%)	28 (22.4%)	44 (35.2%)	34 (27.2%)	125 (100%)
Decline in church attendance	8 (6.4%)	5 (4.0%)	26 (20.8%)	45 (36.0%)	41 (32.8%)	125 (100%)
Individualism and limited human interactions	6 (4.8%)	4 (3.2%)	20 (16.0%)	47 (37.6%)	48 (38.4%)	125 (100%)
Lack and limited knowledge of ICTs	11 (8.8%)	5 (4.0%)	22 (17.6%)	41 (32.8%)	45 (36%)	125 (100%)
Worship wars among believers	8 (6.4%)	9 (7.2%)	15 (12.0%)	48 (38.4%)	46 (36.8%)	125 (100%)
Misuse of cyberspace technologies	5 (4%)	10 (8%)	15 (12%)	50 (40%)	45 (36%)	125 (100)
Poor internet connectivity	4 (3.2%)	15 (12.0%)	14 (11.2%)	44 (35.2%)	48 (38.4%)	125 (100%)
High cost of a full-fledged IT Infrastructure	3 (2.4%)	7 (5.6%)	18 (14.4%)	45 (36.0%)	52 (41.6%)	125 (100%)

Table 2: Implications of Cyberspace Technologies on the SDA Church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kenya
Source: Researcher (2023)

The results in table 2 demonstrated that cyberspace technologies used by the church despite being good, also embed negative aspects that cannot be undermined by the church for its integrity. Data analysis considered specific aspects of the study. On the theme of mechanization of religious experience, 11 (9%) participants disagreed, 25 (20%) remained neutral, and 89 (71%) were in full agreement with this assertion. The findings are also echoed by those from the interviews where participants noted:

Instead of going to a pastor or spiritual leader and servant for advice, today, most church members, especially the young generation, refer to the web for religious and spiritual answers to their quests (KINF 13).

Complete reliance on cyberspace technologies for religious and church life has led to a lack of real taste in religious experience. Everything seems to be structured and withdrawn from individual direct experience of faith. When everything is mediated by cyberspace technologies, there are lots of distractions such that people are tempted to visit other sites during worship. This brings less concentration (KINF 7).

While another respondent from the interview was of a different opinion, saying:

Apart from the non-physical nature of the online cyber church, its activities of preaching, worshipping, bible study, testimonies, and prayers are determinant characteristics and functions of what a church is supposed to do more than worrying so much about the challenges (KINF 17).

The findings are consistent with Van Niekerk and Brimadevi (2017), who explained that religion is a matter of faith and spirituality places greater emphasis on direct experiences. Also, Barna Research Group (2015), in its Cyber Church Report, affirmed that about 100 million Americans rely upon the internet to transmit some aspects of their religious experience. While the study by Zhao (2019) informs that electronic communication is an era of multiplicity and secularization of religious beliefs and experiences. These texts and field findings point to both the benefits and dangers of cyberspace technologies to the church, which calls for the church to be cautious when choosing to employ specific technologies. Technology has both enabling and constraining implications for the church.

It is a fact that there is a lot of uncontrolled mediation of religious experience in cyberspace through its related technologies to the height that it has become a mechanical church exercise (Dawson, 2005). However, the point worth noting from the field and literature is that despite the benefits of online operations, there should be importance attached to the physical operations of the church. The findings are further in agreement with Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019), who informed that the power of cyberspace technologies as instruments for the realization of the church's mission reconstitutes in a manner of manipulating real religious and spiritual experience of the faithful, making them mere excitements or vice versa.

On the aspect of the reduction of symbolic and ritual dimensions of the church, 19 (15.2%) informants of the respondents disagreed, 28 (22.4%) were neutral, and 78 (62.4%) were in agreement with the assertion. Corroborating data from the interviews indicated:

With the use of cyberspace technologies to mediate the operations and mission of the church, it is impossible to celebrate some sacraments like marriage and baptism and other rituals that require the physical presence of the celebrating church community. For instance, as a Christian community, we cannot consider a virtual marriage to be an authentic marriage since it lacks basic rituals like physical contact. Marriage requires at least the physical presence of the couples, coming together physically on the date of their marriage to exchange their marriage contract promises (KINF 4)

Doing away with oral communication, where religious information is transmitted through voice symbols (such as chanting and playing instruments), body symbols (such as expressions, gestures, dances and other ritual acts), and image symbols, is impoverishing the symbolic meaning of religion and manifestations of religious faith (KINF 11).

I had interacted with a Catholic churchgoer who told me that the physical church building is an integral part of the faith of many people, where each part of the building has been given a series of symbolic codes and meanings related to the New and Old Testament rituals and icons. Such symbols enrich the faith and identity of the congregants. Some churches are decorated with different pictures with deep expressive icons with verses of scriptures accompanying each picture. Even in the SDA church, people's faith is attached to their physical place of worship, and if all this rich symbolic development is replaced by cyberspace church faith, then the symbolic religious faith of church members is equally thrown away (KINF 12).

However, another informant from the interviews citing 1 Peter 3 was of a different opinion:

What is important is not physical presence but the intention of those celebrating the sacrament. All sacraments are symbolic; hence, to argue for the celebrating community's physical presence is unnecessary. Putting emphasis on physical contact restricts people's concept of God and religious experience (KINF 27).

What is entailed in the field data is that it is doable to celebrate some of the sacraments through cyberspace platforms, but this may lead to a loss of religious meaning envisaged by the Holy Scriptures and the church. For instance, the celebration of baptism demands the physical presence of both parties to perform the rituals entailed. Most religious faiths and movements require a full body water immersion accompanied by a public confession from the person who is being baptized, and the person who is baptizing has to do it following certain formulae and rituals that cannot easily be carried out cybernetically. As argued by O'Leary (2005), cyberspace technologies can never replace ritual performance in a physical sacred space. Rituals are filled by face-to-face Church operations for the deepening of religious experience among the faithful; the physical nature of religious experience is still relevant and should not be undermined.

On cyberspace technological platforms and church attendance, the questionnaire findings showed that 13 (10.4%) of respondents disagreed with the claim, 26 (20.8%) remained neutral, and 86 (68.8%) completely agreed to the statement. These findings resonated well with those from the interview schedules where key informants argued:

What is the need to attend a physical church when I can comfortably have all the services on my computer or smartphone? Most young people have declined to participate in the physical church because they find all they need in the online cyberspace church mediated by cyberspace technologies (KINF 23).

The apparent media mania experienced among the young people in the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station creates a false sense of being comfortable with the "cyber-church" realized through cyberspace technologies rather than the real face-to-face ecclesial assembly of God's faithful (KINF 31).

The findings reverberated with those in the study by Fitzgerald (2014), which informed that the use of cyberspace technologies in the church leads to a decline in Church attendance, particularly in the US, where it is noted that fewer Christians go to face-to-face Church because the rest are busy logging into internet. There is a tendency for some Christian faithful, especially young people, not to go to Church under the pretext that they can access the church service or prayers on mobile internet applications and, therefore, have no need to physically be present in the church to undertake its activities. The field findings also resonate with Onyulo (2020), who, referring to poor church attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic, asserted that a reduction in church attendance also affects the Church's financial status, whereas a reduction in church offerings and tithes were experienced, thereby adversely affecting various outreach programs of the church. However, another flipside of this is that some members of the church, especially the orthodox ones, tend to take the Luddite stance on cyberspace technologies in relation to church operations and evangelical missions.

The study further considered the issue of individualism and limited human interactions in technologically determined cyberspace-based church operations. On this item, the questionnaire findings indicated that 10 (8%) of participants disagreed, 20 (16%) were neutral, and 95 (76%) were in support of the assertion. These findings were echoed by those from the interviews of which some of the participants indicated:

Having a church in the comfort of oneself online runs the risk of individuals replacing the sense of religious community life. Cyberspace platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on tend to create a false sense of community since, through them, we choose to share information with people we may not even know or have seen. Under this, the sense of a church community is swallowed by the individual's whims and impulses. Sometimes, we even share religious content with people who are not and do not want to be Christians, which is a barrier to sharing authentic Christian faith and experiences (KINF 15).

Direct human physical operations and interactions through interpersonal and group communication are crucial to the nature of the church and its existence. Connecting and interacting with other faithful face-to-face is essential for the individual and collective life of the church (KINF 31).

Since social media communication is often a private affair of its designers and managers, the sense of its application and implementation endangers real face-to-face communication. Internet-related technological platforms are not bad in themselves; they become a problem when technology becomes a substitute for church-human interactions (KINF 18).

The findings were in agreement with Nilles (2012), who posits that even though cyberspace technologies allow one to post a request for intercessory prayer, for example, and to receive some limited acknowledgement of the request or offers of spiritual counselling, human communication, whether interpersonal and group is crucial in defining the Church and her operations. Worshipping, reading, discussing thematic church and religious issues and asking questions are critical to individual spiritual development. However, having such interactions over text, email, or social media is not as effective or valuable as physical interactions. This is an aspect that gives the traditional church model its authenticity in defining the faith of the members that cannot be completely swept away by the technological development of the church's operations. Nilles (2012) further asserts that attempts to advocate and underline a sacred virtual space on the internet and its related technologies tend to threaten basic human communication and interaction among members. Thus, the use of the use of cyberspace technologies creates a situation of Church gadgets without human interactions. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo, Gmail, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, just to mention a few, are privately oriented. Moreover, Song (2009) argued that cyberspace technologies, especially internet-related ones, do not promote a sense of community life; it is not a suitable place for community building. In cyberspace platforms, it is not easy to know who the real participants are and what is their real identity because a person can claim who he is online, which may be a fake identity, without any proof for what he claims in the real world of religious communities. Popular websites frequently rely on the support of advertising revenue; they influence a consumerist mentality that favors the individual and undermines affiliation with wide social institutions, particularly the community dimension of faith.

The aspect of knowledge in cyberspace technological platforms was also considered important in the study. On this, the study sought to find out whether there was a lack of or limited knowledge of ICTs among church members. The questionnaire results showed that 16 (12.8%) participants disagreed with the statement, 22 (17.6%) remained neutral, and 87 (69.6%) were in full agreement with the statement. From the interviews, some respondents informed:

Despite the church's intent to embrace technology and even offer basic training, many congregants still do not have ICT skills and training that could build their use of cyberspace platforms for evangelical activities of the church (KINF 24).

Many pastors and other church groups, despite their willingness to embrace technology in the church, do not have ICT skills training that could build them in the use of cyberspace platforms for the evangelical activities of the church (KINF 20).

The findings raised the concern that not many church members were informed of the structured cybernized church platforms like church websites and other technologies. This meant that they lacked training to enable them to obtain basic skills in the use of social media platforms for church activities. In agreement with Lacy (2021), Mateus (2017) and Mckinney (2014), the study noted that training on the use of an electronic platform is a crucial factor in determining a church congregant's perception and use of cyberspace technologies. The church is not doing enough to equip its audience, especially those going into the ministry in the digitalized world (Jewell, 2005). The church is challenged to realize that technology is specific not only to technocrats but also to all users. Therefore, users need to understand the philosophy that defines the technologies they use if they are to benefit fully from them.

In the endeavor to understand more the flipside of cyberspace technologies used by the church, the further sought to find out their misuse. The findings indicated that 15 (12%) disagreed, 15 (12%) were neutral, and 95 (76%) affirmed that there is a misuse of cyberspace technologies in the operations of the SDA church. When asked in the interviews which technologies are mostly misused and how there were mixed reactions from the respondents as follows:

WhatsApp is the most misused platform, followed by Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These platforms, despite being used for religious purposes, also transmit harmful content devoted to defaming and attacking religious groups, particularly the SDA church (KINF 13).

Even among church members, especially the youth, it is customary to exchange tweets. However, these messages do not reflect Christian content due to the large-scale distribution and transfer of personal data on the network, which has led to hacking and disclosure of personal information to the public, thereby violating the privacy of individuals or groups (KINF 19).

The sterling challenge is not the scarcity of the information in the church but too much of it. It is practically hard to find where to start and how to reduce the huge amount of church information available on the internet and its related technologies. It is difficult to determine the reliability of the vast amount of available church information. It is equally difficult to determine the source and the authenticity of the avalanche of available church information (KINF 14).

In cyberspace online church communities, there are many false prophets and false teachers, people who swindle and take advantage of innocent church believers who authentically seek help for their daily problems. There is neither any effective supervision of the online church content nor supervision is given to those who access the available church content (KINF 21).

The salient issue from the findings was that while the internet and related technologies outstandingly uphold the evolution of religion, there are several kinds of false and unpleasant occurrences under its pretext of religion; there are issues of terrorism, religious extremism, network fraud, cults, and so on perpetuated through cyberspace technologies. The findings agree with Himma (2007b), who explained that cyberspace's secular nature, content and technologies tend to obscure those using them in a manner of not fully understanding religious and moral values because they are constantly challenged by the specific technologies they employ. Moreover, Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) warned that the capability of cyberspace technologies used in the church could reconstitute in a manner of manipulating real religious information and spiritual experience since the technological platforms used to make that information and spiritual experiences mere excitements or vice versa. Today, it is becoming impossible to distinguish strange doctrinal interpretations, personal devotional practices, and ideological advocacy carrying a church label from the authentic positions of the church. This is where knowledgeable church cyberspace users explained earlier is paramount. The withdrawal of the church's presence in cyberspace implies endorsing unreligious content in cyberspace technological platforms. As postulated by Magnani (2007), the same technological knowledge has become our moral duty in our technologically determined world. Thus, the SDA church membership, individually and collectively, should be creatively present in cyberspace platforms not just to witness the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in a technologically inundated environment but, more importantly, to evangelize it; there is a need to Christianize, spiritualize or even evangelize technology itself.

Related to the misuse of cyberspace technologies is the aspect of wars or tensions among church believers created by the use of cyberspace technologies. The findings on this indicated that 17 (13.6%) of the respondents disagreed, 15 (12%) were undecided, and 93 (74.4%) affirmed the existence of such tensions, especially between users of cyberspace technologies and non-users. This was echoed in the interviews where a participant informed:

The use of cyberspace technological platforms has made congregants not feel the taste of worship and prayer. Sometimes, when I attend a church service, all I hear is the noise of sophisticated audio machines that do not allow for meditation and reflection. Young people enjoy this kind of service while a majority of the old church members feel irritated by this kind of service (KINF 33).

From the findings, the study noted that tensions arise as a result of those who believe only in the traditional model of church where they assert that only traditional forms of worship are real worship, and anything beyond that is unacceptable. This was the position of the old members and those who hold a Luddite stance on technology use in church since they grew up in a faith defined by physical operations like singing from hymnals and having face-to-face interactions. The findings agreed with Hubert Spence (2002), who sustains that some older generations of church members prefer traditional church music sung from hymnals, while others are more adamant about their use and oppose any change in church music. The findings also agree with Woods et al. (2007), who assert that sometimes those who are against contemporary church music have valid concerns, claiming that the use of contemporary praise choruses tends to propagate shallow theological language that does not entail the same rich doctrinal depth of traditional hymns.

On the theme of poor internet power connectivity and disruptions of church activities, 19 (15.2%) of the respondents disagreed, 14 (11.2%) remained neutral, while the majority 92 (73.6%) were of the opinion that poor

internet connectivity is a major challenge to church communities that fully embrace technology. The findings were replicated in the interviews whereby key informants asserted:

Most often, when there is poor internet or power connectivity, the video stops, and the screens go dark, and we cannot continue with worship. However, when the lights came back, we were forced to resume, but much time was wasted (KINF 3).

There is daily, weekly and monthly interruption of power attributed sometimes to rationing, illegal connections, and so on. This interruption of internet services due to power breakages or poor connectivity works against potentially vibrant Online Church services and functions (KINF 16).

These findings showed that for the church to fully embrace cyberspace platforms, it demands a consistent energy and power supply for its realization. However, this is not the case since there are persistent electricity interruptions. The findings were supported by Egere (2012), who explains that in some African and Middle Eastern countries, the usage and installation of internet services is very poor, particularly where internet signals could disappear for days and weeks; in the case of its presence, internet connectivity is very slow. Craigo-Snell and Johnson (2020) contend that the 3G and smartphones that support internet communication are not easily available for everyone everywhere, which affects those who use WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and so forth for church operations. Underlining these sentiments, Swain and Badenhorst (2020) concurred with the study findings, arguing that technology allows for potential communication through online applications, which enable the ministry to continue. However, many rural areas lack online connectivity, and both pastors and congregants cannot afford data and airtime, which are very costly, especially when many of them are not at work due to the lockdown or are unemployed. Internet speed is very low, which does not support video chat and voice transmission that breaks between lines and requires great tolerance from those of us who live in countries where the technology is advanced. The interruption of internet services could militate against a potentially vibrant Online Church.

Finally, the study considered the high cost of installing a full-fledged ICT infrastructure in the church as a major setback in embracing cyberspace technologies for church operations. The results from the questionnaire indicated that 10 (8%) disagreed, 18 (14.4%) were neutral, while 97 (77.6%) agreed. While results from the interviews featured the same sentiment where a participant explained:

The cost of buying technological equipment is too high, which disadvantages church members who may be willing to embrace the shift to technology. Moreover, the high cost of smartphones and data to access sermons, teaching and songs are other challenges to embracing cyberspace technologies in church operations. This hinders the church faithful from participating in online church worship, prayer and teaching sessions. Since having complete cyberspace technologies is impossible, churches should consider the blended mode of operations (KINF 21).

The challenge of the cost of installing a full-fledged Church ICT infrastructure for effective development of internet technologies (such as VSAT, TV station or TV production, computers, central storage or repository, database server, SMS server, web portal, email server, Internet bandwidth, local area network (within church buildings), wireless network infrastructure, optical fiber cabling, ICT resource center, CD/DVD production studio) is something that SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station are confronted with. However, the truth of the matter is that this is a massive project that many local churches, particularly those in poor rural setups, cannot afford. The findings were in tandem with those of the study by Bolu (2012), which reported that because of financial constraints, very few churches in Nigeria manage to have standing ICT infrastructure and committees, while many others are not able to do so. The findings also agreed with Thumma and Travis (2007), who asserted that economically rich churches are utilizing online technologies to a large extent, which is not the case for the poor ones. The argument of the study was that poor SDA churches would not be able to see the full light of the benefits of cyberspace technological platforms, which in one way or another create classes of churches and of church members that eventually affect the unity of the church in terms of access to information and other needed services.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that cyberspace technologies have multiple implications – both positive and negative, and it is sometimes erroneous to think that cyberspace technologies are absolutely good or absolutely bad for the SDA church. The SDA church users should be critical enough in their endeavor to employ technology to enrich their faith and facilitate their operations. The challenges posed by technology should not be a justification to denounce the good in cyberspace technologies and vice-versa. Therefore, the SDA church should be present in technology and also be conscious of the fact that as it enables her activities, it also constrains her form of being church – conscious living with technology is the way for the being of the SDA church.

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