

REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD PASTORS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS UTILISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR COUNSELLING IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR FAMILY HARMONY

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Abstract

The study investigates pastors' attitudes toward using social media for counselling and promoting family harmony among Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) members in Kwara State, Nigeria. It is quantitative research that adopted a descriptive survey research type. The population for this study comprised all Redeemed Christian Church of God pastors in Kwara State. One hundred and fifty-two (152) pastors were sampled for the study using a simple random sampling technique. A researcher-designed questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was used for data collection, while the data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of the percentage, mean, and rank order to answer the research questions. The finding revealed that the most used social media platforms were Facebook, messenger and WhatsApp. The attitude of pastors toward the use of social media was positive. Power failure was one of the challenges the pastors faced during the counselling sessions. Based on the findings, it was concluded that RCCG pastors have a positive attitude towards the use of social media platforms. It was therefore recommended that pastors should seek other means of power supply in order not to disrupt their counselling sessions.

Keywords: Social Media, Utilization, Counselling, Pastors

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of daily life, offering new avenues for communication, community building, and support. The advent of digital technology has transformed numerous aspects of life, including how religious communities interact and how spiritual leaders perform their roles. The utilization of social media platforms by pastors for counselling has become increasingly

prominent, particularly as church communities respond to the obstacles posed by modern societal issues. For many churches, these platforms have become vital tools for outreach and connection, particularly in providing counselling services to members. Pastors leverage social media platforms to offer spiritual and emotional guidance by facilitating both one-on-one interactions and group support, recognizing its potential to bridge gaps in communication. Social media enables a more

accessible and responsive counselling approach, which promotes camaraderie and support among congregants. This shift not only reflects the changing dynamics of pastoral care but also highlights the importance of adapting traditional practices to meet the needs of modern believers.

The advent of technology has introduced new dimensions to pastoral counselling, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Contemporary practices in pastoral counselling are increasingly incorporating digital tools and platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram) to enhance their reach and effectiveness. They also offer opportunities for live streaming services, sharing inspirational messages, and conducting virtual counselling sessions. Afolaranmi (2021) opined that social media platforms have become vital tools for pastoral care and counselling, enabling religious organizations and pastoral workers to engage with their congregants in innovative ways.

There has been evidence of the use of social media platforms in the church over time (Bocala-Wiedemann, 2022; Matobobo & Bankole, 2021). These social media platforms have been shown to contribute largely during worship through various aspects like preaching and singing (Matobobo & Bankole, 2020; Williams-Smith & McMillan, 2022). Examples include the use of social media platforms in Poland and the UK, not only for religious purposes such as worship in churches but also to disseminate information that assisted members in becoming aware of and reducing the transmission of COVID-19 (Kołodziejka, 2022b). The SDA has also adopted the utilization of social media platforms as a means of implementing its companies for its establishments, such as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, churches, food industries, and media centers (Halvorsen, 2021).

In Nigeria, churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith (Winner Chapel) have embraced social media to maintain connections with their congregations (Afolaranmi, 2021). In Ghana, churches have increasingly turned to social media platforms to engage with their congregations and provide pastoral care. Churches such as the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and Lighthouse Chapel International use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to livestream services, share inspirational messages, and conduct virtual counselling sessions (Obeng, 2019). These digital engagements have allowed churches to maintain a strong connection with their members, particularly during times of social distancing and lockdowns. In Uganda, social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube were utilized to host various church programs during the COVID-19 lockdown (Mbivnjo et al., 2021).

In fact, churches have been urged to adopt social media platforms as a means of encouraging active participation from congregants in church services and related events (Andor, 2016; Gyasi, 2020). A recent study conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya, among young people in some churches, revealed that they have widely adopted the utilization of social media platforms (Rwanda, 2018). These have been imbibed because social media also allows for interactive engagement, where congregants can ask questions, request prayers, and receive counselling in real time. It has also provided a platform for reaching younger generations who are more digitally connected (Obeng, 2019).

As social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become pervasive in modern society, they have transformed how individuals communicate and access information. This shift has also impacted the church, providing new

avenues for outreach and communication. For instance, online counselling has become a viable option for providing support to individuals who may not have access to traditional face-to-face sessions due to geographical, economic, or social barriers (Barak & Grohol, 2011). In Kisii County, a study showed that the use of a number of social media platforms within cyberspace by SDA churches helped conduct various church-related services (Nyakwara & Ichuloi, 2022). The services included discussing church matters, preaching, sharing information, and publicizing church activities to reach a wider audience.

A significant number of pastors are now using social media as a tool for ministry. Recent studies indicate that over 70% of churches utilize platforms like Facebook, and nearly one-quarter of pastors are active on Twitter. This engagement is not just for announcements but also for fostering deeper connections with congregants. Ultimately, this study aims to inform best practices in social media for counselling and family harmony, enhancing the support and guidance pastors provide in their congregations.

Statement of the Problem

Social media platforms have facilitated the formation of online support groups and communities, where individuals can share experiences, seek advice, and receive emotional support from peers and pastors (Afolaranmi, 2021). It also enables pastors to reach a broader audience, offer timely support, and foster a sense of community among congregants. Religious leaders and counsellors are using these platforms to engage with their communities, share inspirational messages, and provide a sense of connection and support, especially during times of crisis (Afolaranmi, 2021).

Despite these benefits, the adoption of technology in pastoral counselling is not

without its challenges. The digital divide remains a significant issue, with disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity across different regions and socio-economic groups (ITU, 2020). Cultural and ethical considerations also play a crucial role, as the use of technology in pastoral counselling must be contextual to the culture and values of African communities. Privacy and security concerns are paramount, given the sensitive nature of the information shared in pastoral counselling sessions. Additionally, there may be resistance to technological adoption from both pastoral workers and their clients, rooted in a preference for traditional methods of care.

This paper aims to explore the social media platforms RCCG pastors utilise and their attitude towards these platforms. It also seeks to find out the problems encountered in the use of the platform's dimensions in detail, providing a comprehensive analysis of the use of technology in pastoral counselling in RCCG. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how technology can be harnessed to enhance pastoral counselling in RCCG while respecting and preserving the rich cultural traditions that underpin these practices.

This study investigates the utilisation of social media platforms by pastors for counselling among members, with a specific focus on the implications for family harmony. By exploring the benefits, challenges, and best practices of social media-based counselling, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on the intersection of technology, religion, and family relationships.

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for pastors, church leaders, and family therapists seeking to leverage social media platforms for counselling and support. Ultimately, this research endeavours to illuminate the role of social media in fostering

family harmony and promoting healthy relationships within religious communities.

Purpose of the Study

The study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the extent to which RCCG Pastors in Kwara State utilise social media platforms in counselling.
2. Find out the attitude of RCCG Pastors towards the utilisation of social media platforms in Kwara State.
3. Identify the challenges RCCG Pastors faced in the utilisation of social media platforms for counselling in Kwara State.

The following research questions were considered in the study

1. To what extent do Pastors in Kwara State utilise social media platforms in counselling?
2. What is the attitude of RCCG Pastors towards the utilization of social media platforms in Kwara State?
3. What are the challenges RCCG Pastors faced in the utilization of social media platforms for counselling purposes in Kwara State?

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive survey research type. The population of the study is all the pastors in Province 6 of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (N-236). From the population, a total of 152 were selected by the research advisor using a simple random sampling technique. The reason for chosen simple random sampling technique was that it is a process whereby every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected in order to eliminate the possibility of being biased.

The instrument was face validated by two experts from the Department of Social Science Education, University of Ilorin. In order to

determine the reliability, the validated instrument was thereafter trial tested on 20 Pastors outside the study area with similar characteristics. The scores of the Pastors were collated and analyzed for internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha statistic, and a 0.81 alpha index was obtained. The researcher considered the score high enough to consider the instrument reliable for use in the study. The questionnaire comprised four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A elicited respondents' demographic data, such as age and educational qualification. Section B investigated the extent to which pastors utilize social media in counselling. The items were rated on a response scale of Always Use (AU), Frequently Use (FU), Sometimes Use (SU), and Never Use (NU), respectively scoring 4, 3, 2, and 1. Any item with a mean rating of 2.5 and above was regarded as a great extent of utilization, while a mean below 2.5 was considered a low extent of utilization of the social media platform for counselling. Any standard deviation of 0.000 to 0.05 revealed that the respondents were not far from the mean and opinion of one another.

Section C dealt with the attitudes of pastors toward social media platforms. The items were rated on a Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with the scoring of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Section D dealt with the challenges pastors faced in using social media platforms. The items were rated on a scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), with the scoring of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentages to answer demographic data, while mean and rank order answered the research questions.

Table 1: Age of Members who were counselled through social media

Age	Pastors	Percentage
25-34	7	4.62
35-44	47	30.92
45-54	62	40.78
55 and above	36	23.68
Total	152	100

Out of the 152 respondents, 4.62% (n = 7) were between 25-34 years old, and 30.92% (n = 47) were between the ages of 35-44 years, 40.78% (n=62) were between the ages of 45-54 and 23.68%(n=36) were between the ages of 55 and above.

Table 2: Educational Background

Qualification	Pastors	Percentage
Diploma	9	5.92
Bachelor Degree	79	51.97
Master Degree	46	30.26
PhD	18	11.84
Total	152	100

In terms of educational background, the majority of the participants in the study had a bachelor’s degree 51.97(n=79), followed by a master's degree 30.26% (n = 46), and a Ph.D. 11.84% (n = 18), and the minority had a diploma education, 5.92% (n = 9). These statistics suggested that the population was quite representative of typical church pastors in the study area and captured the education cadres adequately.

Research Question 1: To what extent do RCCG Pastors in Kwara State utilize social media platforms in counselling?

Table 3: Extent of RCCG Pastors Utilization of social media platforms in counselling

S/N	Media Platforms	A U	F U	S U	N U	X	SD	Rank	Remark
1	WhatsApp	74	46	27	5	3.26	0.87	3th	Frequently used
2	E-mail	15	27	47	63	1.96	0.99	5th	Sometimes Used
3	Twitter	02	15	29	106	1.43	0.72	8th	Never used
4	You Tube	11	19	30	92	1.66	0.96	7th	Sometimes used
5	LinkedIn	2	15	19	116	1.36	0.72	9th	Never used
6	Messenger	83	48	15	6	3.37	0.82	1st	Frequently used
7	Instagram	13	32	23	84	1.83	1.04	6th	Sometimes used
8	Facebook	81	43	23	5	3.32	0.85	2nd	Frequently used
9	Telegram	58	45	39	10	2.99	0.95	4th	Frequently used
10	Zoom	3	17	10	122	1.35	0.76	10th	Never used
Weighted mean= 2.25									

The table above shows that RCCG pastors in Kwara State have varying levels of utilization of social media platforms for counselling purposes. Messenger (3.37), Facebook (3.32), and WhatsApp (3.26) emerge as the most frequently used platforms, indicating their popularity among pastors for providing counselling services. In contrast, platforms like Twitter (1.43), LinkedIn (1.36), and Zoom (1.35) are rarely or never used for counselling,

suggesting that pastors may not see them as effective tools for this purpose or may not be familiar with their potential benefits. While the other social media (Telegram, E-mail, Instagram, and YouTube) are sometimes used. The overall weighted mean of 2.25 indicates a moderate level of utilization of social media platforms for counselling among pastors in Kwara State. This finding suggests that while some pastors are leveraging these platforms to

reach their congregants and provide support, there may be opportunities for increased adoption and training to enhance the effectiveness of social media in counselling.

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of RCCG Pastors towards the utilization of social media platforms in Kwara State?

Table 4: Attitude of RCCG Pastors towards Social Media Platforms

S/N	Attitude	SA	A	UN	D	SD	X	SD	Rank	Remark
1	I feel that I have the necessary skills to use social media effectively for counselling	31	59	21	27	14	3.43	1.25	5th	Agreed
2	Social media can be misused in a counselling context	45	32	18	20	37	3.18	1.58	10th	Agreed
3	I feel comfortable using social media to communicate with congregants	35	56	11	27	23	3.35	1.40	7th	Agreed
4	I think that counselling via social media can be as effective as face-to-face counselling	23	64	17	26	22	3.26	1.31	9th	Agreed
5	Social media can be an effective tool for reaching a wider audience for counselling purposes	38	69	10	12	23	3.57	1.32	2nd	Agreed
6	Using social media in counselling is consistent with the ethical guidelines of your religious organization	41	63	15	13	20	3.61	1.32	1st	Agreed
7	I have concerns about the privacy and confidentiality of counselling conducted over social media	44	51	12	21	24	3.46	1.44	4th	Agreed
8	Social media offers a valuable platform for sharing spiritual guidance	37	58	1	17	25	3.43	1.40	6th	Agreed
9	Social media platforms facilitate the fast and easy exchange of information	39	48	14	26	25	3.33	1.44	8th	Agreed
10	It allows for follow-up and feedback	32	65	16	22	17	3.48	1.28	3rd	Agreed
Weighted Mean= 3.41										

The study reveals that RCCG pastors have a positive attitude towards utilizing social media platforms for counselling. With a weighted mean of 3.41, it is evident that pastors generally "Agreed" with the statements regarding social media utilization. Specifically, pastors strongly agreed that using social media in counselling is consistent with their religious organization's

ethical guidelines, ranking as the top statement with a mean score of 3.61. They also agreed that social media can be an effective tool for reaching a wider audience, with a mean score of 3.57, ranking second. Furthermore, pastors agreed that social media allows for follow-up and feedback, with a mean score of 3.48, ranking third. Overall, the findings suggest that

pastors have a positive attitude towards leveraging social media for counselling purposes.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges RCCG Pastors faced in the utilization of social media platforms for counselling purposes in Kwara State?

Table 5: Challenges faced by RCCG Pastors in using social media platforms in Kwara State.

S/N	Challenges	SA	A	N	D	SD	X	SD	Rank	Remark	
1	Power failure discourages the counselling session	82	27	11	27	5	4.01	1.28	1st	Strongly agreed	
2	Inconsistent internet connectivity discourages me	64	51	6	18	13	3.89	1.30	2nd	Agreed	
3	Misinterpretation and Context Loss	53	42	18	24	15	3.62	1.36	3rd	Agreed	
4	Privacy and Confidentiality	46	38	26	23	19	3.45	1.39	4th	Agreed	
5	Lack of nonverbal cues	25	77	14	14	22	3.45	1.28	5th	Agreed	
Weighted mean= 3.68											

This table identifies the challenges faced by pastors in using social media platforms for counselling. With a weighted mean of 3.68, it is revealed that pastors "Agreed" that these challenges exist. The top challenge faced by pastors is power failure, with a mean score of 4.01, indicating that they "Strongly agreed" that it discourages counselling sessions. Inconsistent internet connectivity is another significant challenge, with a mean score of 3.89, where pastors "Agreed" that it discourages them. Pastors also "Agreed" that misinterpretation and context loss (3.62), privacy and confidentiality concerns (3.45), and lack of nonverbal cues (3.45) are challenges they face in utilizing social media for counselling. Hitherto, the various challenges that pastors face when using social media for counselling have been highlighted, with power failure and inconsistent internet connectivity being the most significant ones.

DISCUSSIONS

The result of the findings on the extent of pastors' utilization of social media platforms for counselling indicated that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Messenger were the most frequently used social media platforms. While Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube were

sometimes used, Twitter and LinkedIn were rarely or never used. This finding agrees with Bonsaksen et al. (2021) that most pastors are favourably disposed to the use of social media generally in their pastoral ministries, particularly in resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence among church members and the people in the community. This finding is also in line with Anumante, Akussah & Darko-Adjei (2021), who opined that social media platforms have become one of the critical digital platforms being utilised by pastors to carry out counselling activities and bring harmonious relationships among congregants. The weighted mean average of 2.25, indicates that there is a moderate level of use.

The findings on the attitude of pastors towards the utilisation of social media revealed that pastors have a positive attitude towards the use of social media platforms for counselling. The foregoing was in tandem with Kim et al. (2021), who asserted that social media has been used to mediate between conflicting parties, especially married couples, when they could not readily meet the parties directly because of distance. In addition, Rizwan et al. (2021) and Zhang & Yu (2022) also reported that social media platforms facilitate fast and easy exchange of information and allow for follow-up and feedback.

Among the many challenges faced by pastors in using social media platforms for counselling are power failure, inconsistent internet connectivity, misinterpretation and context loss, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and lack of non-verbal cues. The findings also agree with the submissions of Bastain, Hakimzadeh & Bahrani (2021); Aina and Adekanya (2013); and Oluchukwu (2021), who also indicated power supply, inadequate internet connectivity, and lack of non-verbal clues as problems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that:

1. The overall weighted mean of 2.25 indicates a moderate level of utilization of social media platforms for counselling among pastors in Kwara State.
2. Overall, the findings suggest that pastors have a positive attitude towards leveraging social media for counselling purposes.
3. Hitherto, the various challenges that pastors face when using social media for counselling have been highlighted, with power failure and inconsistent internet connectivity being the most significant ones.

Recommendations

1. Different social media platforms should be exploited to meet the counselling needs of the Congregants.
2. Pastors should seek other means of power supply in order not to distrust their Counselling sessions.
3. A better internet network should be used to avoid disruptions with counselees.

Implications of The Study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of religion,

technology, and pastoral care. By exploring pastors' attitudes towards social media, this study provides valuable insights for religious organizations, pastoral training programs, and individual pastors seeking to effectively integrate digital tools into their ministry while addressing the unique challenges they present.

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