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Impact of Social Media on Church Ministry in the Methodist Church, Nyambene Synod

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the impact of social media on church ministry in the Methodist Church of Kenya (MCK), Nyambene Synod. Religious institutions are increasingly challenged by declining youth participation and shifting patterns of congregational engagement, which threaten the effectiveness of traditional ministry approaches. A descriptive survey design integrating quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. From a target population of 25,463 members across 24 circuits, a sample of 412 respondents was drawn using proportionate random and purposive sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, and analysed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and binary logistic regression in SPSS version 28. Findings showed that 95.1 per cent of respondents agreed that social media extended church outreach beyond the physical congregation. The main online activities included teaching and preaching (20.1%), youth engagement (20.0%), evangelism and outreach (17.3%), and announcements (18.0%). Regression analysis revealed that diversity of ministry activities ($p = .031$) and frequency of social media use ($p = .001$) significantly predicted perceived impact, jointly explaining 42 per cent of the variance. The study concludes that social media is a vital tool for strengthening ministry and recommends digital capacity building, infrastructure investment, and policy development for responsible online engagement.

Key words: Church ministry, digital evangelism, Methodist Church of Kenya, social media.



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INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions are increasingly challenged by declining youth participation and shifting patterns of congregational engagement, which threaten the effectiveness of traditional ministry approaches (Mukami, 2025; Mwila, 2022). In this context, social media—referring to digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube that allow people to create, share, and interact with content—has become an important tool for rethinking how churches reach and involve their members (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022; English, 2021). For many congregations, particularly those in rural settings, the question is no longer whether to use social media, but how to strategically integrate it into church ministry, understood as the organised activities through which the church fulfils its mission of worship, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship (Bocala-Wiedemann, 2022). Within this scope, outreach refers to the extension of church influence and presence beyond the physical congregation, often using digital networks to communicate with non-members and diaspora audiences (Kimaru, 2019; Atuehene, 2022).

Likewise, digital evangelism describes the use of online platforms to proclaim the Christian message, nurture faith, and sustain interaction with younger and more digitally active generations (Alade, 2020; Bwalya, 2021). Framing these concepts together highlights the urgency of assessing how social media can help churches address participation gaps and reimagine ministry in today's digital era (Mbithi et al., 2023; Kühle & Larsen, 2021). The advent of social media has transformed communication and interaction in virtually every sector, including religion. Globally, religious institutions have embraced digital technologies to remain relevant and extend their reach in an era defined by networked societies and digital consumption of information. Churches across North America and Europe livestream sermons, host online Bible studies, and employ targeted campaigns to attract and retain members, thereby complementing traditional worship (English, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital shift, forcing many congregations to adopt virtual worship and proving that social media is no longer optional but integral to ministry (Kühle & Larsen, 2021). The growing phenomenon of networked religion illustrates how

online spaces now serve as digital sanctuaries where congregants gather for worship, fellowship, and discipleship irrespective of geographical barriers (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022).

In the African context, the uptake of social media for ministry has been equally significant, albeit with unique dynamics. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana and Nigeria have pioneered the integration of social media into evangelism, youth engagement, and fundraising, with WhatsApp groups becoming popular hubs for prayer requests and daily devotions (Alade, 2020; Atuehene, 2022). In South Africa, Kgatle (2018) observed that social media empowered new prophetic voices and reshaped authority structures in church spaces, while in Kenya, social media has been widely used for church marketing, mobilisation, and event promotion (Kathambi et al., 2022). Nonetheless, challenges such as poor internet connectivity, digital literacy gaps, and resistance from conservative members hinder the full potential of digital ministry in many rural congregations (Mbithi et al., 2023). This dual reality underscores the need to investigate how churches in semi-urban and rural contexts can strategically harness social media to enhance engagement and retain congregants in an increasingly competitive religious environment.

In Kenya, mobile penetration stands at over 90 per cent, with WhatsApp and Facebook emerging as the most popular platforms for communication, including in rural areas (Communication Authority of Kenya, 2023). Studies show that a majority of churchgoers are conversant with social media platforms and often use them to learn about events, participate in online prayer meetings, and receive scriptural teachings (Chiluwa, 2013; McKinney, 2014). However, research on church-based social media use has largely focused on urban and Pentecostal settings, leaving a gap in understanding its role within mainline denominations such as the Methodist Church of Kenya (MCK), particularly in rural synods like Nyambene (Jelagat, 2022). The Nyambene Synod, located in Meru County, is predominantly rural and agrarian, with congregants of mixed age demographics and varying levels of technological exposure. Despite these challenges, WhatsApp and Facebook are widely used by youth and working-class locals, often serving as the

primary platforms for live service broadcasts, sharing Bible verses, event marketing, and community mobilisation (Maitai et al., 2022).

Within the MCK Nyambene Synod, the problem of declining physical attendance and limited congregational involvement has raised concern over the effectiveness of traditional ministry approaches (Mukami, 2025). Youth participation in particular has been declining, with many drawn to alternative online religious content, including that of Pentecostal churches, suggesting that MCK risks losing its younger demographic if it fails to innovate digitally (Mwila, 2022). This backdrop necessitates an exploration of how social media can be leveraged to revitalise ministry, enhance communication, and strengthen church cohesion. Social media represents a critical opportunity to bridge generational gaps, extend the church's presence beyond physical boundaries, and foster interactive participation among congregants (Bocala-Wiedemann, 2022).

Theologically, the integration of social media into ministry can be framed through functionalist theory, which holds that institutions evolve in response to societal changes in order to sustain cohesion and relevance (Parsons, 1951). From this perspective, social media represents a structural adaptation that enables the church to maintain its core functions of worship, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship in a rapidly digitised society. It acts as a digital sanctuary, ensuring that spiritual nourishment and communal interaction continue even amidst disruptions such as pandemics, generational shifts, or geographical distance (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022). In particular, its ability to engage younger demographics resonates with the church's mission of intergenerational discipleship, providing an accessible and relatable platform for nurturing faith (Bwalya, 2021). This functionalist lens underscores how social media is not merely a communication tool but a mechanism that reinforces the resilience and adaptability of church ministry, forming the conceptual foundation for this study. Nevertheless, the adoption of social media for ministry in the Nyambene Synod is not without challenges. Poor internet connectivity, limited digital skills, and distractions from secular content remain significant barriers to effective engagement (Mukami, 2025). Conservative attitudes among older congregants,

concerns about misinformation, and the absence of formal church policies on digital engagement further complicate efforts to institutionalise social media use (Mbithi et al., 2023). Despite these constraints, more than half of church leaders affirm that social media is essential for modern ministry and call for greater investment in training, infrastructure, and digital literacy programs (Mukami, 2025).

This study, therefore, situates the impact of social media on church ministry within the broader discourse on digital religion, examining its potential to revitalise congregational life, enhance communication, and expand outreach in the MCK Nyambene Synod. By focusing on this rural context, the study fills a critical gap in the literature that has often overlooked non-urban churches in digital transformation research. Understanding how social media influences evangelism, member participation, and ministry effectiveness provides a basis for strategic interventions that can strengthen the church's relevance and growth in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in church ministry by expanding outreach and connecting congregants across spatial and temporal boundaries. Campbell (2022) emphasises that platforms such as Facebook and YouTube enable churches to live-stream sermons and disseminate announcements, effectively transforming local ministries into globally accessible experiences. In Norway, Kimaru (2019) similarly found that digital platforms fostered inclusivity by linking diaspora communities to their home churches, while Atuehene (2022) reported that WhatsApp became indispensable in Ghanaian charismatic churches for sharing prayers and sermons, thereby overcoming logistical barriers. Taken together, these studies underscore social media's capacity to extend the church's pastoral reach and ensure inclusivity. Yet, they differ in emphasis: Campbell stresses global visibility, Kimaru foregrounds diaspora integration, and Atuehene highlights localised functionality. This diversity of findings raises the question of whether social media's impact is primarily global, diasporic, or community-based—a tension this study addresses by focusing on a rural Kenyan Methodist context where connectivity and digital literacy are uneven.

Beyond outreach, the literature suggests that social media strengthens internal church engagement and community building. Alade (2020) demonstrates that Nigerian Methodist churches leveraged online youth Bible studies and prayer meetings to boost youth participation, while Mbithi et al. (2023) show that WhatsApp groups in Kenyan Protestant churches served as digital hubs for devotionals, event coordination, and mobilisation, thereby reinforcing communal bonds beyond Sunday worship. English (2021) and Cheong (2022) extend this perspective, documenting how messaging tools during the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated real-time counselling and spiritual support, deepening trust between clergy and congregants. What emerges is a consensus that digital platforms reinforce the church's traditional functions of discipleship and fellowship, aligning with functionalist theory. However, while Alade and Mbithi et al. stress grassroots participation and peer-driven engagement, English and Cheong highlight the pastoral authority of clergy in digital spaces—pointing to different modes of leadership adaptation that may not always coexist harmoniously. Understanding how these dynamics unfold in the Nyambene Synod will shed light on whether social media empowers congregants, reinforces clerical authority, or produces a hybrid form of ministry.

Nevertheless, critical voices in the literature caution against uncritical celebration of social media in ministry. Campbell (2022) warns that online accessibility can reduce physical attendance and weaken congregational accountability, while Kgatele (2018) argues that digital platforms may destabilise spiritual authority by amplifying alternative voices outside formal church leadership. Mbithi et al. (2023) further note that misinformation circulating in WhatsApp prayer chains compels clergy to dedicate significant time to corrective teaching, which can strain resources and erode trust. Structural inequalities also complicate adoption: Omollo (2023) and World Bank (2021) highlight the persistence of digital divides that exclude older or less tech-savvy members, thereby widening generational gaps in participation. These tensions illustrate that while social media offers powerful opportunities for ministry, its integration is fraught with contradictions—it can simultaneously expand inclusivity and foster exclusion, strengthen authority

and undermine it, deepen engagement and reduce attendance.

Despite this growing body of evidence, most studies focus on urban, global, or charismatic church contexts where internet penetration and digital literacy are relatively higher. Far less attention has been given to rural mainline denominations, such as the Methodist Church of Kenya, Nyambene Synod, where declining youth participation and uneven access to digital tools present unique challenges. By examining how social media is reshaping ministry in this rural context, the present study contributes to filling this gap, offering insights into how digital platforms mediate intergenerational engagement, pastoral authority, and congregational participation in environments marked by infrastructural and cultural constraints.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to assess the impact of social media on church ministry in the Methodist Church of Kenya, Nyambene Synod. The design was suitable for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from a large population. The target population comprised 25,463 individuals, including 21,645 church members, 2,037 lay preachers, 1,527 lay leaders, and 254 clergy. Using systematic random sampling, six out of 24 circuits were selected, and 14 churches representing more than 30 per cent of the total were included. A sample size of 377 church members was determined using Kothari's (2004) sampling formula. Purposive sampling was applied to select key informants: the Synod bishop, six circuit ministers, 14 church leaders, and 14 lay preachers. In total, 412 respondents participated in the study. Data collection involved structured questionnaires for church members and interview guides for leaders. Questionnaires contained both closed and open-ended items, while interviews provided detailed insights from key informants. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 28, applying descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression to test relationships between social media use and ministry outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews and field notes were thematically analysed to enrich the findings. Ethical considerations included obtaining permission from church authorities, securing informed consent from participants, and

ensuring confidentiality. Respondents were assured of voluntary participation and the freedom to withdraw at any stage.

Table 1: Sampling Matrix

Respondents	Population	Sample
Bishop	1	1
Clergy	6	6
Church leaders	14	14
Lay preachers	14	14
Church members	25428	377
Total	25463	412

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Findings

This section presents the descriptive findings related to how church members and leaders utilise social media for ministry engagement. The analysis also shows the use of social media among church members and church leaders.

Digital Ministry Activities and Church Outreach Extension

The study established that an overwhelming 95.1 per cent of respondents agreed that social media has helped extend the church’s reach beyond the physical congregation. Only 3.1 per cent said "No," while 1.8 Per cent were "Not sure." This highlights the transformative role of social media in enabling broader outreach and digital evangelism.

Table 2. Extending Church Reach beyond Physical Congregation

Social media and physical reach	Frequency	Percent
No	12	3.1
Not sure	7	1.8
Yes	369	95.1
Total	388	100

In addition, the respondents reported using social media for a range of ministry activities. The most common were teaching/preaching (20.1%) and youth engagement (20.0%), followed closely by evangelism/outreach (17.3%) and announcements & church updates (18.0%). Other activities included

prayer and fellowship (12.9%) and fundraising/mobilisation (9.7%). A small percentage (2.0%) indicated they do not engage in ministry activities online. These findings suggest that social media is a versatile tool for various forms of church ministry.

Table 3. Types of Ministry Activities via Social Media

Types of Ministry Activities via Social Media	Frequency	Percent
Evangelism / Outreach	157	17.30%
Teaching / Preaching	182	20.10%
Youth Engagement	181	20.00%
Announcements & Church Updates	163	18.00%
Prayer & Fellowship	117	12.90%
Fundraising / Mobilisation	88	9.70%
I do not engage in ministry online	18	2.00%

The use of Social Media Platforms among Church leaders

Church leaders' perspectives on their knowledge, training, and attitudes toward the use of social media in ministry were also assessed on a Likert scale basis. Responses were analysed by aggregating levels of agreement for clearer interpretation. A majority of respondents (46.3%) agreed that they are well-informed about the social media platforms available for the ministry, while 14.2 per cent remained neutral and 9.5 per cent disagreed. When asked whether church leaders are aware of how social media enhances outreach and engagement, 44 per cent agreed, 14.9 Per cent were neutral, and 11.1 Per cent disagreed. On whether social media guidance is regularly provided, 44.8 Per cent agreed, 12.9 per cent were neutral, and 12.3 per cent disagreed.

The impact of social media on church participation was also highlighted, with 46.9 Per cent agreeing that its use has increased attendance and engagement,

15.2 Per cent remaining neutral, and only 8 Per cent disagreeing. Furthermore, 52.1 Per cent agreed that social media helps reach younger community members effectively, 11.3 per cent were neutral, and 6.7 Per cent disagreed. Regarding challenges, 48.2 per cent of respondents agreed that lack of training limits effective ministry, while 15.5 Per cent were neutral and 6.5 Per cent disagreed. Privacy and security concerns were also noted, with 48.7 per cent agreeing, 13.4 per cent neutral, and 8 Per cent disagreeing. Importantly, 50 per cent of respondents affirmed that social media is an essential tool for modern ministry, while 14.2 Per cent were neutral and 5.9 Per cent disagreed. Additionally, 52.1 Per cent agreed that the church should invest more in social media tools, 11.9 per cent were neutral, and 6.2 Per cent disagreed (Table 4). The findings suggest a strong positive attitude among church leaders toward the role of social media in enhancing ministry, despite the noted gaps in training and infrastructure.

Table 4. The use of Social Media Platforms among Church leaders

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am well-informed about the social media platforms available for ministry use in the church.	58 (14.9%)	122 (31.4%)	55 (14.2%)	19 (4.9%)	18 (4.6%)
Church leaders are aware of how social media can enhance outreach and engagement.	25 (6.4%)	146 (37.6%)	58 (14.9%)	27 (7.0%)	16 (4.1%)
Guidance on effective social media use is provided to church leaders regularly.	45 (11.6%)	129 (33.2%)	50 (12.9%)	23 (5.9%)	25 (6.4%)
Using social media has increased the overall attendance and participation in church activities.	52 (13.4%)	130 (33.5%)	59 (15.2%)	20 (5.2%)	11 (2.8%)
Social media allows the church to reach younger members of the community more effectively.	62 (16.0%)	140 (36.1%)	44 (11.3%)	17 (4.4%)	9 (2.3%)
Lack of sufficient training on social media use presents a challenge for effective ministry.	57 (14.7%)	130 (33.5%)	60 (15.5%)	13 (3.4%)	12 (3.1%)
Concerns over privacy and security make it difficult to use social media effectively in church activities.	55 (14.2%)	134 (34.5%)	52 (13.4%)	18 (4.6%)	13 (3.4%)
I believe social media is an essential tool for modern church ministry.	53 (13.7%)	141 (36.3%)	55 (14.2%)	11 (2.8%)	12 (3.1%)
The church should invest more in social media to enhance its ministry and reach.	66 (17.0%)	136 (35.1%)	46 (11.9%)	10 (2.6%)	14 (3.6%)

The use of Social Media Platforms among Church members

Church members' perceptions of how social media is utilised to enhance communication, connection, and

participation in ministry activities were assessed on a Likert scale basis. Responses were summarised into the following categories: agree, neutral, and disagree, and results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The use of Social Media Platforms among Church members

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The church informs congregants about activities and events through social media.	90 (23.2%)	175 (45.1%)	51 (13.1%)	38 (9.8%)	34 (8.8%)
I feel adequately informed about church ministry activities through social media updates.	40 (10.3%)	177 (45.6%)	77 (19.8%)	63 (16.2%)	31 (8.0%)
Social media helps me stay more connected to the church’s ministry activities.	93 (24.0%)	180 (46.4%)	63 (16.2%)	28 (7.2%)	24 (6.2%)
Social media has made it easier for me to engage with church teachings and sermons.	88 (22.7%)	191 (49.2%)	65 (16.8%)	29 (7.5%)	15 (3.9%)
Using social media allows me to interact with other congregants more frequently.	95 (24.5%)	198 (51.0%)	54 (13.9%)	25 (6.4%)	16 (4.1%)
Social media has improved my overall participation in church activities.	88 (22.7%)	194 (50%)	64 (16.5%)	26 (6.7%)	16 (4.1%)
I face challenges in accessing social media due to a lack of internet or technical skills.	86 (22.2%)	184 (47.4%)	69 (17.8%)	33 (8.5%)	16 (4.1%)
Privacy and security concerns discourage me from engaging with the church on social media.	65 (16.8%)	185 (47.7%)	84 (21.6%)	33 (8.5%)	21 (5.4%)
I find it difficult to focus on church-related content due to other distractions on social media.	80 (20.6%)	175 (45.1%)	87 (22.4%)	27 (7.0%)	19 (4.9%)

A majority of the respondents (68.3%) agreed that the church informs congregants about activities and events through social media, while 13.1 per cent were neutral and 18.6 per cent disagreed. Similarly, 55.9 Per cent felt adequately informed about church ministry activities via social media, although 19.8 per cent were neutral and a relatively high 24.2Per cent expressed disagreement. In terms of connectivity, 70.4 per cent of the participants agreed that social media helps them stay more connected to church ministry activities, 16.2Per cent were neutral, and 13.4Per cent disagreed. Likewise, 71.9Per cent agreed that social media has made it easier to engage with church teachings and sermons, while 16.8Per cent were neutral and 11.4 Per cent disagreed. Social media was also perceived as a tool for enhancing fellowship. About 75.5Per cent agreed that it allows more frequent interaction with other congregants, 13.9Per cent were neutral, and 10.5Per cent disagreed. In addition, 72.7Per cent affirmed that social media has improved their participation in church activities, 16.5Per cent remained neutral, and 10.8Per cent disagreed (Table 5).

However, 69.6Per cent of the respondents agreed that they face difficulties in accessing social media due to internet or technical skill limitations, 17.8Per cent

were neutral, and 12.6Per cent disagreed. Concerns over privacy and security were also present, with 64.5Per cent agreeing, 21.6Per cent neutral, and 13.9Per cent disagreeing. In addition, distractions on social media emerged as a barrier, with 65.7Per cent agreeing that it affects their ability to focus on church content, while 22.4Per cent were neutral and 11.9Per cent disagreed. The findings indicate that while most congregants recognise the value of social media in enhancing church communication and participation, some experience challenges related to access, security, and distractions.

Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

A binary logistic regression analysis was also performed to determine the impact of social media on church ministry in the Methodist Church, Nyambene Synod. The dependent variable was whether respondents perceived that social media had made it easier to reach people beyond the physical church, coded as Yes = 1 and No/Not Sure = 0. The independent variables included the types of ministry activities conducted via social media, frequency of social media use, gender, and age brackets. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 18.72, p < .001$, which indicates that the selected predictors collectively improved the ability



to predict the likelihood of perceiving social media as impactful compared to the null model. Furthermore, the model explained a substantial proportion of the variation in the dependent variable, as shown by the Nagelkerke R² value of 0.42 in

Table 6. This suggests that approximately 42Per cent of the variance in the perception of social media impact was accounted for by the predictors in the model.

Table 6. Logistic Regression Analysis Results on the Impact of Social Media on Church Ministry

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Types of ministry activities	0.834	0.386	4.662	1	0.031	2.302
Frequency of use	-0.9	0.274	10.804	1	0.001	0.406
Gender (Male=1, Female=0)	-0.052	0.598	0.008	1	0.93	0.949
Age bracket			5.625	4	0.229	
18-25 (Yes=1, No=0)	0.854	0.869	0.965	1	0.326	2.349
26-35 (Yes=1, No=0)	1.509	0.957	2.484	1	0.115	4.523
36-45 (Yes=1, No=0)	0.391	0.818	0.229	1	0.632	1.479
46-55 (Yes=1, No=0)	2.446	1.261	3.763	1	0.052	11.536
Constant	2.526	1.095	5.324	1	0.021	12.508
Model $\chi^2(4)$	18.72				.000	
Nagelkerke R ²						0.42

Note: *B* represents the regression coefficient (log-odds), *S.E.* is the standard error, *Wald* tests the predictor's significance, *df* is the degrees of freedom, *Sig.* is the *p*-value, and *Exp(B)* indicates the odds ratio.

The analysis revealed that two predictors were statistically significant. First, the types of ministry activities carried out through social media significantly influenced the perception of its impact on ministry ($p = .031$). For each additional type of activity undertaken online, the odds of perceiving social media as effective increased by approximately 130Per cent ($\text{Exp}(B) = 2.302$). Second, the frequency of social media use also significantly predicted the perception of impact ($p = .001$). Respondents who used social media more frequently were substantially more likely to consider it an effective tool for ministry. The odds ratio for frequency of use ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.406$) indicates that less frequent use was associated with a markedly lower likelihood of perceiving social media as impactful, emphasising the importance of consistent engagement.

Gender did not emerge as a significant predictor ($p = .930$), indicating that male and female respondents did not differ significantly in their perceptions of social media's role in ministry. Similarly, the age bracket variable was not statistically significant overall ($p = .229$). However, the age group of 46–55 years approached significance ($p = .052$) and had an odds ratio of 11.536, suggesting a possible trend that individuals within this category may be more inclined to perceive social media as beneficial, although this result was not conclusive. These findings demonstrate that the breadth of ministry activities undertaken through social media and the frequency of its use are the most influential factors in shaping positive perceptions of its effectiveness for church ministry. Conversely, demographic factors such as gender and age appear to exert minimal influence on these perceptions. This underscores the importance of promoting diverse ministry

engagements and encouraging regular social media use to maximise its impact on church outreach.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Responses Clergy Interviews

This section presents the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with clergy members regarding their use of social media in ministry. The data was analysed inductively, and three overarching themes emerged: (1) Integration and Use of Social Media in Ministry, (2) Capacity and Challenges in Social Media Utilisation, and (3) Opportunities for Improvement and Impact on Ministry.

Theme 1: Integration and Use of Social Media in Ministry

The clergy unanimously acknowledged the significant role social media plays in enhancing communication and ministry activities. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Live were commonly cited as the primary tools used to deliver spiritual messages, conduct prayers, and provide pastoral support. These platforms have made it easier for clergy to reach a broader audience, especially during virtual services or when congregants are geographically dispersed.

“WhatsApp posts, Facebook Lives, messages or SMS...” (Clergy 1)

“Meeting through WhatsApp, occasionally Facebook Lives...” (Clergy 2)

In addition to facilitating real-time interaction with congregants, social media was used to organise church events such as crusades, vigils (Keshas), and group prayer sessions. This theme demonstrates the increasing integration of digital platforms into daily pastoral routines and church operations.

Theme 2: Capacity and Challenges in Social Media Utilisation

Despite the widespread use of social media, most clergy members reported inadequate training and limited capacity to fully exploit digital platforms for ministry. Some clergy rated their social media skills as average, while others expressed outright concern about lacking the necessary knowledge and digital literacy.

“Not adequate” (Clergy 1)

“Average” (Clergy 2 and 3)

In addition to the skills gap, the clergy faced various operational challenges. These included the lack of

appropriate equipment (e.g., laptops, projectors, and smartphones), insufficient internet bundles, and occasional negative feedback from online audiences. Moreover, they observed that not all congregants were active on social media, limiting reach and participation.

“Lack of tools like projectors, laptops, good phones...” (Clergy 1)

“Not everyone is using social media, negative feedback...” (Clergy 2)

This theme highlights both human and infrastructural barriers that hinder the seamless integration of social media in ministry.

Theme 3: Opportunities for Improvement and Impact on Ministry

While acknowledging existing challenges, the clergy also recognised the transformative potential of social media in delivering sermons and enhancing spiritual engagement. Respondents noted that digital tools have made it easier to access biblical materials, understand scripture, and personalise sermon content for diverse audiences.

“Social media helps one get the meaning of the Bible texts...” (Clergy 3)

“Positive influence, easy to communicate and download materials...” (Clergy 1)

To maximise these benefits, clergy members recommended a range of interventions. These included structured training on digital ministry, provision of reliable internet access, creation of secure platforms for online engagement, and broader digital awareness campaigns within congregations.

“Improve knowledge on social media use among the clergy through training...” (Clergy 3)

“Facilitation by provision of Wi-Fi/bundles...” (Clergy 1)

This theme reveals a proactive attitude among clergy, who are open to embracing technology if given the necessary support and tools.

Lay Preachers Interview Responses

This section presents the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with lay preachers to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of social media in ministry. The respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions related to their engagement with social media platforms, the effectiveness of these tools in spreading the gospel, challenges faced, and the kind of support needed to

enhance digital evangelism and various themes developed.

Theme 1: Embracing Social Media for Ministry Outreach

The first theme highlights the widespread use of social media among lay preachers for evangelistic purposes. Respondents indicated that platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube were instrumental in reaching congregants with sermons, scriptures, and spiritual music. The majority of lay preachers perceived social media as a valuable and accessible tool for enhancing their ministry, particularly in terms of reach and engagement. Several noted that social media was especially effective in connecting with the youth, increasing church attendance, and facilitating spiritual growth among members who might not physically attend church.

One respondent noted, *"I use Facebook Live and WhatsApp to stream services and share scriptures."* Another added, *"Social media is good, simple, and has increased reach."* Such responses point to a growing recognition of the digital space as a legitimate and impactful ministry platform.

Theme 2: Barriers to Effective Social Media Use

Despite the enthusiasm for social media use, various barriers were identified that hinder effective engagement. These included technological limitations such as a lack of smartphones, unreliable internet access, and costly data bundles. Additionally, some lay preachers lacked adequate digital skills or experienced challenges interpreting online language. There were also instances where negative feedback or perceptions from the audience discouraged their efforts.

For example, one lay preacher remarked, *"The challenge is the lack of smartphones among members."* Another stated, *"We face negative messages and poor internet connectivity."* These limitations present significant obstacles to the consistent and meaningful use of social media for spiritual outreach, particularly in underserved or rural communities.

Theme 3: Need for Capacity Building and Technological Support

The third theme reflects the respondents' collective desire for increased support to enhance their digital

ministry efforts. Lay preachers emphasised the need for structured training on the effective use of social media tools, access to biblical and theological content such as Bible commentaries, and improved technological infrastructure. This includes the provision of internet bundles, Wi-Fi access, and necessary equipment.

Multiple participants expressed this sentiment, with one stating, *"We need training on social media and installation of Wi-Fi at the church."* Another added, *"Provision of skills and facilitation in terms of bundles would help a lot."* These responses underscore the importance of investing in the digital capacity of lay preachers to ensure more impactful and sustained online ministry.

Church Leaders' Responses

This section presents a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with church leaders on the use of social media for church management and ministry. The responses focused on the platforms used, attitudes and awareness of social media's role in ministry, observed impacts, challenges faced, and strategies proposed to overcome those challenges. The analysis revealed three dominant themes: growing acceptance of social media in church ministry, digital literacy and access challenges, and the need for structured policy and capacity building.

Theme 1: Growing Acceptance of Social Media in Church Ministry

Church leaders expressed an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the use of social media in church operations. WhatsApp and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used platforms, with leaders leveraging them for communication, outreach, and engagement. Many respondents noted that social media had significantly increased church participation, enhanced information flow, and improved connectivity with members both locally and in the diaspora.

For instance, one leader stated, *"We use WhatsApp and Facebook to inform members on various occasions,"* while another emphasised, *"Social media has simplified communication and improved participation."* This theme indicates a growing trend among leaders who view digital platforms as valuable tools for spiritual and administrative functions in the church.

Theme 2: Digital Literacy and Access Challenges

Despite the enthusiasm, respondents identified several access-related and literacy-based barriers. Commonly cited issues included a lack of smartphones, poor internet connectivity, limited digital skills, power outages, and the high cost of mobile data. Additionally, leaders noted that some members were unaware of how to use social media effectively, and a few expressed concern over inappropriate use or timing of social media engagement.

One leader remarked, *“The main challenge is illiteracy and lack of smartphones.”* Another added, *“Social media use in the wrong time and negative posts are concerning.”* This theme reflects a digital divide that hampers equal participation and underscores the need for broader inclusion and awareness-building within church communities.

Theme 3: Need for Structured Policy and Capacity Building

The final theme highlights the need for institutional support and capacity development to enhance the responsible and effective use of social media in ministry. Several leaders pointed to the absence of formal church policies guiding digital engagement. Moreover, many respondents called for member training on the correct and safe use of social media, cybersecurity awareness, and investment in infrastructure such as Wi-Fi and backup power.

For example, one respondent recommended, *“Create awareness of the importance of social media and install Wi-Fi.”* Another said, *“Educate members on cybersecurity and the rightful use of social media.”* These views indicate that, beyond individual effort, structural and organisational interventions are necessary to sustain digital ministry.

Discussion of Findings

Impact of Social Media on Church Ministry

The study revealed that the most common activities conducted through social media were teaching and preaching (20.1%) and youth engagement (20.0%), followed by evangelism and outreach (17.3%) and announcements and church updates (18.0%). These findings demonstrate that social media has become a multifunctional tool for ministry. This concurs with Adelaku (2020), who reported that Kenyan churches widely use social media for evangelism and educational purposes. Similarly, Bocala-Wiedemann

(2022) emphasised that digital platforms enhance outreach and discipleship among youth and young adults, which aligns with the prominence of youth engagement observed in this study. Furthermore, Livingston et al. (2023) observed that social media supports diverse ministry functions, including preaching and community mobilisation, indicating its role in expanding both formal and informal aspects of church communication. These findings underscore the adaptability of digital platforms in fulfilling key ecclesiastical roles traditionally performed through in-person interactions.

Extending Church Reach beyond Physical Congregation

An overwhelming 95.1 per cent of respondents agreed that social media has extended the church’s reach beyond its physical congregation. This resonates with findings by Kühle and Larsen (2021), who documented that during the COVID-19 lockdown, social media became essential for maintaining and expanding church membership globally. Similarly, Sircar and Rowley (2020) highlighted that social media offers churches a global presence, enabling real-time interaction beyond geographical boundaries. Campbell and Tsuria (2022) also noted that digital platforms create “networked religious communities,” allowing churches to reach audiences previously inaccessible through traditional means. These findings imply that social media is not merely a supplement to physical gatherings but a critical extension of church ministry into broader digital spaces.

Perceived Impact of Social Media on Ministry

The study found that 64Per cent of respondents viewed social media as having a very positive impact on church ministry, while 25Per cent considered the impact somewhat positive (Figure 1). These results are consistent with Murumba and Omuya (2017), who reported that Kenyan churches perceive social media as an effective means of spreading the gospel and maintaining engagement. Similarly, Williams and Krisjanous (2023) argued that social media promotes spiritual consumption, offering congregants easier access to religious content and interactive worship experiences. Njuka and Phiri (2021) also asserted that social media enhances communal identity among African churches, supporting fellowship beyond physical meetings.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the notion that digital platforms significantly enrich ministry by improving communication, participation, and evangelisation.

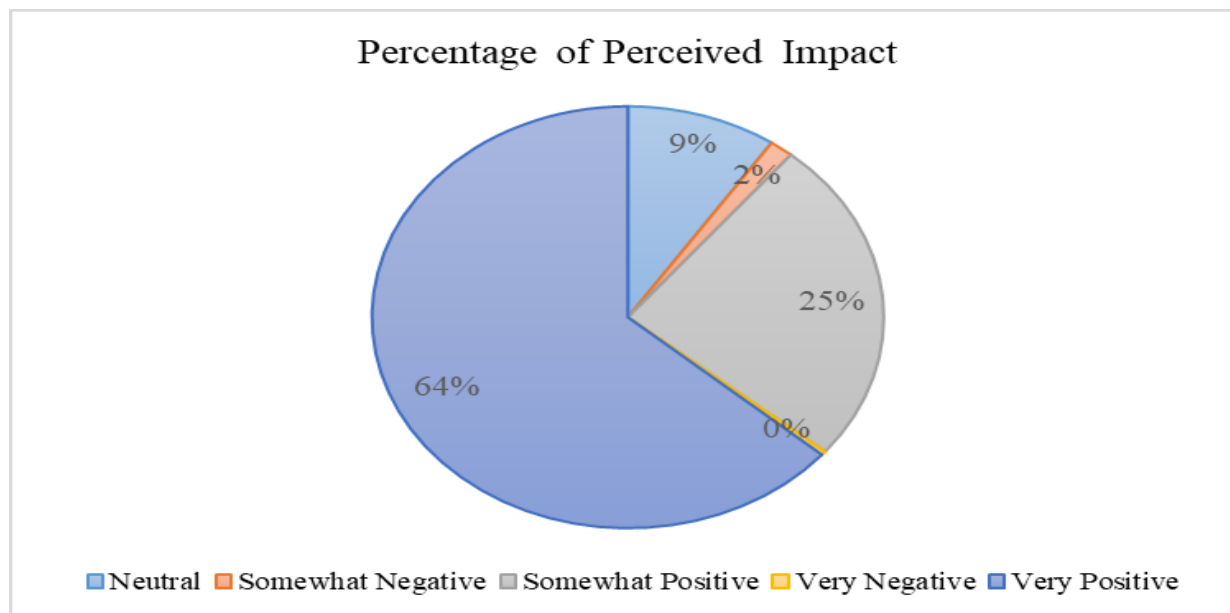


Figure 1: Perceived Impact of Social Media on Church Ministry

Determinants of Perceived Impact

The logistic regression analysis showed that the types of ministry activities and frequency of social media use were significant predictors of perceived impact, accounting for 42 Per cent of the variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.42$). For each additional type of activity conducted online, the likelihood of perceiving social media as impactful increased by 130 Per cent. This aligns with Animante et al. (2021), who found that the perceived usefulness of social media in religious settings is strongly tied to the variety of activities integrated into digital ministry. Similarly, Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasised that consistent engagement with digital tools strengthens perceptions of their utility and impact. The findings also show that demographic factors such as gender and age were not significant predictors, which contradicts earlier studies like Bwalya (2021) and Gultom et al. (2022), who linked age and gender to varying levels of digital engagement in churches. These results imply that actual usage behaviours—rather than demographic attributes—are more critical in shaping perceptions of social media's value in ministry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study established that social media plays a significant role in enhancing church ministry in the Methodist Church, Nyambene Synod. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook have expanded outreach, improved communication, and fostered member participation, particularly among the youth. The findings revealed that the diversity of ministry activities conducted online and the frequency of social media use were the strongest predictors of positive perceptions of its impact, accounting for 42Per cent of the variance. This confirms that consistent and varied digital engagement enhances the effectiveness of the ministry. While social media has been embraced as a complementary tool for evangelism, teaching, and fellowship, challenges such as limited training, poor internet access, and privacy concerns need to be addressed to maximise its benefits.

Recommendations: The church should invest in capacity building for clergy and lay preachers through structured training on effective social media use and cybersecurity awareness. There is also a need to improve digital infrastructure by providing internet access and relevant equipment to support

online ministry. Additionally, the church should develop clear guidelines for digital engagement and adopt a blended approach that integrates online and in-person ministry to ensure inclusivity and strengthen congregational cohesion.

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