CHRISTIANITY IN THE DIGITALIZED AGE

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Abstract

Christianity remains the largest religious sect in the world, with over 2 billion adherents. Despite different persecutions from different quarters, Christianity is on the rise. In any age, Christianity takes the lead among religious organizations when it comes to welcoming new technological discoveries. In the 17th century, when the printing press was newly introduced, Christianity was so marveled at to an extent that the first set of bibles, usually referred to as the King James Version (KJV), and was published in 1611. In the early 20th century, when radio was newly discovered, Christianity took over the radio world and used it to preach the gospel until the whole radio world was saturated with the message of Christ. The same thing goes with the introduction of television (TV). Telecast evangelists arose in mass throughout the world where people have access to TV, and a lot of people were won to Christ. In the 21st century, which is generally referred to as the digital age, Christian leaders all over the world are now using internet technology to minister Christ to the generation Z, or homo digitalis. The purpose of this article is to instill the culture of digitalization in the hearts of the readers, especially the church leaders. With digitalization, a single person could minister Christ to billions of people at the lowest cost. Indeed, the future robotic age will never leave Christianity behind, as more Christians will fully maximize it to bring home the message of Christ.

Keywords: **digital age, Christianity, technology, Christ, church, religion.**

Introduction

Digitalization has indeed turned the world into a global village. Information is now at the fingertips of users of Android or smart phones and operators of laptops or computers. Geographical distance no longer creates barriers. Feedback could be gotten in the twinkle of an eye. Product and service delivery has become better and faster. Information about anything is now made possible with different search engine optimization (SEO) platforms like Bing, Yahoo, and Google and social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.

The purpose of this article is to instill the culture of digitalization in the hearts of the readers, especially the church leaders. With digitalization, a single person could minister Christ to billions of people at the lowest cost. Digitalization is the fulfillment of the prophecy according to Habbakuk 2:14[1], "**For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea".**

With the introduction of the Internet in worship centers, it is easier to carry out the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the book of Matthew. 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Christianity, on the other hand, is spreading at a very high speed due to the usage of digital devices like phones, laptops, etc. The combination of Christianity and digitalization has greatly contributed to the spreading of the gospel of Christ, especially among Generation Z, or Homo Digitalis. The young people have made the internet their virtual home. They spend more time connecting with people from different parts of the world through digital devices. The marriage between Christianity and digitalization has now been blessed with productivity, prompt delivery, easy accessibility, speed, accuracy, etc.

With an increase in the population of youths on a daily basis, Church leaders have been advised to embrace digitalization in order to attract this set of people to embrace the gospel.

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[1] All Scriptural quotations are from the New International Version (NIV), except as otherwise stated.

Today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24, accounting for 16 percent of the global population. By 2030—the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that make up the 2030 Agenda—the number of youth is projected to have grown by 7 percent, to nearly 1.3 billion.

The purpose of this article is to instill the culture of digitalization in the hearts of the readers, especially the church leaders. With digitalization, a single person could minister Christ to billions of people at the lowest cost.

The number of Christians in the world is soaring; hence, the need to embrace technology to sustain this figure cannot be overemphasized. The youth make up the largest percentage of these newly converted Christians. These youths, who have made the Internet their second home, need constant teaching and counseling to sustain their salvation. In as much as the current economic situation has made people work harder and longer hours, getting their time for physical meetings or discussions may pose a great challenge, hence the resort to the internet. The population of Christians in the world is too large to be neglected.

Christianity, despite its history of close to 2000 years, remains one of the most critical pieces of any culture. But today, Christianity is within the age of digitalization, so how do churches use technology to advance the Kingdom? It has never been overcome by time or change and continues to grow strong under pressure. These days, almost every religion, especially Christianity, has embraced digital media as a means of spreading its teachings, promoting Digital Churches. Among the most prominent examples are the advent of writing, the transition from the scroll to the codex, the innovation of printing, the spread of literacy, the creation of electronic media (radio, telephone, cinema, and television), and the growth of digital communication (social media, websites, and digital publishing). Hence, the digital age has triggered this revolution, which will profoundly impact the religious landscape in the following decades:

There will be over 2.6 billion Christians worldwide by the middle of 2023 and around 3.3 billion by 2050, according to a report published in early January by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. The 2,604,381,000 estimate for the mid-year 2023 Christian population total is a 44,506,000-person increase from the mid-year 2022 total. The new estimates of the worldwide Christian population for both 2025 and 2050 are higher than the 2022 report's estimates. The 2023 report projects a Christian population of 2,662,979,000 in 2025 (up 25.8 million from the 2022 estimate) and a population of 3,342,878,000 in 2050 (up 8.8 million). The number of Christians as a percentage of the world population declined from 34.5% to 32.3% from 1900 to 2000, before rising 0.1% from 2000 to 2022. If the report's estimates prove accurate, Christians will comprise 34.4% of the global population in 2050[2].

.Digital Churches

Many people are concerned about the future of Christianity in an increasingly secular society that celebrates individuality, personal choice, and consumerism. At the same time, more people express an interest in spirituality than ever before. Today, you can find countless religious communities online where you can connect with others around the world. This happens through the internet, and social networking makes it possible to connect with like-minded people at any time of day. People can now pursue spirituality without worrying about their physical location, travel expenses, or busy schedules. They can join digital churches that they feel are more compatible with their beliefs than local churches if they are not biblical.

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him, of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Rom 10:14)

Christianity in the Digital Age

Christianity in the Digital Age refers to the impact of digital technology and the internet on the practice, dissemination, and engagement of Christianity. The rise of the digital age has brought about significant changes in how Christians interact with their faith, connect with others, and access religious resources.

Here are some key aspects of Christianity in the Digital Age:

*Online Worship***:** Many churches now offer live-streamed or recorded services, allowing people to participate in worship remotely. Online platforms enable individuals to join services from

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[2] [Zach Dawes](#) Jr. (2023): https://goodfaithmedia.org/global-christian-population-projected-to-reach-3-3-billion-by-2050

anywhere in the world, overcoming geographical limitations. It also allows churches to reach a broader audience and connect with individuals who may not have access to a physical church.

*Online Communities***:** The internet has facilitated the formation of online Christian communities where believers can connect, share their faith, discuss theological topics, and provide support to one another. Social media platforms, forums, and online groups have become spaces for Christians to engage in discussions and build relationships.

*Bible Study and Resources***:** Digital technology has made Bible study more accessible than ever before. Online platforms offer a wealth of Bible translations, study guides, devotionals, and commentaries. Mobile applications and websites provide tools for studying the Bible, including concordances, language tools, and reading plans.

*Evangelism and Outreach***:** The internet has become a powerful tool for sharing the Christian message and reaching out to others. Social media platforms, websites, podcasts, and online video channels provide avenues for Christians to share their faith, engage in apologetics, and connect with individuals who are seeking spiritual answers.

*Online Discipleship***:** Digital platforms offer opportunities for discipleship and spiritual growth. Churches and organizations provide online courses, webinars, and mentoring programs to help individuals deepen their understanding of the faith and grow in their relationship with God. Online counseling and prayer platforms also offer support for those in need.

*Online Giving***:** The digital age has transformed the way Christians give financially to their churches and charitable organizations. Online giving platforms and mobile apps make it easier for individuals to donate and support causes they believe in, regardless of their location.

*Challenges and Considerations***:** While the digital age has brought numerous benefits to Christianity, it also poses challenges. Issues such as online misinformation, the proliferation of false teachings, and the potential for online bullying and division require discernment and critical thinking. Balancing online engagement with personal, face-to-face relationships and community involvement remains important.

Overall, Christianity in the Digital Age has expanded opportunities for worship, community, education, and outreach. The internet and digital technology continue to shape the way Christians connect with their faith and engage with others, providing new avenues for sharing the gospel and deepening spiritual growth.

Digitalization Aiding Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth refers to the development and deepening of one's spiritual life, beliefs, and practices. It is an ongoing process of seeking a closer relationship with a higher power, exploring personal beliefs, and nurturing inner qualities such as love, compassion, gratitude, and wisdom.

With the advent of the internet, various spiritual information is made available for any willing Christian to tap into and make use of towards discipleship.

Here are some key aspects and practices that contribute to spiritual growth:

*Self-Reflection and Awareness***:** Spiritual growth often begins with self-reflection and developing a heightened sense of self-awareness. This involves examining one's beliefs, values, and behaviors and being open to personal growth and transformation. This is simple to achieve by comparing yours with others through search engine optimization (SEO).

*Prayer and Meditation***:** Prayer and meditation are practices that help individuals connect with the divine and cultivate inner stillness and peace. They provide an opportunity for introspection, seeking guidance, and experiencing a sense of transcendence or unity with a higher power. The features of social media, especially Telegram and WhatsApp, have greatly increased the number of people praying in the comfort of their homes and offices.

Study and Contemplation: Engaging in the study of spiritual texts, scripture, and philosophical teachings can deepen understanding and inspire spiritual growth. Contemplation involves reflecting on the deeper meanings and truths found within these teachings. There is virtually no topic you want to know more about that Google, Bing, or Yahoo cannot search for. Studying is becoming easier with the advent of digital devices.

Community and Fellowship: Being part of a spiritual community or engaging in fellowship with like-minded individuals can be an enriching aspect of spiritual growth. It provides support, encouragement, and opportunities for shared learning and service. When you get to the internet, you meet with various communities of like-minded people who are fellowshipping together towards achieving a common goal: spiritual growth.

*Service and Compassion***:** Actively practicing kindness, compassion, and service to others is an integral part of spiritual growth. It involves extending care and support to those in need, fostering empathy, and living in alignment with one's spiritual values. If any denomination really wants to make a great impact on the Internet, it must teach its members acts of kindness, compassion, and service. The Internet is full of free services. This has made the Internet the most singular invention with the highest number of free services.

*Challenges and Obstacles***:** Spiritual growth is not without challenges. Doubts, setbacks, and periods of spiritual dryness are common experiences. These challenges can serve as opportunities for further growth, self-reflection, and deepening faith. In trying to grow, one can get hooked on the wrong biblical philosophies and ideologies, which could result in negative growth that may eventually lead to heresy or backsliding. This is one reason why one needs to compare the information sourced on the internet with the Holy Scripture to compare such information together.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

Digitization: Promoting Christianity

Christians nowadays are fully immersed in the digital age. It is becoming an international, or at least a transnational, phenomenon more and more often. Statistics show that one in ten Europeans and North Americans is currently a practicing Christian from a media perspective. Even though there are still about 2 billion Christians worldwide, their distribution has changed drastically over the last 20 years. In 2001, only 24 percent of all Christians lived in developed countries. This percentage increased to 31.11% by 2020[3]

Besides, church culture and communities are also changing. New-age churches and communities worldwide are virtualizing and becoming globalized quickly. The use of digital technologies in evangelization, formation, and service to other Churches has long been established as a regular part of daily life for all kinds of Christians worldwide.

Here are a few examples of why digitization is promoted in Christianity:

Education and Learning

A critical aspect of the digitalization of religion is its implications for education. This has been reflected in the Bible, according to the book of Colossians 1:28. "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ".

Education and learning are the first and foremost purposes of Christianity. The internet has changed how people learn. For example, there are now massive open online courses (MOOCs) that use video lectures to teach students in the comfort of their own homes and at affordable prices. People who cannot afford traditional universities can educate themselves through these self-paced courses.

Connectivity

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3 Laura (2023): https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/christianity-in-the-age-of-digitalization/#ixzz857E4SwJN

One of the Bible commandments is "Love thy neighbor, which means that people should connect and help each other out. Connectivity, or communication, has played a more prominent role than ever before as modern technology allows people to communicate with each other regardless of distance. It can be done online through Emails, Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram, Twitter, Zoom, and many others. The new-age churches are adopting and implementing these digital tools to connect with more people and reply to their religious and social queries.

Ease of Practice

Many churches and their members began to use the Internet to provide information about their churches, ministries, and religious practices. Church websites now include direct information about why one would want to visit a location, their beliefs, what's offered, and how it works. Pastors have begun recording sermons and posting them online, making them available for those who cannot attend a live service due to health or other reasons. Many churches have also begun to post podcasts of their recorded sermons on their website, Twitter, and Facebook accounts for the digital church, making it easier and more flexible for people to listen and practice their faith.

Ways and Examples of Digitalization

As discussed, technology has become a necessary part of our lives. Social media sites are used by more than two-thirds of internet users. [9]. In the last 15 years alone, it is estimated that people have doubled their usage of digital platforms. The use of technology in daily life increases from generation to generation, and it seems that every new generation is more used to the "digital world" than the previous generation.

Advancing the Gospel

Most digital churches today have a website, and many even take it a step further by using social media. Facebook groups for specific denominations alone have well over 100 million members. Furthermore, research has shown that young people are becoming less involved in organized religion as more people check their phones during church services. In fact, for those aged 18–35, most of them prefer to go to a social gathering or event rather than spend their time on spiritual things like going to revival or church.

Digital Churches

Many people are concerned about the future of Christianity in an increasingly secular society that celebrates individuality, personal choice, and consumerism. At the same time, more people express an interest in spirituality than ever before. Today, you can find countless religious communities online where you can connect with others around the world. This happens through the internet, and social networking makes it possible to connect with like-minded people at any time of day. People can now pursue spirituality without worrying about their physical location,

travel expenses, or busy schedules. They can join digital churches that they feel are more compatible with their beliefs than local churches if they are not biblical.

In recent years, many churches have made it their mission to modernize and take advantage of technology. This can be seen in apps, virtual reality tours, and connections through social media. It is essential to recognize the benefits and pitfalls of digitalization in religion.

Today, churches use apps for holy and religious purposes, such as Bible verses, meditation, and prayer requests and reminders. Virtual reality tours are used to allow churchgoers to explore the inside of the church building without having to travel there.

Digital Church services can also use apps and social media for their faithful to stay connected and actively involved. They can digitally share their message through various social media platforms, allowing for widespread accessibility and increased followers. Social media is also crucial because it enables digital churches to virtually advertise fundraising or other events.

Many churchgoers see using these apps as a way to further connect themselves with their faith, specifically God and Jesus Christ; however, if one spends too much time on these applications, they risk disconnecting themselves from the real world, their loved ones, and the local body of Christ. The use of digital applications can also be seen as an insincere attempt to modernize and appeal to a younger demographic. According to the book of Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—aand all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NIV)

Conclusion

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant influence on Christianity in several ways, including the suspension of worship services and the closing of Missionary schools, as well as the cancellation of ceremonies and religious festivals. This has also urged many religious authorities and priests to take the necessary actions to continue Christianity's motives and teachings through digital means, which led to the development of Digital Churches.

Young churchgoers must recognize that social media does not reflect the true nature and spirit of what it means to be a part of a church's community. Churches should not use their presence on social media as the only form of communication between their members. Social media interactions must still take place in person. The use of digital applications requires one to consider whether they would prefer to connect with God through real-life experiences or solely through virtual means; however, for many, it's not an option anymore. The coronavirus pandemic has led to many social restrictions, resulting in strict guidelines for churchgoers.

Christians and other religious communities have long adapted to changes in media technologies. The emergence of writing, the move from scroll to codex, the printing press, the spread of literacy, the development of electronic media (radio, telephone, film, and television), and the

subsequent rise of digital communication (social media, websites, and digital publishing) provide obvious examples. Yet, it distorts the history of religion and media to simply note that religious figures adopt new ways of expressing themselves. They also resist media change, or alternatively, they adopt new forms of media, which they imagine as mere containers for unchanging messages that support unchanging religious practice. These anxieties and simplifications must be examined, for new media cultures encourage new ways of understanding ourselves and support particular forms of religious practice while making others seem less "natural."

Resistance to new media and its power is well established. Jeremiah chapter 36 reports that the prophet adopted the new form of the scroll to send a word of the Lord to King Jehoiakim, and that the king responded by feeding the scroll into the fire. Tom Boomershine describes this as the first recorded act of religious resistance to new media and its power. Judaism was formed in the era of the scroll, and the Torah as a scroll has a ritual function not replaced by the codex, in which pages are bound between covers. Christians have also thought that the sacrality of the word is tied to its form. The early church embraced the codex, the new media of its day, and later Christians wondered whether the word of God and the mission of the church were well served by changes to that form. Printing made it possible to put vernacular translations of the Bible into the hands of lay people and required the church to ponder the implications of this change. We saw similar struggles in explorations of whether the word of God could be expressed through film and television, in debates about the value and challenges of Bible apps, and in discussions of whether Christian community can be sustained in digital spaces and through social media.

While some Christians distrust new media, others embrace media change without considering the way that their faith claims and practices will change in new media cultures. They imagine new media as the arrival of increasingly sophisticated amplifiers, allowing an unchanging message to reach ever larger and more distant audiences. But in fact, different media make possible quite different ways of thinking and relating. We might tease this out by exploring the complicated relationships between publishing, literacy, and the rise of modern understanding of the individual. Print didn't simply put the scriptures in more people's hands. Learning to read gave them a new relationship to scripture, increasing the likelihood that they experienced themselves as interpreters of the word. Similarly, in the era of televangelism, some Christians embraced the technology and the genre of the television talk show without understanding the ways they would be drawn into the patterns and excesses of celebrity culture.

Today, Christians are living in a digital culture. It won't be adequate to either resist it as incapable of supporting authentic Christian life or to embrace it without considering the changes it brings to Christian identity and community. Consider three factors of digital culture. First, it assumes that communications are two-way. Whether one blogs, tweets, or posts sermons, digital culture assumes that the post is the beginning of a conversation in which it is possible for others to respond and that the original poster is listening. Second, this and other factors flatten authority. Faith leaders create contexts for meaningful conversation; they can help the community draw on its heritage, but pronouncements are ineffective in this culture. As I have argued elsewhere, more significant than digital technology is what I call the digital metaphor. Digital texts, images, and sounds are created from pixels. The pixels can be rearranged; they are subject to ongoing editing and repurposing. Through this metaphor, people think of themselves,

their religious identity, their theologies, and the church itself as under constant formation and reformation. It won't matter if church hierarchies adopt the tools of digital communication if they fail to understand the digital culture in which they seek to practice faithfully and effectively.

The Internet has become part of us. Everything seems possible with the advent of the internet. Geographical location poses no distance any longer. In fact, the internet made us believe that the reign of Jesus Christ from the city of Jerusalem to the whole world was possible. The Internet's founding fathers said the Internet was still in its infant stage. What a paradox? If with this wonder that the Internet is performing at this infant stage, what will the world be like in the year 2050, when a lot of discoveries will have been made and artificial intelligence (AI) will have taken over almost all the aspects of life[4].

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[4] OlumuyiwaSamuel (2008). *Teach Yourself Internet* 11(3), 14-20

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