

Adebayo Afolaranmi

Training baptist pastors in internet information dissemination capabilities in their ministries. An appraisal of the impact

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Statement

There have been various means of communication among human beings generally, and pastors in particular. The Church has always been at the forefront of communication because her essential mission is to communicate Christ to the world. Internet is a relatively new means of communication. It comprises many aspects that people are making use of nowadays. Pastors have to know these aspects and make use of them effectively in their pastoral ministries. This will, indeed, help them reach out to people in contemporary ways.

Background to the Study

The world has become a global village where information technology has taken the centre stage. A prominent aspect of information technology is the Internet. Although, the Internet was originally designed around 1969 to allow the exchange of packets of bits between computers, it became a popular means of communication since 1993 when the Mosaic web browser was released, and especially when electronic mail (popularly known as e-mail) and bulletin boards became increasingly popular among those who have access to it. It has grown to be one of the fastest means of communication in the world today (Hardcastle, 2007). Tusubira and Kyeyune (2001) gave a vivid explanation of the evolution of the Internet when they affirmed that,

Advances in information and communication technologies and the need to share information globally led to the evolution of the Internet. What is popularly called the Internet is really a network of many independent internets

linked together for mutual benefit. The Internet is a global connection of computers. These computers are connected via a huge network of telecommunications links. The Internet allows access to a wide resource of data and information stored at different sites (called hosts or servers) and locations all around the world. Each computer connected to the Internet can act as a host (6-7).

Halcomb, et al (2000) rightly observed that, “computer, the Internet, videos, CD-ROMs, DVDs, remote education, TV, radio, and other media permeate our culture. All of them can be used for communication” (52). In addition, Halcomb, et al (2000) referred to this present era as the “Information Age” (52). In Nigeria, this is now gradually replacing some of the conventional means of communication. Adeoye (2008) painted this picture vividly. According to him, “There has ... been a sharp decrease in the circulation of newspapers as readers now turn to the Internet for their daily news. The poor readership of newspapers is also affecting the revenue of the newspaper industry in the country, and some are already shedding their staff strength” (11). Adeoye (2008) had earlier cited *American Journalism Review* that stated that because of the advent of Internet, “the last newspaper in the United States, US, would be printed in October 2044 (11).”

Kerrey and Isakson (2000) were of the opinion that,

The Internet is a powerful new means of communication. It is global, it is fast, and it is growing rapidly. Reaching to the far corners of the earth, the Internet is making the world at once smaller and more connected, transmitting information at nearly real-time speed. ... The World Wide Web is bringing rapid and radical change into our lives—from the wonderfully beneficial to the terrifyingly difficult (i).

The impact that the Internet is having on every facet of life cannot be overemphasized. In fact, it has been observed that “the Internet is a driving force for much development and innovation in both developed and developing countries” (Khvilon 2002, 9). More and more people are making use of it in their day-to-day

activities. “The speed and extent to which the Internet has been embraced by a wide diversity of people in such a short period of time are unparalleled in human history” (Dawson and Cowan 2004, 5). The fact that it is a fast means of communication has endeared it to many people.

The Internet has become the new mission field of the twenty-first century and an assertive evangelisation tool (Edmiston, 2007). In fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission, pastors have the great opportunity of making use of the Internet (Discussing Internet ministry with pastors, 2008). In an interview posted on the web on October 11, 2007, Tanto (2007) observed, “Modern communications, particularly the Internet, do not only offer us a variety of media with which to transmit the Good News but have given birth to a ‘new culture’ (Binju-Nkambe Parish Weblog, 2007). Babin and Zukowski (2002) referred to this new culture as “new territory or frontier” and “new marketplace of public information and communication” called “cyberspace” (4). It is “a new culture with a new language, a new psychology, and new technologies for communication and information” (Babin and Zukowski 2002, 157).

Robbins (2000) rightly observed that, “the Internet is revolutionizing mass communications for virtually every facet of society, and is becoming a world-wide gathering place for the global community... including vast numbers of Christians and clergyman, [therefore] it behooves the church to bring its presence there” (Robbins, 2008). Edmiston found out that there are over 275 million Internet searches each day, eighty percent of all Internet sessions begin at a search engine, and religion is one of the main topics people search for (Edmiston, 2007). More and more people are turning to the Internet to find information, to use it as a pleasure, or to use it to send information to other people.

As Robbins (2000) pointed out, ministers of the gospel are not left behind in making use of this modern means of communication (Robbins, 2008). According to the Gospel Communications (an organization that is an umbrella of some Christian ministries that involve themselves in online ministries), “When traditional means of ministry fall short, the Internet provides a way to speak directly to people about their spiritual beliefs, fears, and questions on their own terms” (Why Gospel Communications Does Ministry Online, 2008). According to Tanto (2007), “the Internet is not the only means of communicating Christ to the world but it is the most appropriate means to integrate the Good News of Jesus Christ to the new culture in which the Church finds herself” (Binju-Nkambe Parish Weblog, 2007). In Wilson’s (2000) words, “God is doing something big, and we had best be clearheaded about what is going on around us. The church is in the information business, and we should not be surprised that God has raised up information technology to communicate His word to the entire world” (xiii). Therefore, many pastors have seen the Internet as a veritable means of communication in their ministries while some have not seen it as such. In fact, in Jewell’s (2004) words, “Christian leaders who do not have access to the Internet or e-mail... will be increasingly out of touch with most of the people in their faith community” (162).

Nevertheless, result of a preliminary survey (see Appendix A for detail) conducted by this researcher on the pastors in Ibadan metropolis during one of their meetings on September 2, 2008 discovered that most pastors, especially Baptist pastors in Ibadan metropolis, do not make good use of this great opportunity. How will these pastors know how to use the Internet in their pastoral ministries? The personal involvement of this researcher in using the Internet as a veritable means of

communication in his pastoral ministries has made him to decide to delve into this research work.

Statement of the Problem

Information dissemination nowadays has taken new dimension with the advent of information and communication technology in general and the Internet in particular. Inasmuch as the Internet has become a veritable means of information dissemination, and since the use of information and communication in general, and the Internet in particular among pastors is not very popular as evident in the preliminary survey that many of them are Internet illiterates, the training of pastors in Internet utilization will likely improve their information dissemination capabilities to their members that are using the Internet.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the level of the difference between the knowledge of the pastors in using Internet to disseminate information in their ministries before and after their training on the use of Internet information dissemination?
2. What ways do pastors use the Internet in their ministries?
3. How do members of churches rate the level of information dissemination of their pastors through the Internet?
4. What specific areas of pastoral ministry do the Internet information dissemination influence most?
5. What specific areas of pastoral ministry do the Internet information dissemination influence least?

6. What ways can pastors be encouraged to use the Internet more in their pastoral ministries?

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this research is to assess the impact of the Internet on information dissemination capability of Baptist pastors in Ibadan metropolis to their members. This research specifically aimed at:

1. discovering the various aspects of Internet that pastors can use as a means of communication;
2. finding out ways pastors can use these aspects to effectively communicate in their pastoral ministries;
3. learning the extent pastors are making use of these aspects in their pastoral ministries;
4. encouraging pastors to make good use of these aspects in their ministries;

Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that:

1. It explored the Internet as one of the most useful and contemporary means of communication among human beings in general and pastors in particular, especially in their information dissemination.
2. It helped pastors to be more efficient in their ministries as they make use of this modern and postmodern means of communication to disseminate information.
3. It also helped to advance the Kingdom of God on earth as this means of communication does not limit pastors to their locality but enable them to fulfil the mandate of the Great Commission to be witnesses of the gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the use of four aspects of the Internet—e-mail, short message services (SMS) or text messages, online chatting, and websites—as means of information dissemination among pastors of churches in Baptist Associations within Ibadanland. The study trained pastors on the use of the Internet in Ibadan metropolis without any experience of the use of the Internet. The training covers four aspects mentioned above. Ibadan metropolis was chosen because there was accessibility to many Internet services providers (ISP) in the city, and most elites in the city have started using the Internet in their day-to-day activities.