ASSESSMENT OF CYBERSPACE AND TRADITIONAL CHURCH MODELS: A STUDY OF SELECTED SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN NYANCHWA STATION, SOUTH KENYA CONFERENCE, KISII, KENYA

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A RESEARCH THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POST GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGION OF THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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DEDICATION

I commit this thesis to my cherished wife Yunniah Nyaboke and my beloved children Bonface, Sharon, Lenah, Ahithophel and Blessed for their understanding, patience, prayers and enduring support for the period of my study time. Lastly, I commit this study to my dear parents Eliasiph Nyakwara and Jane Moraa for their mentorship, encouragement and vast prayers.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CTT: Critical Theory of Technology

HWM: Hear the Word Ministries

ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies

IDA: Infocomm Development Authority

IM: Instant Messaging

PCs: Pentecostal Churches

SCNSs: Social Cyberspace Networking Sites

SDA: Seventh Day Adventist

SKC: South Kenya Conference

TV: Television

UGT: Uses Gratification Theory

US: United States

UK: United Kingdom

ZAOGA: Zimbabwe Assembles of God Africa

KINF: Key Informant

ABSRTACT

The mission of the Church is to evangelize all people regardless of the place within which they are found. Today, cyberspace technologies have tremendous implications on traditional and conventional regard to the church in terms of her definition and mission, particularly in hard times of pandemics and even challenging human condition like age, sickness, physical distance, and so on. Cyberspace technologies create a wake-up call for churches to rethink the place of technology in enhancing her activities. The study investigated the implications cyberspace and traditional church models, with specific reference to selected churches of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya. This was realized as guided by the following specific objectives: to determine cyberspace technologies used by the SDA church; to assess evangelical activities of the SDA church; to examine the implications of cyberspace technologies used by the SDA church, and to examine some of the challenges encountered by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station. The entire study was guided by two theories: Uses and Gratification Theory by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974; Critical Theory of Technology by Feenberg in 1991. Being a qualitative study, it employed a descriptive research design. The general target population was 519 respondents with a sample size of 171 informants. The study employed two sampling techniques: purposive for ICT technocrats and simple random for church members, including the youth; it also used censors for pastors and church clerks. Two data collection tools were used: Questionnaire and Interview schedule guide. Data was qualitatively analyzed using content, narrative and thematic analyses, reported and presented through frequency tables, charts and verbatim. The study found that and 56 (45%) were in support of the thesis on the use of various technologies, however, the point to note in these findings is that the difference margin was so minimal. Radio was found to be the most preferred, with 102 (82%) of the respondents endorsing it. For objective two on church activities realized through cyberspace technological platforms included: pastoral care of the faith, preaching, worship, religious instructions, spiritual development, formation of online church communities, finally, financial management and church contributions. However, preaching and prayer services counted as the most preferred with 114 (91.2%) of the respondents in its support. For objective three cyberspace was found to be a new area of mission where many people, especially the young are found and reached, and a source of religious information that the traditional physical church with a majority of 114 (91.2%) in its support. For objective four, the high cost of installing a full-fledged ICTs infrastructure in the church with 97 (77.6%) of participants endorsing it and the misuse of cyberspace technologies with 95 (76%) of the informants affirming it were found to be the biggest challenges. The study concluded that the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station endeavors to employ cyberspace technologies in her evangelical mission. It recommended for a blended type of church and SDA church to invest more in cyberspace technology infrastructure. Further, the study recommended the SDA church together with Christian theologians to come up with effective ways to evangelize cyberspace platforms and its technologies.

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CHPATER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

The advancements realized in technology, particularly information and communications technologies (ICTs) enable the world to overcome the boundaries of space and time, while impacting heavily on traditional processes in many spheres of life, including the church and other faith groups; they are now the conduit for social change within the umbrella of both informal and formal operations of institutions. Today, it is unusual to find people not relying on internet related technologies like Face book, You Tube, Twitter, Instagram, streaming media, and so on, for texting, carrying out business, and other forms of social communication. In the context of this study, the use of these technologies in the church operations has made cyberspace not the preserve of only technology experts since it reconstitutes the way the church defines herself and carries her activities. As explained by Campbell and Grieve (2014), the symbiosis between religiosity, spirituality, and cyberspace has broadened and influenced the relevance of the church in a technologically motivated society; it has opened up the church's social and evangelical space, extending it beyond the confines of the traditional church model that depended more on physical approaches of defining herself and also of doing mission. This assertion is reiterated by Huizinga (2016) who argued that technology and religion are deeply connected and non should be considered "an absolute antithesis" of the other. While De Wildt and Aupers (2020) posit that, today, millions of technology users engage religion and spirituality through videogames and other sites for the development of their faith and related purposes.

However, the fact that informed this study was that embracement of cyberspace church model implies having tremendous implications on traditional and conventional church model that

esteemed and esteems physical presence and activities. For instance, cyberspace church model is capable of responding to the spiritual needs of church groups like age, sickness, physical distance, and so on who are not able to participate in the physical determinations of the church mission. This is something that cannot be done in the traditional church model. Cyberspace church opens new avenues for the reconstruction of the church identity and operations in the technological frame of development. But this cannot be for those with conservative stances that consider cyberspace church to be antithesis of the traditional church model; they fail to consider them as complementary and at the same time enhancement of the understanding and growth of the church.

Cyberspace technologies are new platforms and forms of being church that allow inclusivity, where all church members are enabled to participate without any barriers, reckoning hard times that require no need for physical human presence in church since the church is no more about physical presence but the mission she is commissioned to realize. The practical and contextual implications of this was witnessed in the late 20th century with the up surging of HIV virus and AIDS with the ignorance and fear around it where churches all over the world declined in physical member participation and disruption of physical church operations (Starr, 2006; Gamble, 2010). In the attempt to adhere to this, churches and religious communities all over the world took relevant measures, actions and formidable internal reforms to help reduce the spread of the virus (Bello, 2015; Iyakaremye, 2015). This included the disruption of physical operations of the church that previously defined the traditional church model. Since the church was defined by its physical operations, it meant that with the disruption of physical activities it was not able to fully operate as church in the traditional frame.

A similar reality was seen with the outbreak of Spanish Influenza pandemic or virus that swept many lives in Europe and in the USA. In the attempts to reduce the spread of the virus, governments all over the world had to close their operations, including churches. For instance, in the United States (US), Europe and other parts of the world, churches were forced to close, paralyzing all their religious activities (Starr, 2006; Gamble, 2010). This implied that traditional church model operations that were defined by physical setting were all interrupted, and even rendered obsolete. This, consequently and in the most adverse manner affected the mission of the Church, especially its physical space and spiritual needs of church groups like the sick, the far off, and so on. Others for fear of getting infected, they could not attend the mortar and brick church. This is where cyberspace church model became an alternative and preferred by many congregants. However, since modern technological platforms were not fully developed and in use it meant that the church could still not fully continue with her missionary activities.

In a more adverse a severe manner, a related situation was witnessed again with the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, commonly known as Corona virus pandemic in December 2019, which reached every corner of the world killing many people and paralyzing all face-to-face human activities, including church services and other spiritual and administrative functions. Covid-19 pandemic interrupted and reconfigured all the operations and nature of the traditional church model that for a long time gloried itself in physical activities. Following the same dynamics that were used to control the widespread of Spanish Influenza pandemic or virus, and reduce its impact, governments all over the world temporarily suspended all face-to-face activities, including church evangelical and missionary undertakings like worship services of various faiths and all other gatherings of the church to avoid escalating spread of the virus. With the suspension of face-to-face gatherings, in a remarkable way, able churches (with internet infrastructure and accessibility)

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were compelled to embrace cyberspace technologies and even form cyberspace churches, while those that were not able found themselves disadvantaged.

Under such new development of being church, the cyberspace church model became an alternative and a new mechanism to enhance and promote church evangelical and administrative work; technological platforms like TV live streaming, teleconferences, radio, WhatsApp, Facebook, email, desktop publishing, visual technologies, church websites, and so on, became new horizons for the church operations, which in essence enabled the church to be relevant during those hard times. Since these technologies transcend the determinations of physical operations, churches were able to continue with their ministerial missionary activities like worship, fellowship, pastoral programs, education, evangelism and so forth. However, this was not the case with some of the churches including the SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station that were accustomed to traditional physical form of being church and not flexible to embrace technology. This meant that a section of members in those churches were not fully attended to thus necessitating this study on the assessment of cyberspace and traditional church models in selected Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference.

From an historical perspective, influenced by modern technological developments, the reconstituting and remodeling of the traditional church model was first posited in an empirical study by Scott (1997); the study indicated that in the US, particularly Fuller Seminary in Pasadena – California prepared its future ministers and theologians for technological advancements. Reaffirming the study by Scott, Morgan (2011) indicated that in the US cyberspace technologies are used as new ways of realizing the pastoral ministry of the church; through them church ministers engage their communities beyond the physical coordinates of the church as they are able

to tweet out and email devotionals and other church events with greater ease with less costs. Technologies like Facebook, Instagram and You Tube facilitate the creation of online church communities and share church programs and spiritual content like pictures, sermons, and videos. These church and spiritual functions make them community-based web tools that connect congregants and allow them to enrich their faith, work and learn together as a dynamic and growing church community (Chiung, 2011). The profound implication of this is that the use of these cyberspace technologies indicates the development of a new Church architecture that is not material in nature, with the enlargement of the church space for worship and other religious ministries. However, despite the embracement of technology by Americans, Jewell (2005) pointed out that Christian institutions are not doing enough in the training of their personnel and congregants to equip church ministers in a manner of enabling them to manage well the cyberspace platform as a new area of mission and its related technologies for the good of the church. A gap that warrants this study on cyberspace church model and Seventh Day Adventist Traditional church model in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya.

Echoing this new reality of the church in relation to cyberspace technologies, a study by Lynas (2021) postulated that in the United Kingdom (UK), church congregants facing different life conditions use cyberspace technologies to keep their faith alive, particularly in situations where there is no possibility of participating in the traditional and physical way of being church. For instance, in the hard times like the ones posited by Covid-19, a survey research conducted throughout the UK and across different denominations revealed and reported that many traditional churches remained closed and could not continue with their operations. This in a profound way influenced the average in-person attendance at church services, with the decline by 32% with other unmeasurable effects in the development of the faith of the members (Lynas, 2021). There was

also a drop in relation to congregational monetary contributions as many were accustomed to physical monetary contributions. The interesting gap that gives rise to this study was that the same study by Lynas (2021) argued that with the decrease in Covid-19 pandemic infections, the majority of churches have returned to weekly in-person services (95%) from 60% during hard times of Covid-19, though some have remained offering online services as well with 60% level of operations. This comportment of the church pointed to the fact that traditional church model of physical operations cannot be completely dismissed and replaced by cyberspace church model that is essentially defined by technological church platforms. But the important aspect of this return to in-person church reality is that there are aspects that define the church in the traditional church model that cannot fully be substituted by modern cyberspace church model and technologies.

While in Singapore, a study by Randolph Kluver (2007) examined ways in which technological advancements and religion co-exist and reciprocally inform and strengthen each other within the Singaporean context. The study concluded that various religious communities resolve to employ internet related technologies as part of their renewed way of being church. This reconstituted religious missionary platforms and strategy for church development with a remarkable impossibility of returning to the traditional church model of face-to-face interactions. On the same note, Infocomm Development Authority (IDA, 2004) of Singapore explained that the embracement of internet by the Singaporeans church was as a result of an assertive resolve campaign by the government to build a technologically affable infrastructure and to boost personal use of the Internet as indispensable way of being and acting in the technological society. Since the entire society was induced and facilitated to embrace technology, the engagement of the Church with technology as supported by Singaporean government made the church religiously acceptable to the members in a manner that legitimated the technologization of religious faith in practice; it

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revitalized the faith and practices of the various Christian communities within the country (Campbell, 2005b).

In Africa, whether in in the physical church space or in cyberspace platforms religion plays an important role in the lives of many people (Tayob, 2018). The efforts of many countries to avail internet related technologies to their people have enabled the church to embrace cyberspace platforms for her missionary mandate in the various ministries. An empirical study by De Lanerolle (2013) indicated that South Africa leads in the use of internet related technologies with 78%, followed by Kenya at 74%, Ghana 59.6%, Namibia 56.6) %, Nigeria 46.7%, Uganda 46%, Cameroon 44.5%, Tanzania 35.8% and Rwanda 24.4%. These figures imply that the use of internet related technologies facilitated by the various governments equally facilitate the church mission through the formation of Facebook groups, Twitter groups, live streaming and so forth. The indubitable fact is that cyberspace technologies present new methodologies and approaches that invigorate traditional church models in Africa, since church members are able to find a church at a specific cyber-location not confined to physical space for fellowship (Hvass, 2011).

Various churches take advantage of the available cyberspace technologies to enhance their evangelical activities and have a renewed form of doing evangelism. This shift is manifested where churches in Africa today rely most heavily on social media technologies. For instance, in Zimbabwe, taking advantage of the high levels of literacy of church, the leaders produce booklets, tracts and magazines full of church doctrine. Zimbabwean MPCs, like the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA) and Hear the Word Ministries (HWM) have their own radio stations and publishing houses. Remote technologies like the radio and television enable the faithful who are unable to attend face-to-face ministry services to experience them from afar, thereby enriching

their sense of belonging to the church and also their spirituality. Through cyberspace technologies, church members are able to access any church information they need at any time of their choice and comfort, thereby enlarging the church ministerial space to get new members and religious experiences. But then, sometimes this is more idealistic and idolization of cyberspace while undermining the important aspects of traditional church model that should as well be taken into consideration in the development of the church and the faith of members.

In Nigeria, an empirical study by Adebayo Ola Afolaranmi (2020) explained that few churches employed internet related technologies in their pastoral ministry before the Covid-19 pandemic. But with the distressing implications of Covid-19 plague, many Christian denominations through the Christian Association of Nigeria had to direct all churches to conduct their services online, including financial contributions through electronic transfers (Amadi-Nche, 2021). Most churches opted to use cyberspace technologies (Zoom, WhatsApp, Telegram Messenger, Television, Face book and so forth) as a viable alternative and a complementary means and mechanism of evangelization with less preference to traditional means of church pastoral ministry. The reason for this was that such platforms do not require physical and face-to-face church engagements and therefore are considered appropriate to congregants in different conditions of life even beyond and after the threatening effects of Covid-19 pandemic. Wobodo (2020) explained that churches that did not make the shift to technology use and only depended traditional model of church organization and operations lost most of their members to other churches that used cyberspace programs and technologies to carry out their evangelical activities to enrich their congregants. However, the flip-side of the shift was that since there were no face-to-face church worship sessions or any religious activities, the income of physical traditional church model that depend

on the free will giving of offerings, tithes, and others meant that the financial revenue of most churches tremendously dropped (Amadi-Nche, 2021).

Still in Nigeria, a research by Ihejirika (2010) on media, religion and culture made an impressive comparative analyses of Pentecostal churches and the Catholic church on the use of cyberspace technologies. The study made a claim that Pentecostal churches consider and use technology as an enabling invention that extends the church pulpit ministry, while the Catholic church displays to some extent a conservative and luddite attitude and stances towards technology by remaining largely in a print-based media church operations and oral religious instructions or catechisms. Because of this, the Catholic church is seen to constrain her evangelical platforms to physical arrangements, thereby not reaching to evangelize cyberspace members and technologies that are part of her mandated mission in the technologically growing society. This luddite stance in essence limits her capacity to realize the prodigious instruction of Jesus Christ of spreading the Good News to the end of the earth through various available means that facilitate evangelism activities and platforms, including cyberspace technologies themselves as new areas of mission. According to Ihejirika (2010), the internet related technologies have proved to be one of the most efficient and reliable means of social communication globally with little or no restrictions, which Christians cannot disregard if the message of Christ has to reach to all peoples as intended by Jesus Christ in the grand commissioning of his disciples.

In Kenya, again siting the case of Covid-19 pandemic, the government imposed lockdown measures and prohibited face-to-face mass gatherings, physical churches were closed and Kenyans were asked to stay at home (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2020). The halting of church assemblies and other get-togethers in both private and public spaces prevented church minsters from carrying

out with their pastoral ministry directly in the traditional church model setting that is characterized by physical visibility. Furthermore, the government championed the transition to digital space. This move on one side enabled the church while on the other side challenged and negatively affected the traditional church model that was accustomed to keeping audiences captivated by physical activities and programs to the level that she is not inclined to see the need elsewhere for followers. But with cyberspace technological platforms, churches were and are able to carry out their activities in unrestricted manner, reaching out to those who are aged, sick, physically challenged and not able to participate in a physical church operational settings (Nyakwara & Ichuloi, 2022).

In more practical ways, churches including the SDA church opened TV stations and migrated to cyberspace area of mission to continue with their operations. Apart from television and radio stations, most Kenyan churches embraced the cyberspace form of church through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Websites, Blogs, WhatsApp and Messenger. These technological platforms offered audiences other options not foreseen in the traditional church such that today congregants worship, receive sermons, educational programs, prayer sessions, meetings, church music, and awareness were made available to the faithful and they exhorted to join activities in those platforms. They are digital tools or platforms for church community engagement that are different from the traditional model of church. Despite this, not all church members were satisfied with the new technological church development since there were those who could not be reached even with technological platforms, while others were skeptical of the use of technology to advance the church mission.

The point to note is that this recourse to cyberspace technological platforms for the operations and mission of the church is steadily reconstituting the church by wiping out face-to-face contact/relationships as experienced in TV/Internet church services, listening to aired radio sermons, messaging church issues, and so on. This new mode of being church encourage the faithful and give them hope not only in times of crisis brought by either pandemics, anthropological factors like age, sickness, distance, but also to those who look forward for renewed forms of being church. However, this reconstituting and instrumental enhancing nature of technology creates a wake-up call for the SDA church to rethink her identity as a dynamic one, while remaining open to improve her evangelism activities in a manner that transcends the traditionally accustomed forms of doing church mission. Today, in the technologically motivated society, the relevance of the SDA church can only be fully realized through the church's ability to embrace new technological forms of being church and new areas of mission (Nyakwara & Ichuloi, 2022), while also remaining open to the needs and aspirations of those who find spiritual meaning in the traditional physical church model.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the light of modern technological development, the Church in her endeavor to facilitate Christians in their relationship with God and carryout her administrative role is obliged to enlarge and contextualize its physical and cyberspace to cater for the diverse faith needs of the congregants. This is fundamentally important because natural realities (calamities like pandemics, and other anthropological factors like age, sickness, comfortable lifestyles) present new church landscapes and challenges that call for both resilience and adaptation, embracing new ways of doing mission and of being church. Those affected by the mentioned natural realities of sickness, age are all church members that should equally and appropriately be served using all possible and accepted

means, including cyberspace technologies. Another important fact is that the use of cyberspace technologies should not be envisioned only in the times of crises as was the case during Covid-19 pandemic. In both cyberspace and traditional brick and mortar churches, modern cybernetic platforms and technologies are relevant for the evangelical activities and programs of the church.

However, in some SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station (Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta represented the rural setup churches. Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup), there is resistance to embrace cyberspace technologies for the operations of the church; there are church members with conservative and luddite stances on cyberspace technologies, condemning anything related to their use, especially when it comes to church and religious affairs. They consider cyberspace church platforms and any possibility of having a cyber-church as a threat that replaces the traditional and conventional church model that is defined by the parameters of physical face-to-face structure of operations. This study, therefore, aimed to assess both the cyberspace and the traditional church models with reference to selected SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station; they are models that today define the ecclesiology of the SDA church in South Kenya Conference.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study sought to assess both cyberspace and the traditional church models with reference to selected (Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta represented the rural setup churches. While Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup) Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, Kisii County, Kenya. The underlying intent of the study was to

address not only the instrumental nature and use of cyberspace technologies, but more importantly to assess their implications on the traditional model of the church. Today, because of the insatiable technological influence, all church communities are in between the paradox of a total embracement of technology and the hybrid church operations; in other words, the ministry of the church is challenged to make an option to be partly physical and partly virtual or conservatively remain physical. However, the pointer to either totally embrace technology in church or have a hybrid of technology physical church is realized by the fact that every church congregation has members and experts who interact with cyberspace technologies in their daily lives. Thus, the study sought to investigate cyberspace technologies and the traditional church model with reference to selected SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference.

1.4 Specific Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by three specific objectives:

1. To determine cyberspace technologies used by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii Kenya

2. To assess church cyberspace evangelical activities of the SDA church in cyberspace church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

3. To evaluate the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya.

4. To examine the challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya.

1.5 Study Questions

1. What cyberspace technologies does the SDA church employ in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya?

2. What are the church cyberspace missionary activities of the SDA church in cyberspace church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya?

3. What are the implications of cyberspace technologies used by the SDA church in her evangelical activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya?

4. What challenges does the SDA church face in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya?

1.6 Justification of the Study

The study engaged in assessing both cyberspace church and traditional church models in selected SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station. Nyanchwa Station represents two realities – rural and urban. Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta churches represented the rural setup. While Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup. The great commission of Jesus Christ to his disciples was to proclaim the Good News to all peoples (Mt. 28: 19–20) in wherever place they are, including those in cyberspace. The services realized through cyberspace technologies form the basis and reasons for which churches should seriously consider the importance of technology as an instrument in their mission that enables them reach out to the faithful in various conditions or state of affairs in and outside of the church. Partridge (2005) asserted that the existence of cyberspace and its related technologies create a Church sphere not limited by time or location, a sphere for the interactions of individuals with different ideas from around all over the world. This resonates with Grinter et al (2011) who argued that evangelism is one of the major reasons why churches opt to adopt cyberspace platform to serve church communities situated in

remote, secluded, sparse and even spatial locations of the globe. Furthermore, there are groups of

the church community (the aged, sick, people with physical disabilities) that need the enhancement

of technology. Online services allow Christian believers and those who are inquisitive about the

Christian Church and message to have the pleasure in a personal way to experience some of the

aspects of being church from the comfort of their own home different from those with traditional

church model that esteem the physical presentation of being church.

Cyberspace today is a critical place of mission of the church which cannot be undermined since

its related technologies have a decisive role for religious activities and experience where the

internet as an instrument becomes an indispensable forum for important religious activities and

engagement (Dawson, 2005), and also where the church encounters a number of new members,

especially the inquisitive young generation. Many young people turn to cyberspace and internet

related platforms to find personal, social and religious information and ecclesiastical institutions

are devoting more and more resources to improving their presence on the web (Bolu, 2011).

According to Bolu (2011), young people make up the lion share of church membership, and most

of them are found in cyberspace engaged with cyberspace technologies. These young people are

most of the time engaged with technological platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp,

Instagram, television, satellite systems as well as the various services and applications related to

them such as video conferencing and distance learning (Wobodo, 2020) and the like used to create

and realize online Church communities and functions. Cyberspace technologies give the church

opportunities to grow in numbers, community consciousness that is not limited to mere physical

presence, and also in the faith (Wyche et al., 2006). Online technologies are now an integral part

of the younger generational culture for operations, which churches need to understand and exploit

the potential within these technologies. Shoba (2020) reaffirmed that the use of digital platforms

provided congregations with spiritual motivation, through daily devotionals, prayers, and sermons. Phone calls, twits and instant messaging enabled the sending of encouraging text messages. Churches had no choice but to embrace technology they were once hesitant to accept.

Cyberspace church and its technologies are taking over many of the functions of the church as an institution and of institutionalized religion by giving spiritual guidance and moral orientation. Through technology, users participate in virtual religious rituals, services, meditation sessions, worship, confessional exchanges, religious instructions (teachings), discussions, testimony services, and intercessory prayer groups (Cloete, 2015). These sentiments are echoed by Adebayo (2019) who argued that technology offers multifaceted services to church believers, leaders and ordinary church users in that most popular religious activities online are meant for search of religious experiences and providing religious data, seeking or offering spiritual advice, and sending/emailing prayer requests. Thumma and Travis (2007) accounted that the adoption of various specific technologies by the Church is meant to help denominations reach out to and recruit members who are put off by traditional church model systems.

Today, cyberspace and its related technologies have proved to be the most efficient and reliable means of communicating globally with little or no restrictions; congregants belonging to cyberspace churches are remarkably increasing to the point of dominating the traditional church model and method of Church functions. This points to the fact that the future of Christianity is the virtual or cyber church model that encompasses cybernetic forms of evangelism and operations (Teffera, 2017). The physical church model is no longer the determinant and form of church for

future generations of the faithful since going to a physical church structure may not be a relevant issue for them as they are able to access and have all the same church services and activities online. The implications of this is that the use of cyberspace technologies progressively and steadily redefines and re-configures the nature of the traditional church in the areas of church attendance, individual verses community participation, interactions of congregants, and so on away from physical determinations that for a long time defined the life of the church.

To make a better use of cyberspace as a new area of mission, the Church needs to be informed with technologies that are used in that space (Feijter, 2006) so as to enable her properly carry her mission in a manner of not undermining the traditional church practices. As a new sphere of mission, cyberspace technologies are beckoning those given the mandate to evangelize to attend to them, fundamentally because there is a lot going on in it that need to be evangelized. Technologies used in cyberspace need to be evangelized too since technology is no mere instrument nor neutral, rather it has both the negative and positive aspects that need to be evangelized. Additionally, even though cyberspace presents novelties and new consciousness of being church, both physical (brick and mortar churches) and cyberspace church models and platforms are correspondingly important and even necessary for the church in her various contexts of responding to the needs of the congregants and pastoral activities and programs of evangelical nature and exigency. The SDA church must first embrace and appreciate cyberspace church model and technologies used as new instruments for the missionary work and evangelism. It cannot, therefore, afford to content herself only in the physical sphere of her mission and have a luddite stance on technology and cyberspace church model. However, the turn to cyberspace church or to cyberspace technologies should not be done at the expense of some important and basic areas of

traditional church model. Instead, they should complement each other for the purpose to including all calibers of church membership.

1.7 Significance of the Study

After looking at the justification of the study, the researcher looked at the beneficiaries of the study. Under this, the study was deemed to benefit different groups of people. First, the study is thought to benefit believers in the church that are looking for new and appropriate ways of living and manifesting their Christian faith, taking into account their different conditions of being and self-interests. The study was considered to contribute to the appreciation of the evolution of the Christian church beyond the physical and geographical considerations, while equally appreciating and conserving those aspects of the traditional church model. This is because not everything in the traditional church model can be presented cybernetically. Similarly, the study benefits religious leaders who may opt to fully embrace and employ technology in the management and running of church affairs. And in a way bring efficiency and inclusivity in the church where all members from all categories are served equally and feel belonging to the church.

The findings and gaps of the study were deemed to benefit theologians by contributing to Christian theology within the new frame of technological determination. This is because through cyberspace, new forms of being church are emerging and theologians interested in explicating the new ecclesiology presented by the cyberspace reality will find in this study informative data on which to establish and articulate the emerging ecclesiology that is beyond the determinations of physical space.

Researchers as well as religious practitioners are enabled to investigate the unique and cybernetic scope of new forms religion and being church that are taking on the fledgling reality of cyberspace technologies. This contribution is informed by the fact that research on online church and online religion is not isolated to one discipline or methodological approach as was the case with the traditional church model. Thus, in the field of ecclesiology, the study contributes to a growing field of a dynamic church, mapping the terrain of where the church was traditionally conceived, where it is at present, while at the same time offerings recommendations of where researchers on the cyberspace church and religion may endeavor to investigate.

The study also was seen to benefit the SDA church leadership in the development of church policies that incorporate the new reality of cyberspace church model since some members of the church tend to have luddite stances on technology, erroneously thinking that cyberspace tends to endanger the development of the church. Of course, not all that is technological is good there are other aspects of technology that are not necessarily good. It is, therefore upon the Church leadership to en-focus it to better serve the interests of the church. Also, the study was considered to benefit pastors, particularly in their use of technology as it expands their access to those who are not physically in the church building.

Further, the study anticipated that its outcomes may help church organizations, church leaders and lay people at large to consider and employ cyberspace and cyberspace technology knowledge for the growth of the faith, development of relationships and management of the church, supporting the pursuit of spiritual being of the congregants. This is in the area of creating awareness of a new technological mission space for the SDA church, particularly on how cyberspace technologies are impacting in whichever way the church ministry and management beyond the conventional and

traditional church model. The study created the awareness of the new emerging church realities that also call for equal attention to that of the traditional church model for the universality of the church of Christ.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study was carried out in selected SDA churches (Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta represented the rural setup churches. Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup), South Kenya Conference, Kisii County, Kenya. However, the study specifically looked at the nature of cyberspace church and traditional Church models with special reference to selected SDA churches in Kisii county. In examining cyberspace church model, it limited itself to cyberspace internet related platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, e-mail, YouTube), DVDs, Live Streaming-Television, Radio, and Face-to-face verbal, with all the activities realized through them by the SDA church. A look on these platforms was within the study objectives: factors necessitating the use of cyberspace technologies in evangelism; technologies used in cyberspace evangelism; activities realized by those technologies; and the challenges the SDA church encounters in the use of cyberspace technologies. The study engaged in a profound way with reality of cyberspace technologies in relation to its positive and negative aspects to both cyberspace and traditional church models. However, the study exalted the SDA church to have a positive regard to cyberspace as a new reality of being church without disregarding the possible negative aspects that come with it, and the impact it has to the traditional church model. Data was collected from the respondents using questionnaire and interview schedules.

In the area of limitations, the study appreciated that challenges are part of the research process for its enrichment. In the context of this study, limitations were viewed to be eye openers since they made the researcher to be creative in the endeavor to achieve the objectives of the study on the important matter of cyberspace church and traditional church models, cyberspace church model defined as a new area of church mission. Thus, the study foresaw a number of limitations, which included:

The available literature, particularly on the importance of cyberspace technologies in times of calamities and pandemics, especially Covid-19 was found to be enormous, but very little on the other anthropological factors that also necessitate the place of cyberspace technologies and virtual model of the church. All this was considered a necessary complement to the traditional church model. Even in ordinary times the anthropological conditions of the faithful necessitate the need and use of cyberspace church. Cyberspace technologies offer important services to the faithful beyond the horizons of physical church space.

There was the limitation of sampling bias resulting from ignorance of cyberspace church model and its related technologies and vice versa for those who are skeptical about the cyberspace church model. For instance, many informants were acquainted with most cyberspace technologies and therefore were not knowledgeable on certain issues raised by the study, likewise, there were those who are pessimistic about cyberspace church model and esteem traditional church model. In other words, the challenge of informants with limited access to the internet or with limited computer literacy on the capacities and benefits of various platforms and technological tools. And those who think technology destroys what they think is "original church" – physical church. This made it difficult to determine the generalizability of the research findings. To settle this challenge, the study engaged informants that were informed of technology and had long employed technology in

their everyday engagements. It equally, it engaged participants capable of understanding the beauty of being a traditional church and at the same open to new realities and challenges brought by cyberspace church model.

There was also the challenge of diverse theological interpretations of the place of internet related technologies today, ranging from the positive to the negative. Those who hold a luddite stance, the conservatives tended to see modern technology as inherently negative, while the liberal ones advocated for the use of technology in the propagation of the Christian faith. This caused confusion whether to embrace or throw away cyberspace technologies. However, the informants were informed that neither of the two (cyberspace church and traditional church model) are completely wrong and that the Church should take advantage of what the new modern cyberspace technologies are offering. The study looked for ways to contextualize the church in a careful manner of embracing technology and encouraged Christians to have a positive use of cyberspace technologies for the good of the Church in the technological society.

Another limitation arose from the regard and analysis of the theories employed in the study. Many informants were more enticed by the gratification they get from the technologies used in the church and failed to have a critical assessment to them; they did not have a critical assessment of the technologies they used in the church; how they can deconstruct and reconstitute the nature of the church. Informants only had instrumental regard to technology, maintaining the neutrality thesis of technology. But as was explained in the theoretical framework, mere instrumental approach technology is minimalistic; the technologies used in the church should not be regarded neutral. Rather they contain the reconstitutive power over the informants' regard and understanding of the church herself.

1.9 Assumptions of the Study

The study worked under the following theoretical assumptions: that participants in Nyanchwa Station were informed enough and had the knowledge and experience with the reality of cyberspace technologies used in the church. That they had used technology to enrich the church operations and mission.

The study also assumed that cyberspace is a new extension of the physical offline area of church that provides a viable alternative to worshipers who may decide to stay at home or anywhere for worship online instead of going to a brick and mortar church.

There was also the assumption that the findings of the study would motivate church members to engage more with the cyberspace platform and look forward to a church that is open to new realities and challenges in the attempts to formulate its own history and relevance in the postmodern and technological society. This was hoped to increase optimism among church members that their church takes care of all realities of her members.

Another assumption was that all the respondents would correctly and truthfully responded to the items in the research instruments and would return them within the required time frame.

Finally, there was the assumption that the sample for this study was a true representative of the entire target population, and that the research instruments employed for data collection were valid and reliable.

1.10 The Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by two theories: Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), and the Critical Theory of Technology (CTT). Both theories were deemed to inclusively complement each other in the attempt to address the concerns of all the study objectives on cyberspace church model and its related technologies and the traditional church model with reference to selected (Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta represented the rural setup churches. While Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup) Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, Kisii County, Kenya.

1.10.1 Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) was pioneered by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974. However, as reported by McQuail (2010), the theory may perhaps be drawn to as early as 1940's when it was used to explain in a specific way the effectiveness of the radio as a social media cyber technology. The UGT explains why and what people do with some specific media technologies; it looks at the rationale behind the choice and usage of various media technologies. The main postulate of the theory is that users employ diverse mass media technologies for specific dissimilar reasons and purposes that give them diverse benefits or gratifications they are looking for in those technologies (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). For instance, in the modern technological society and for diverse societal needs, millions of people opt for media technologies since they do most of their activities on social media platforms; through specific media technologies users get the opportune advantage to seek, read, view and divulge all that they like, anytime and anywhere on any issue of interest (Papoola, 2014).

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According to UGT, social media assemblages enjoy the benefits and freedom to dynamically seek for information or anything else they think is of their interests and benefit. Social cyberspace networking sites (SCNSs) and technologies have become an important social platform for computer-related activities and functions (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuniga, 2010). Due to their benefits like personal social interactions with friends, family, communities, human functions are continually transforming themselves from the offline realm into an online entity (Gallion, 2010). As explained by Wimmer, (2014), socialization is one of the central and most essential elements of employing the UGT; the desire to meet new friends and sustain relationships of whichever nature are among the socialization needs that sustained by this theory.

With the rise of new SCNSs such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube, users have become constantly connected and capable of interacting with one another at a wider level (Ding & Zhang, 2010). SCNSs enable users to present themselves, connect to a social network, and develop and maintain relationships with members of their association that benefit them and meet their interests fulfilled as a common denominator of their operations (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). As emphasized by Griffin (2012), the measured choices people make in using specific media platforms are fundamentally supported by the gratifications they desire from those platforms. In other words, any satisfaction brought by a particular technology, like television, radio or internet related will be perceived differently by different people on the type of satisfaction that receive from it.

In the context of this study, UGT explained the functions of specific technologies (internet, radio, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and so forth) used in the cyberspace to enhance the activities of the church that redefine its nature in a technologically motivated society. Today, it is easy to carry out Church functions and activities through such technological platforms. The use of specific

technological platforms by pastors, Church leaders, members allows them to share their ministry content in a manner that includes and enables those who may not physically able to do so in the conventional and traditional model of face-to-face activities. In other words, the use of SCNSs or technologies provides members of the Church access to ministry content and which consequently gives them gratification. They are gratified by connecting them to each other as they are Biblically instructed to go into the entire world and pronounce the Good News of the kingdom of God; reciprocally and equally the congregants are gratified in the sense that they can meet their spiritual needs beyond the confines of physical space that defined the traditional church model. Furthermore, SCNSs give users an opportunity and freedom to communicate among themselves by forming communities or groups using various church groups, discussion boards, educational and professional forums, where they enjoy the benefits of immediate feedback. Such activities are quite different from the mainstream traditional church operations that depended on local geographical space to receive their services. Even in the traditional church model, there is the use of remote technologies like the print, public address systems. The Church employs SCNSs for the purposes of her mission to reach out the faithful where she can decide the appropriate and specific cyberspace technology to use as determined by the needs offered by that particular technology to church congregants.

However, the gap or the misgiving of the UGT is that it misleadingly assumes that people know why they are using a particular technology, which to it is to fulfill or meet their desired particular needs. The theory is not critical to particular technologies used and does not even look at the reasons and needs of those who for particular reasons do not employ a given technology in the church. It is quiet to the fact that as much as technology enables the renewed for of being church

and doing mission, it also constrains the identity of the church. Furthermore, in most cases and if not, in all cases technologies are decided by those who make and import them without necessarily involving those who use or consume them. This theoretical gap informed the choice of the Critical Theory of Technology (CTT).

1.10.2 Critical Theory of Technology (CTT)

Critical Theory of Technology (CTT) was propounded by Andrew Feenberg in 1991, but it dates back to Marcuse's version of Frankfurt School critical theory, effected through a constructivist approach to the analysis of specific technologies, artifacts and systems (Feenberg, 2002). CTT argues that while technologies happen in socially assorted ways depending on the contexts, people and practices involved also have larger touchstone implications that demand for a critical consideration. In other words, technologies we use should be viewed in the context of a larger system, a lifestyle, a collection of social values and meanings, some of which become inscribed in technological design itself and its application. Despite the presence and use of various technologies, the real problem is not technology itself but the variety of possible technologies and paths of progress among which we must choose for the good of those who employ it. Technologies are invented and exported to contexts that sometimes have little knowledge of what those technologies actually are in a manner of enabling and disabling the users. People sometimes employ technologies that they do not properly understand its essence and implications on them.

The theory further argues that the different technologies we use are instruments that serve human purposes or means to achieve certain ends; as instruments, those technologies serve different ends intended by the users and designers which are concealed from the users (Feenberg, 1999).

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However, the specific and original point of the theory is that it emphasizes the fact that technology is not mere means; technology is not neutral as many people conceive it to be (Feenberg 2002). Prior to Feenberg, Heidegger (1977) had explained that the use of technology is indispensable in today's society in that everything has the imprint of technology. However, in a critical way Heidegger explicates that modern technology has transited and muted to other meanings beyond the instrument confines of being machines and inventions used by humans to realize specific given goals of their interests to a way of being and relating in the physical world; technology constitutes and reconstitutes the understanding and regard to any given reality in a given context. However, in a progressive way, and like Heidegger, Jacques Ellul (1983) recapped and considered technology as a new and influential modern cultural system that restructures institutional and social organization of the world, making it not just an object of use, but of control. From the explained constructs, the theory proposes a framework for analyzing specific technologies and technological systems. Thus, the CTT does not absolutize any technology or technological gadget, but subjects it to a critical assessment. For instance, in Feenberg's view, technologies have distinctive features while at the same time also exhibit biases derived from their place in society. The technical code is the rule under which technologies are realized in a social context with biases reflecting the unequal distribution of social power.

In the context of this study, the CTT opened ways for the critical theory of religion in relation to the use of technology, where cyberspace church model and its related technologies should not be taken on their face and instrumental value; cyberspace church and technologies are not neutral because they reconstitute the regard and understanding of the church operations in her attempts to be meaningful to those embracing it. But it is also important to note that even though technologies

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used in the church enable a renewed experience of being church and doing mission by enhancing our appreciation and understanding of it, it also constrains the way the same church appears to us in a very particular and unique way. Cyberspace church model and its related technologies reconstitute our traditional understanding and regard of the church and church activities as composed of real physical human engaged face-to-face. The traditional understanding of church as a body of Christ that meets together, consisting of face-to-face encounters and modes of participation is reconstituted by cyberspace technologies as it is being substituted by the virtual or cyberspace church model. Through cyberspace technologies, today, congregants are in a way divorced from their internal physical relationships, where all the physical elements of being church are suspended or even substituted. The constraining and probably negative factor of this embracement of cyberspace technologies is that, church members instead, tend to live according to the virtual conception of themselves independent from the physical settings, with distancing results from each other as members of the same physical church.

Cyberspace church and employed technologies decontextualize the physical objects or aspects of the church and religious experience of its members This is in line with Ichuloi (2015) who argued that taking any given reality as the designed goal of technology does not necessarily imply that we regard our relationship with it in a merely instrumental way that only improves and augments our abilities; instead, we should be open and critical to consider it as a contest that reconstitutes that particular reality and all that appertains to it. From this insight, employing technology tends to reconstitute physical features of the church including all spiritual aspirations of its members such that they are no longer interpreted and considered from the standpoint of direct human religious experience, but as always mediated by specific technologies strange to the subject. As argued by

Ichuloi (2015) the modern subject, including the church sometimes live with only the illusion of technology as all good, which gives rise to the belief in her mind that through technology she "conquers" every reality. But such illusion is paradoxical in that technology not only enables the understanding of the church as a dynamic and evolving entity but it equally constrains many of her aspects and connotations.

However, the gap of the CTT as employed in this study is that it is too general as it did not address specific technologies examined in their context and the gratification or purposes they serve. The theory proposes democratization of technology through public specific participation without providing proper guidelines to its democratization especially in employing specific technologies. However, this considerable gap is addressed by the Users and Gratification Theory (UGT).

In conclusion, the study noted that both UGT and CTT provide a framework that underpins the discussions of the findings safeguarding the position that attempts to embrace technology but they also point to the fact of taking into consideration the traditional model of being church. Christian communities are diverse and have different socioeconomic contexts and practical operations that should be incorporated in church functionings, calling for why particular technologies, whether remote of modern are used by the church. Both traditional and modern technological frameworks of being church capture how the Church in context carries out her activities and continues to do so using various online and offline platforms that are deemed to be responding to the reality of the church as an institution and church congregants as the body of Christ. Those congregational members who are unable to connect with the traditional mode of church operations and vice versa are able to do so using other forms of church operations. This summed up the argument of the study that it is detrimental to consider either traditional or technological ways of being church as paramount or absolute, rather the church has to rethink on the possible misgivings of each of the

two models and possibly complement each other in the process of being church that serves both technological and traditional interests of the members.

1.11 The Conceptual Framework

The study endeavored to recapture key concepts that informed in the discussion as structured in the figure 1.1 below:

Independent Variable   **Dependent Variable**

Cyberspace technologies   **Traditional Church Model**

Factors Necessitating the use of Cyberspace Technologies by the Church

Cyberspace Technologies used by the Church

Church Evangelical Activities

Challenges faced by the Church in using Cyberspace Technologies

Intervening

Open-air Services

Face-to-Face Activities

Cell Fellowship

Prayer and Preaching

from the Physical Pulpit

Printed Material of Religious Literature

Bible Study and Teaching instructions

House Visitations

Spiritual Retreats

Church Law/Manual

Church Policies

Church Teachings

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher, 2022

In the above conceptual framework (Figure 1.1), cyberspace technologies was the independent variable, with factors influencing the use of technologies in Church, cyberspace technologies (Face book, WhatsApp, Zoom, YouTube, Teleconferencing, Recorded messages and songs, Radio broadcasts, Twitter, Video recordings, Television, Webinar, Website Postings, Online financial services and contributions, et cetera) themselves, church mission activities, and challenges faced by the SDA church as the basic indicators. While traditional church model was the dependent variable, with air services, face-to-face activities, printed literature, house-fellowships and visitations, spiritual retreats and prayer vigils as key indicators. The study also conceptualized that both the independent and dependent variables moderated by other factors like church law and policies, Biblical exaltations, and church teachings.

1.12 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Brick and mortar Church: Is the physical constructed building used by the church congregation

Church: The community of believers regardless of the context they find themselves in.

Church Traditional Model: The model of the church where believers and church activities are determined by in-person physical operations and space

Cyber-church: Is an online church community where the congregants carryout their church activities without having physical presence.

Cyber-religion: It refers to a cyberspace mediated religious organizations and activities with their contents reflecting the main aspects of the postmodern technological and cybernetic culture.

Cyberspace: Cyberspace is a sphere characterized by the use of electronics and the electromagnetic scope to store, modify, and share information via networked platforms and associated physical infrastructures, form communities with the intent to exchange ideas and mutually provide social support.

Cyberspace Technologies: Refers to Information Communications Technologies (ICTs), which are internet related technologies used for communication; they are of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store and manage information.

Online church communities: These are interactive groups, facilitating two-way interaction through computer technologies such as email, Face book, Twitter, Instagram, WhatAspp, and so on.

Religion on Cyberspace: Denotes religious information uploaded to the websites and can be reached in the off-line context at any desired time.

Virtual Pastor: Is an online shepherd, evangelist who moderates online programs, 'services', conducts e-counseling and other pastoral duties to members who form the online fellowship. He maintains personal blogs and/or websites where he runs bible studies, online class meetings and moderate group discussions.

Worship: It is an act of religious devotion usually directed towards a deity; reverence offered to a divine being or supernatural power.

Christian Ministry: Is the service of God's people in a manner that is acceptable by Him.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviewed related literature on cyberspace and traditional church models. To be within the focus of the study, the literature reviewed was done thematically as guided by the study objectives: cyberspace technologies used by the church; church missionary activities realized through cyberspace technologies; implications of cyberspace technologies on the traditional church model; and the challenges encountered by the church in the use of cyberspace technologies.

2.2 Cyberspace Technologies and Church Mission

The major mission of the church is to preach the Good News to the ends of the earth following the command of the master Jesus Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; teach them to observe all that I commanded you; and I am with you to the ends of time" (Matthew 28: 19 - 20). This grand mission is realized through various available means since contextualizing the Gospel message is embedded in that mission of the Church (Flemming,2005). In the past, church ministers and religious organizations used communication systems such as train ships and chariots that facilitated their missionary mandate of preaching the gospel; they used printing press which brought with it the expansion of access of the written word and emphasized more on the material or physical church operations. The oldest and most utilized media was print, which expanded quickly to various parts of the world as a form of availing the message of the gospel to the faithful (Lovemore, 2007). Despite being the oldest form of preaching the message of the gospel, and because of its relevance, printing is still widely used today as manifested in church bulletins and other instructional

materials. Traditional visual art was included in places of worship as a means of transmitting religious content.

However, today, with the cyber church model there are other forms of doing the same work of spreading the message of Christ to the ends of the world. The use of internet and its related technologies in the spread of the gospel has made the church make a step further in the sense that internet interactive potential facilitates the mediation of religious experiences, knowledge, ministry and so forth. It gives a new form of being church and new forms of religion. The Internet is now a sacred and spiritual platform used for religious purposes, enabling spiritual experiences, a place where one can easily find God. Cobb (1998) argues the Internet facilitates a process or sacred journey leading us on a mystical path towards the Divine. This new reality brought by the Internet is explicated by millions of Web search sites for seekers interested in spiritual and religious materials and information. First, the Internet surpasses the obstructions of time and space in that Web spirituality, Web churches and Web religions delight in extraordinary entree on a global scale. This, in consequence allows long-established religious communities and newly mushroomed spiritual movements to reach non-allied potential followers like never before. Second, the free democratic nature of the Web enables almost everyone interested to create new circles of faith, thereby increasing supply and choices of religions and churches across the globe. But then this raises serious concerns to traditional mainstream churches who enjoyed monopoly of faith and religious experiences in the sense that they provide good treatment of the faithful and offer authentic religious teachings. Failure to meet this great concern implies their followers can freely move to other churches and faith groups. Third, the very nature of the Internet permits encounter with groups who may find it difficult to participate in traditional communal church worship and activities. Searchers of religious and spiritual meaning and who for some reasons feel

left out by traditional church arrangements or who willingly choose to exclude themselves from their religious community can join other religious groups and have a free access to religious materials distantly and anonymously pertaining to their own faith and the faith of other religious groups.

This situation is remarkably explained by Stellin (2001) who reporting outcomes from a survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, submits that 25% of all Internet users go online in search of spiritual and religious material to feed their urge for religious meaning. This implied that religious and church markets for the faithful is changing both in terms of consumer needs as well as in terms of the place where consumers choose to practice their chosen religion (Helland, 2003). This is in resonance with Barna (1993) who cautioned that in the technological society and with the use of internet, millions of individuals with no current faith community will take to religious practice and worship on the Web. Barna (1993) further informed that millions of other seekers on the Web will be individuals who drop out of the physical church in favor of the cyber-church. This was reiterated by Wilson (2000) who asserts that through the Internet Christians get the opportunity to reach out to every interested individual on the face of the earth in the next decade, a phrase used three times in his book (Wilson, 2000). Wilson underlined the ubiquity of Internet technology, its capacity to cross social and cultural, providing users with the ability to navigate ways to their spiritual nourishment.

Laney (2005) affirmed that religious websites offer a wealthy depository of religious content and issues for exploration, ranging from religious radio and television sites on the Web to sites for denominational leaderships, churches and ministry organizations and personal homepages. It is estimated that there are more than one million single web pages with a religious content on the

internet (Højsgaard, 2005). A church can have a standard website or a quasi-website where information about and/or of the church can be found and accessed. Websites that allow users to post messages and communicate with each other on church matters, especially those sites that include message boards and forums. Such websites serve the purposes of reinforcing religious beliefs, establishing relationships, engaging them more on church issues. Websites serve further in posting church sermons, Bible study outlines, devotional messages, prayer wishes, outlines of Sunday School lessons, short quotes, announcements, information about the church and its educational ministries, and so on (Adebayo, 2019). Church members and others that do not have the possibility of attending face-to-face worship service are able to partake in the service through the website or social media as they watch everything that goes on in the service live or recorded online wherever they may be. In the websites, communities may also be formed with the aid of religious *videos* and webcasting. Whatever motivation for the use of church websites, wide web provides Christians direct or indirect access of many others across the globe. This webbed relationship among church members makes it easier for the Christian evangelist of today to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Thus, to obtain a website and stream services is a necessary step for a church to take since the intended audiences are also influenced by the digitalization. However, the critical gap in the literature is that churches employ the use of websites without a profound understanding of their implications, particularly on the inclusive nature of the church.

There are also other remarkable internet related social media platforms that are majorly used by the church for her mission. Such platforms include: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Badoo, Instagram, et cetera. These social networking platforms offer various opportunities to reach out many people. For instance, Twitter is a micro-blogging site that enables users to send out messages in short jets of up to 140 characters per "tweet"; it joins users to the

latest content about what they find interesting to them. Twitter is basically a personal platform for communication such that its users choose whom they follow, thus creating a unique experience that is specific to them. The Church employs Twitter to communicate personal information to her membership. Like email or the telephone, twitter is a non-prescriptive communication platform. Users experience twitter differently depending on the time of day and frequency they check their feed, the other people they follow, and the interface(s) they use to access the network (Sheedy, 2011). As Driscoll (2010) posits, because of the flexibility of Twitter usage, norms emerge, mutate, collide, and fade among twitter users. In Twitter, there are tweetable moments in church service, where a service-goer can be tweeted out to the world in a matter of seconds. It is one of the ways that churches are able to enhance services to their members. Church congregants are permitted to tweet their pastor on an issue of faith and the pastor responds; churches organize concerts where performers use tablet devices to cast the music being performed.

Facebook: Facebook is a social utility media technology that enables users communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. They share information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world social connections and other multiple forms. Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with the people they know in a trusted arrangement or context, possibly with similar interests (Sheedy, 2011). This makes Facebook inevitably important for church and religious purposes especially in the formation of prayer and support groups, a virtual fellowship hall, and a 'between Sabbath's gathering place. This assertion of the study is clearly explained by Thumma (2011) who posits that Facebook offers an amicable platform where church members of specific religious orientation commune with their friends in an online setup.

YouTube is an online technology that enables users to upload videos on the web, mobile devices, blogs, and email. It is a simple way to share otherwise cumbersome and large video files. As a social media technology, through YouTube, congregants are able to upload and share video clips with others sharing the same faith. Instagram is an online photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and so forth (Simanowski, 2018).

Skype is another platform that allows individuals who are in worlds apart to equally communicate with the visibility of their images through the use of internet based video conference calls. Blogging and microblogging allows for theological ideas come into the world faster without the slow process of publishing.

Thus, such internet related technologies should be conceived of as God's solution to modern world church arrangements, even though they may embed serious challenges to the church; it enables the church to realize multimedia evangelical activities as it involves concerted use of all the above technologies and platforms for graphics, text, audio, video, data projection, PowerPoint sermons, Webinar and Zoom teleconferencing, sermon and music recording, church advertisements and animation to communicate the Gospel message. The use of the above explained social media platforms and technologies by the Church is meant to engage congregants, communities, motivate and encourage them to virtually share their issues with those they consider apt, but also from the critical theory of technology perspective church users should also be alert and open to their possible embedded reconstituting dangers. Bolu (2012) explains that internet and social media platforms are widely used to reach out to the congregation in various places. But Bolu is silent on

the shortcomings of the internet and the social media platforms. This is where the knowledge and awareness of the critical theory of technology is important for church technology users. Many pastors preach online and have online streaming of their services while others send tracts to various e-mail accounts and websites. Of course, there is no doubt that through the above technologies, online communities of the faithful who share common interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others are enabled. Some online services offer the opportunity of having social networks with other people of similar interests (Adebayo, 2019). The large churches all have satellite branches while other members can worship online at the church's website. Apart from these online services and websites, there are telephone services for calls on the Internet; pastors have their sermons on people's phones, all downloaded from the Internet. Christian literature or books are also available for free or paid download online.

All this means that the Church cannot fold her arms and watch business entrepreneurs, technocrats, owners of industries and information technology experts use this technology to their advantage only, but should also be critical to technological platforms. We all acknowledge that cyber-evangelism is an intelligent way through which Christian church online users share the Christian faith with members of their online contacts. Through it, the religious mediation dimension of cyber technologies spread center themselves on the virtual nature model pushing 'body-centered nature' of the church to the periphery (Højsgaard, 2005). But in its profound sense, this means that the adoption of cyber technologies in church operations is drastically eroding face-to-face contact/relationships. The concern is reiterated by Zukowski (2012) who argues that with massive influence of modern technology in almost every aspect of human life, the conservative nature of Christian faith is confronted with an irresistible digital culture that in most cases leads to compromising some basic religious ritual practices. This is where the study considers it important

to uphold face-to-face contact during service cannot be replaced with watching the service on TV/Internet or listening to radio, there are aspects of the church that cannot all be explained through online settings, and therefore needing physical church operations.

With all the claims laid out in the reviewed literate, the notable gap is that the literature looked at the Internet and its related platforms as a spiritual medium and tool with the ability to alter in positive ways individual and communal understanding of what it means to be church but it does not explicate the negative aspects of the same technological platforms; it considered technologies used by the church to be a neutral tool with little side effects. But, often this is not the case since sometimes the Internet constrains other important aspects of being church and of transmitting the gospel.

2.3 Church cyberspace Evangelical Activities

In today's technological society, religion is something that cannot be relegated to the determinations of only traditional forms (traditional church model) of practice that glorified in face-to-face interpretations and practice, but rather should be open to embrace new technological forms that enhance and shape it in the wider context of the church's development for relevance. This concern is explicated by Dale (2002) who posits that technology has conferred Christianity a voice to reach a worldwide audience beyond the confines of physical space and physical operations. The same sentiment is echoed by Shoba (2020 who referring to Covid-19 pandemic states that the lockdown forced worship sites (churches, mosques, and other places of worship) to close their doors, which meant that traditional church model operations could not be realized forcing the church to look for other forms of doing mission, which included the use of digital platforms and space; this provided a reference point and connection to the world outside her

physical reach. Cyberspace technologies have become a new religious horizon where the church is able to realize various activities that appertain to her mission. In the view of Dawson (2005), cyberspace technologies have a decisive role for religious activities and experience where cyberspace becomes an indispensable forum for important religious and religious activities and engagement. Technology is taking over many of the instrumental functions of traditionally institutionalized church and religion through the provision of spiritual guidance and moral orientation; through technology, church congregants participate in remote religious ceremonials, services, meditation sessions, worship, confessions to each other, religious instructions (teachings), discussions, testimony services, and intercessory prayer groups (Cloete, 2015).

Worship and Prayer

The 'reality' of the church worship for a deep religious experience of the congregants is based upon the actual means the church chooses to employ in the attempts to enhance the object of worship. Worship is an act of religious allegiance usually directed towards a divinity, which can be performed either collectively or individually, in an informal or formal group setting through any given and acceptable medium by the church one is affiliated to (BBC, 2009). Such mediums apply to cyberspace technologies that tend to attract a lot of attention of believers (Campbell, 2005; Grinter et al., 2011; Hadaway, 2010; Helland, 2000; Hoover, 2006). As instruments for worship, cyberspace technologies widen the worship space thus giving Christians opportunities to receive daily devotionals via phones, and downloads of the Bible to phones and computers. For instance, mobile phones and email are used to send and receive prayer requests and to mobilize group prayer efforts. This attraction to cyberspace technology use implies that cyberspace is a sacramental purview, a space or forum that can be shaped for the good of both the performance of traditional and new religious rituals that nourish the lives of Christian communities.

In the traditional church worship arrangements that define the traditional church model, the most popular old technological devices used in worship were visual art, audio systems, microphones, soundboard, processor and improved monitor systems. But now with the advent of cyberspace technology platforms worship devices have transcended the traditional technologies that relied more on mediate physical space for the religious experience. On this, Helland (2007) explained that ICTs support faith practices that are difficult or impossible to practice in the person's current physical setting (sickness, age, pandemics, and so on) to the height that individual Christians are able to carry out their act of worship of God on their own, in any place, and with any means that are convenient to them (BBC, 2009). Cyberspace technologies give Christians unprecedented opportunities that improve church worship in a manner of accessing various services like daily devotionals, prayer and prayer requests via phones, and downloads of the Bible texts to phones and computers. Services that enrich their worship and prayer life as members of the church. This is reaffirmed by Grinter et al (2011) and Bolu (2012) who asserted that Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) have today become a standard base for many church worship services that once relied primarily on oral communication; such services now rely on ICTs to create a varied transmission of religious experiences. In cyberspace, Christians replicate charismatic worship experiences through online gatherings thereby enhancing their religious experience of God.

Margaret Wertheim (1999) earlier had posited that cyberspace is a non-physical space that has the ability to allow people to reconnect with ideas of the spiritual, immaterial world that have often been silenced by the dualistic nature of Western philosophy. In the older days there was more time located for the preaching while singing and worshiping is in the secondary stage. But with the

cyberspace technologies that define the cyberspace church, there is not specific time allocated for sharing the Word of God since the content is available online and can be accessed as one wishes; prayer resources are readily available online than offline. O'Leary (2005) affirmed that the devotees of Judaism and Hinduism religions use the internet to carry out religious worship rituals, prayer, devotion, and contemplation; at the same time for those not able to employ the modern technological platforms, they are equally facilitated to pray and celebrate worship rituals performed at the physical church. Online Church services permit worshipers and those who are inquisitive about Christianity to have the joy to experience aspects of church from the comfort of their own home.

Referring to Pentecostal churches (PCs), Gaiya (2002) had postulated that one important attribute of the PCs is their creativity, particularly in the use of ICTs to propagate the gospel message as demanded by Christ. While Osaghae and Suberu (2005) sustained that PCs are growing in popularity all over the world and are defining worship practices and religious activities through their use of ICTs, thereby opening up new contextual forms of being church and doing mission. Cyber technologies are a spiritual channel, possessing specific properties that facilitate spiritual development of their users since they constitute a worship space not determined by physical boundaries. As argued by Dawson (2005), nothing prevents God from being manifested in cyberspace through specific technological platforms because they are instruments that are used to conceptualize the reality of the church (Dawson, 2005). The indubitable fact in all these pronouncements is that the content and the office of the formal structure of worship and prayer meetings are transferred from face-to-face services into the cyber church platforms, which encourages virtual exchange religious experiences between participants. Cyber platforms which

define cyber church model also broaden the space of participants in worship and prayer to all those who want; such space is not available in conventional church services.

The integration of multi-media technological equipment such as projectors, giant LCD screens, High Definition Cameras, Digital Sound Recording systems – powered Sound Speakers, LCD Digital Podiums which dramatize and enhances sermons, et cetera, that transform worship experience of the faithful. Younger generations and even the older ones are all today comfortable in accessing worship related data through technology, whether it is on a mobile phone device, video screen or tablet (Howard, 2016). However, Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) warned that the above devices have the ability to reconstitute in a manner of manipulating real religious and spiritual experience making them mere excitements or vice versa for the good of the church. Today, many religious and church groups are consciously and calculatively design online worship spaces that endeavor to re-create traditional religious worship experiences in a digital environment and contexts. A popular example in the developing Christian tradition is the cyber church, commonly referred to as churches without walls.

Nonetheless, on the flip-side of it, an earlier study of prayer meetings by Schroeder & Noel & Lee (1998) in a multi-user virtual reality found that prayer meetings in the cyberspace world do not provide the same type of religious experience as a conventional church service, but it certainly reproduces some of the essential features of the latter in novel way. This implied that despite the benefits of online operations, there should be importance attached to the physical space church, where rituals can actually be carried out. Rituals are important aspects of worship that cannot be replaced by cyberspace technologies; As argued by O'Leary (2005), because of the traditional meaning of being church in terms of its physical practices and community religious implications,

worship rituals should not be replaced or mediated by any medium since their physical performance have deep religious and spiritual meanings that can easily be lost if they are to be mediated by technology. Rituals in worship require face-to-face Church operations for the deepening of religious experience among the faithful; physical nature of religious experience is still relevant and should not be undermined, even though cyberspace and technologies offer expansive possibilities for religious enactment and experience, they bring expansive possibilities for religious enactment.

Construction of Online Church Communities

Online Church communities is a new reconstituted way of understandings the dynamic evolution of Christian communities from the physical settings expressed in the Acts of the Apostles that exonerated physical encounters of members. Online church group arrangements ease interactions with believers in that they are set-apart by geographical locations, but share some form of spiritual links or convictions. Such groups enjoy the benefits of cyberspace discussions since they are infused by enabling features that facilitate the communication between interested users who are familiar with the belief systems and religious practices of a church or religious movement in question. Also those who perhaps share the same religious ideals, values and aspirations are equally enabled through online communities (Barken, 2005). Cox (1977) had earlier on argued that through cyberspace technologies, people look for personal spiritual community emoluments like acceptance, companionship, friendship, and recognition, as online churches provide a sense of community; online churches making it easier for classes of members to cope with their individual problems of loneliness and feelings of isolation.

This in various ways enable to deepen their religious convictions and faith without necessarily having or needing the physical church membership for such services. Echoing Durkheim's functional theory that informs this study, cyberspace platforms facilitate collective religious practices and shared belief systems that provide a basis for individual wellbeing as well as collective procedures of constructing individual human identity and meaning within socio-religious contexts. Furthermore, having a foundation for common knowledge of religious symbols, norms, and values among all in the cyber church community participants makes discussions in the implied groups more focused on relevant issues of their religious faith and interests.

Through interactions with others, individual church members internalize church collective customs and belief systems that constitute their church tradition and integrate them in their self-identity. Religious communities are meant to crystallize in both bonding and bridging social capital in terms of interdependence of members. Participants from different social-religious contexts come together to institute a relatively homogeneous cybernetic religious identity that enriches their religious quest for meaning. On the same footing, the Pew Foundation's *Cyberfaith* report (Larsen, 2001) indicated the increasing phenomena of "Religion Surfers," where those who solicit religion or spiritual information online seek to colligate themselves with others on faith journeys. Online church communities congregate around an issue of faith, ranging from general issues mysticism or spiritual development to specific focus on beliefs like the gift of prophecy or religious affiliation. Interested members choose the community they desire to join settled on the kind of religious experience they are searching for.

Campell (2005) explained that the use of internet to reinforce or maintain religious identity in the Anglican tradition can also be seen in the online discussion groups, giving the church a renewed stature. He continues to argue that cyberspace communities find a basis in common values, visions and interests where they are able to use emails, discussion forums, chat rooms, live discussion and communication videos and others forms of communication. This helps them build connections and establish groups based in a variety of endeavors of which some include professional advice, supporting forums, online trade, promoting solidarity around illness, sharing experiences about relationships and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ via paltalk and other social medias (Bailey, 2007). Research by Heidi Campbell (2006) indicated that the Cyberspace church is taking preference among the youth in that one out of six teenagers affirmed that they expected to use the internet as a substitute for current church-based religious experience within the next five years (Barna, 1998). Larsen (2001) explained that activities of "religion surfers" and "cyber-faith" supplement offline religious practices and activities. Hoover, et al (2004) indicated that along with increased internet use for religious purposes (64% of American Internet users) religious ideas and practices are being reshaped.

Online religion online shapes not just specific religious practices, but more general religious sensibilities in a postmodern society. Scholars such as Castells (1997) and Giddens (1991) pointed out that with the use of cyber technologies, local face-to-face organizational setting is no longer viewed and regarded as the sole context for social interaction. This is reiterated by Slevin (2000) who asserted that cyberspace technologies make it accomplishable to construct human relations from a assortment of socio-cultural settings thereby making the Church more inclusive and universal. Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) added that churches can use specific software and

databases to process and store membership records. Storing membership data, in an electronic and organized manner.

Religious Instructions

Online religious activities have multifaceted functions for the good of the church whereby some are meant for research and providing religious data, seeking or offering spiritual advice, and sending/emailing prayer requests (Adebayo, 2019). Christians today, have their Scriptures and other religious instruction materials on their smart phone or tablet devices which facilitate their access to the Bible texts. They can check out the content of what is projected on the screen; many use these computerized technologies to do research and prepare religious instructional lessons that will be taught on their stipulated days of church services or on other instructional meetings. Church members watch the church educational proceedings in their homes through streaming video clips on the television, zoom, or You Tube. The Barna Research Group (2001) in their *Cyber-church Report* claimed that about 100 million Americans rely upon the internet to transmit some aspects of their religious experience. The report further state that the most common religious activities provided online include listening to archived religious teaching, reading online "devotionals," and buying religious products and resources online. The idea is that cyber churches provide online resources for religious instructions. They create new shapes of church by linking the "un-churched" and Christians, both online and offline (Campbell, 2004a).

Cyberspace technologies are a catalyst and tool for the church and her mission since they incorporate those within the church and also those outside of the church, the non-Christians. The use of specific technological platforms his without doubt a valuable tool for church congregations

since they have ability to enlarge human abilities to do more with fewer available resources; they duplicate church functions bringing religious services to wider audiences and contexts that call for the church presence. A church congregation that does not strategically employ cyberspace technologies is likely to be perceived as out of sync since it lacks organized, structured data that can be accessed by members of society that may be looking for church information that inform their choice of a specific church of their interest.

2.4 Implications of Cyberspace Technologies on Church Operations

Cyberspace technologies have multiple implications on both modern and traditional church models, especially in the areas of operations – pastoral care, worship, proclamation of the Word, education and fellowship (Ossai-Ugbah, 2011). Jones (2011) affirmed that the aspect which differentiates emerging churches from others is ecclesiology, whereby the emerging cyberspace church is practicing a new form of congregationalism, which is a virtual 'relational ecclesiology'. Jones (2011) further, states that the advent of technological devices, the 'new media' and the significant church member generational differences have enabled substantially new forms of intra-church and inter-church member relationships. This implies that online church engagements should not be construed to mean merely as a new type of media outreach but more fundamentally is a modified form of 'church planting', which reconstitutes traditional approaches that call for physical presences for any evangelical activity. The formation of online church communities represents a quite different approach to being church that deeply transform traditional regards to the reality and conception of the church.

In the aspect of church data storage, instead of physically writing and archiving church documentation as was the case with traditional church model, with cyberspace technologies, churches can use specific software and databases to process and store membership records and any other meaningful information. Further, church members have the opportunity to watch live broadcasts of stored religious programs from the comfort of their homes because the major mission of the church is to explicitly proclaim the Good News to all populations of the earth, which can be realized in different mediums. This in response to the command of the master Jesus Christ:

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; teach them to observe all that I commanded you; and I am with you to the ends of time" (Matthew 28: 19 - 20).

But to realize this mandate, the church is challenged to look for various available and appropriate means outside of the traditional approaches. In the traditional model, particularly in the past church ministers and organizations throughout the world used communication systems such as train, ships and chariots; they used printing press which brought with it the expansion of access of the written word and emphasized more on the material or physical church operations. Printing is still widely used today as manifested in church bulletins and other instructional materials. Traditional art and beauty were included in places of worship. The oldest, most utilized media was print, but then expanded quickly from there (Lovemore, 2007).

Zukowski (2012) postulated that with massive influence of modern technology in almost every aspect of human life, the conservative nature of Christian faith is confronted faced with an irresistible digital culture. The Church cannot fold her arms and watch business entrepreneurs, technocrats, owners of industries and information technology experts use the remarkable technological advances to their own advantage only. Furthermore, with new technologies like Face

book, Twitter, Websites and so on that use internet cyberspace technologies offer an incredible opportunity to the Church to reach out to members all over the world. The internet platforms and technologies demonstrate to be one of the most apt and dependable means of communicating worldwide with little restraints, which Church and her members cannot ignore if she has to remain relevant to technologically driven society. Unlike traditional church model of face-to-face activities, today several cyberspace platforms are created online communities opening up essential spheres for sharing the Christian faith.

Online technologies and platforms facilitate interconnections of users from different levels of organization thus opening new areas of mission. Ukah (2002) affirmed that church leadership and members regard internet related technologies as God's solution to world missionary arrangements and challenges. According to him, the multimedia evangelical activities involves concerted use of graphics, text, audio, video, data projection, PowerPoint sermons, Webinar, Zoom, teleconferencing music slides, sermon recording, music recording, WhatsApp accounts, Twitter accounts, Facebook accounts, sermons on YouTube, bulk SMS, advertisements, and animation to communicate the Gospel message. All these need technological tools such as telephones, digital cameras, microphones, amplifiers, loudspeakers, projectors, screens, television sets, tape recorders, video or VCD recorder, computers, iPad, iPod, iPhone, and tablets.

Laney (2005) affirms that religious websites offer a wealthy depository of religious issues available to serve various interests ranging from and not limited to religious radio and television sites on the Web to sites for churches and ministry, organizational and personal homepages that offer religious content for the spiritual development of users and other secular material. It is

estimated that there are more than one million single web pages with a religious content on the internet (Højsgaard, 2005). A church can have a standard website or a quasi-website where information about and/or of the church can be found and accessed. *Websites* that allow users to post messages and communicate with each other on church matters, especially those sites that include message boards and forums. Such websites serve the purposes of reinforcing religious beliefs, establishing relationships, engaging them more on church issues. Websites serve further in posting church sermons, Bible study outlines, devotional messages, prayer wishes, outlines of Sunday School lessons, short quotes, announcements, information about the church and its educational ministries, and so on (Adebayo, 2019). Church members and others that do not have the possibility of attending face-to-face worship service are able to partake in the service through the website or social media platforms as they watch everything that goes on in the service live or recorded online wherever they may be. In the websites, communities may also be formed with the aid of religious *videos* and webcasting. Whatever motivation for the use of church websites, wide web provides Christians direct or indirect access of many others across the globe. This webbed relationship among church members makes it easier for the Christian evangelist of today to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Thus, obtaining a website and streaming services is a necessary step for a church to take, as the intended audiences are also influenced by the digitalization technologies.

There are also other relevant social media platforms that are majorly used by the church for her mission. Such platforms include: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Badoo, Instagram, et cetera. Twitter is a micro-blogging site that enables users to send out messages in short jets of up to 140 characters per "tweet"; it joins users to the latest content about what they find interesting to them.

Twitter is widely used because of its individualized nature since it is a personal platform used for communication. In application and convenience, the users choose whom they follow, thus creating a unique experience that is specific to them. The Church employs Twitter to communicate personal information to her membership. Like email or telephone, twitter is a non-prescriptive communication platform and it is open to all who may want to be its subscribers. The reality in Twitter is that users experience this platform differently depending on the time of day and frequency they check their platform feeds, the other people they follow, and the interface(s) they use to access the network itself and its available services (Sheedy, 2011).

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enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and so forth.

The use of these social media platforms and technologies by the Church is to engage congregants, communities, motivate and encourage them to virtually share their issues with those they consider apt. Jewell (2004) claims that instant messaging (IM) apps are used with smart phones and other technological tools that support them like WhatsApp Messenger, Telegram Messenger, Skype, and the like are used for various purposes, including giving the Church a voice to reach a worldwide audience. They enable Church members easy access to any kind of information they want to have. Bolu (2012) explained that internet and social media platforms are widely used to reach out to the congregation in various places. Church congregants are permitted to tweet their pastors on an issue of faith and the pastors respond to them; churches organize concerts where performing artists use tablet devices to cast the music or activity being performed. Many pastors find it easy to preach online and have online streaming of their services while others send tracts to various e-mail accounts and websites; ways that have transcended the traditional model of preaching to the congregants. Through them online communities of the faithful who share common interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others are enabled. Some online services offer the opportunity of having social networks with other people of similar interests (Adebayo, 2019). Today, it is rare to see so many unsubscribed church tracts in one's email which manifest the reconstituting effect of cyberspace technologies on the church. Today, big churches tend to have satellite branches while other members can worship online at the church's website. Apart from these online services and websites, there are telephone services for calls on the Internet. There are also video tracts in which preachers use animation and music to win the hearts of Internet browsers. Also, there are free downloads of CDs that enable Internet users to

listen to sermons. The popular pastors and preachers have their sermons on people's phones, all downloaded from the Internet for future use at one's own comfort. Christian literature or books are also available for free or paid download online.

Cyber-evangelism is a new development through which Christian online users share the Christian faith with members of their online contacts. Thus, the religious mediation dimension of cyber technologies spread center themselves on the virtual nature model rendering 'body-centered nature' at the periphery (Højsgaard, 2005). The adoption of cyberspace technologies in church operations is drastically eroding face-to-face contact/relationships. Face-to-face contact during service cannot be replaced with watching the service on TV/Internet or listening to radio.

Andrew Herman and John Sloop (1999) contended that while cyberspace technologies may increase the creation and spread of new religions and religious practices by overcoming some of the constraints imposed by space, time, and the criteria of social stratification, in the process they may be working against the development of the bonds of true religious group identities, with human flesh and experience that are witnessed in traditional forms of being church. Felicia Wu Song (2009) argued that the cyberspace technologies, especially the internet related ones do not promote the sense of community life. She contends that because popular websites frequently rely on the support of advertising revenue, they influence a consumerist mentality that favor the individual and undermines affiliation with wide social institutions, particularly the community dimension of faith.

However, the critical gap in the literature is that churches employ the use of websites without a profound understanding of their implications, particularly on the inclusive nature of the church. Tim Cottee, et al (1996) expressed that the ease of access to the Internet embeds fanaticism that tend to castigate religious beliefs and practices of other churches using junk information; there is endless barrage of religious advertisements and insidious links to nested commercial sites claiming to be authentic sources of genuine religious information. What comes with this is the problem of genuine interpretation of what is truly religious in cyberspace technologies since "propaganda of one form or another dominates such technologies. Cyberspace technologies increases a religious platform or horizon which renegades, heretics, and outright enemies of the church can appropriate, alter, and misrepresent religious materials for their own purposes. Thus, there is a loss of control of what actually is transmitted through cyberspace technologies. The profound implications of this is the increased loss of control over genuine religious ideas and content since there is no particular religion or church that has monopoly in the use and dissemination of its religious materials, scriptures, images, or whatever.

2.5 Challenges of Cyberspace Technologies

There is no doubt that cyberspace technologies have both positive and negative effects on the church. The use of cyberspace technologies complement and substitute the face of religious presentation in many areas such as worship, whereby they have changed the way that worship and church work is conducted (Borgmann, 2003). By placing church and religious operations and also members' daily religious way of life in the context of a complex and broader technological system of operations, technology makes the church and the entire standardized religious ways of operations different from the usual face-to-face model of operations and functionings. In the

critical theory of technology, it was argued that technologies used are no mere instruments to realize human purpose, neither are they neutral. Technologies have a reconstituting power, which implies that the cyberspace church model and the technologies it employs have a radical restructuring effects on the internal organization and functioning of the traditional model of the church. This same argument is reiterated by Dawson (2005) who contests that the culture of cyberspace technological arrangements with its individualistic, pagan approaches and iconoclastic tendencies, is abstemiously opposed to the traditional expression of religiosity. He further contests that the embracement of cyber church model with all its virtual activities that define it have the tendency to reduce or even undermine the sense of a true sense of a religious gathering in terms of verbal exchanges of religious experiences. The experiences are made shorter and emotional solidarity too is affected since co-participants is weakened. On this Dawson (2005) recommended that there is a need for true qualitative studies of virtual rituality that enhance religious worship for the formidable religious experience, entailing real physical time for participating within the context and determination of and face-to-face interactions.

However, the notable and indicting fact is that the church seems to be doing little to overcome the limitations of online pagan inclinations for the good of her congregants. There is a need to Christianize, spiritualize or even evangelize technology itself. O'Leary Stephen (*2005*) argued that the state of cyber or virtual religion that employ various technologies for its activities will have to become considerably apt to authentically present not just the symbolic dimensions of religion to create a serious experience of God in the virtual space, but also enhance visual and aural aspects of being church.

There is also the challenge of Internet Connectivity. Egere (2012) explained that in some African and Middle Eastern countries the usage and installation of internet services is very poor. It is even more worrisome in rural Africa where internet signals could disappear for days and weeks, and in the case of its presence, it is very slow. The 3G and smart phone that support internet communication is not easily available for every one everywhere. These include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram amongst others (Craigo-Snell & Johnson, 2020). While this may be relatively functional in urban regions, the pastors and church members who are in rural areas face challenges when it comes to using such technologies for lack of network and other logistics. Church members remain offline. Swain and Badenhorst (2020) concurred that technology allows for potential communication through online applications which enable the ministry to continue. However, many rural areas lack online connectivity and both pastors and congregants cannot afford data and airtime which are very costly, especially when many of them are not at work due to the lockdown or are unemployed. Internet speed is very low which does not support video chat and voice transmission that breaks between lines that requires a great tolerance from those of us who live in countries where the technology is advanced. The interruption of internet services could militate against a potentially vibrant Online Church.

The challenge of the cost of installing a full-fledged Church ICT infrastructure for effective development of internet technologies, which include content such as VSAT, TV station or TV production, computers, central storage or repository, database server, SMS server, web portal, email server, Internet bandwidth, local area network (within church buildings), wireless network infrastructure, optical fiber cabling, call center or help desk, church internet domain, ICT resource center, CD/DVD production studio, and printing press or publishing house. This is a massive project that many local churches cannot afford. A study by Christian Bolu (Bolu, 2012) noted that

because of financial constraints very few churches in Nigeria have a standing ICT infrastructure and committees; many others do not have paid ICT personnel and where they have they are usually audio system technicians and television technicians. The churches are also face with the challenge of promoting or enhancing computer literacy among her membership. Constraints by financial force, the church finds it difficult to effect programs for members to enhance their use of the Internet as outreach medium to many who need to hear and receive services from the Church. From the research done by Thumma and Travis (2007) it is evident that larger churches are utilizing online technologies to a large extent; however, this is not the case for the smaller and poor churches.

Fitzgerald (2014) contented that the use of cyberspace technologies in the church leads to a decline in Church attendance and all its entailed meanings. He explained that in countries like the United States of America fewer Christians go to face-to-face Church because the rest are busy logging into internet. There is the tendency for some Christian faithful, especially the young to lazy about by not going to Church under the pretext that they can access the Church Service or prayers on mobile internet applications. The apparent media-mania creates a false sense of being comfortable with the "cyber-church" than the real face-to-face ecclesial assembly of God's faithful. As argued earlier in 1958 by Tillich (1958), the cyber individual replaces church community. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo, Gmail, WhatsApp, Snapchat just to mention a few are privately-oriented. Aside from the false sense of community it creates through information sharing and communication with people we may not know or have seen, it appears that creating a "church" on cyberspace would further entrench individuality. Reduction church attendance also affects the Church's financial status. Onyulo (2020) referring to poor church

attendance during covid-19 pandemic asserted that offerings and tithes will continue to be low each week and this will affect various outreach programs of the church.

Dawson (2005) argued that the creation of online church communities erodes the embodied social and natural actions of the church, such that cyber-religion and church may turn out to be more of an individual intellectual endeavor that has the danger of being agnostic. Dawson further argues that with cyberspace technology use in the church, there is the tendency to reduce inter-community spiritual activities to mere provision and exchange of emails with less sharing and discussion of inspiring religious content. Of course, this does not mean or limit the positive aspects of the posting of requests for intercessory prayers and the like. In whatever case, the reality is that ongoing and community interaction is missing.

Dawson's arguments are reiterated by Nilles (2012) who argued that the use of cyberspace technologies creates a situation of Church gadgets without human interactions. In Nilles' thinking, human communication whether interpersonal and group is crucial in defining the Church. Since social media communication is often a private affair, individualism tend to override any other community aspect of the church. The self-determined activity promoted by cyberspace technologies reflects the concept of 'networked individualism' for the understanding and regard of online religion. Wellman (2001) explains that 'rather than fitting into the same group as those around them', 'each congregant has his/her own "personal church community', supplying 'the essentials of community separately from other church congregants that use the technology: support, sociability, information, social identities, and a sense of online community belonging' . But the great implication of this is that the sense of real face-to-face communication disappears

endangered. It is important to point out that both Dawson and Nilles stand for the conservative approach to maintain the traditional model of the church that exonerates face-to-face operations.

Even though the internet related technologies used in religious activities may bring in the aspect of impersonal nature of the church (Guy, 2002). However, it also important to note and acknowledge the fact that internet related technologies used to give meaning to the cyber church model have the positive elements of permitting church congregants to be more personal and intimate in an open manner and also more self-expressive than in any offline context. On the conservative positions Hutchings (2017a, 2017b), asserted that there may be weaker social ties among religious community members, but online churches can nonetheless have a significant impact on members' relationships and everyday religiosity. The assertion by Hutchings are supported by Kołodziejska **(2018),** who characterized online communities as processes rather than states; online communities are fluid in changing their boundaries and in creating networks of users. Such online communities can either weaken or reaffirm the role of physical communities in traditional churches.

The intellectual gap is that of contextual church theology that addresses the ritual and sacramental life of the church, particularly in relation to aspects that cannot be symbolically represented by cyberspace technologies. Theology emerges in the attempts to understand the development of concepts and theories about God. This implies that even the content of online posts about God have theological goals: in cyberspace through its defining technologies enable users to deliberate issues contained in the biblical texts, help each other in the interpretation of the texts and traditions in relation to the teachings of the church. However, sometimes this is at a superficial level even

though what is discussed many be subtly profound as most of the issues may be merely exchanges of opinions which may or may not influence the participants' intellectual drive. Margaret Wertheim argues (1999) had that cyberspace is a non-physical space allowing people to reconnect with ideas of the spiritual, immaterial world that have often been silenced by the dualistic cosmology of Western science and philosophy. However, there is a challenge of repackaging the old idea of Heaven in a secular, technologically sanctioned format.

Notions of networked individualism, networked collectivism and online church communities reflect different but complementary levels of church development and organization, each pertinent to research. The identified gaps in the literature necessitate this study on the cyberspace technologies and traditional church model, underlining their implications on the church.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter endeavored to present the methodology used in conducting the research; it entails the following features: research design, study area, target population, sample and sampling techniques. Other subdivisions of the chapter were methods of data collection, research instruments, reliability and validity of research instruments, data processing, analysis techniques, and data collection procedures. The chapter was summed up by ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

Being a qualitative research, and following the recommendations by Kelle (2006), qualitative research arrangements were employed; this allowed the researcher to acquire local and grounded knowledge when carrying out field data collection. This was supported by Bengtsson (2016) who argued that qualitative research expands the understanding of diverse contexts within a given study. Therefore, within this qualitative arrangement, the study employed a descriptive design in the collection and analysis of data. The design took into account the opinions, attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of the respondents for a deeper understanding of the implications of cyberspace technologies on the traditional model of the SDA church. Descriptive design further allowed to examine and evaluate the following indicators of the independent variable: factors necessitating the use of cyberspace technologies by the SDA church, cyberspace technologies used, church mission activities realized by cyberspace technologies and the challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies.

3.3 Study Area

The study was done in the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii. According to Conference's Report (2021), Nyanchwa Station is comprised of 11 districts (Nyanchwa, Botori, Daraja Mbili, Kisii New Life, Kisii Central, Jogoo, Nyaura, Nyamatoro, Nyanchwa Adventist College, Kisii University and Gekomu) with a general population of 23, 838 baptized church members from all the 11 districts constituted by 51 local churches. The study was done in each of the districts and the selected churches were: Kiong'ong'I, Itii, Nyakomisaro, Getutu and Kiaruta representing the rural setup churches. While Millenium, Kisii Central, Kisii New Life, Better Living Getembe, Nyanchwa Adventist College and Kisii University churches represented the urban setup.

The choice of Nyanchwa Station as the study area was informed by the fact that it composed of both urban and rural local church setup, thus giving the study the hybrid reality of the SDA church reality in relation to technology use. Urban churches endeavor to use technology in their operations, particularly live streaming through zoom, television, Webinar, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, emails, and so on. They also use electronic systems to keep records of church activities and membership. While rural churches are still within the traditional church organization with very little use of cyberspace technologies. Thus, most of the intended respondents were Adventist church faithful that had both modern experience of modern cyberspace technologies and also traditional church model operations.

3.4 Target Population of the Study

The study targeted to have equal representation of participants from all the 11 districts with 51 local churches that constitute Nyanchwa Station of the SDA church in South Kenya Conference. From the 51 local churches, the study purposively took one church from each district that embodied or represented groups or clusters of respondents that were perceived to be informed or knowledgeable of the cyberspace church model and its related technologies and also traditional SDA church model as shown in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.2 Target Population

Target Group	Target Population	Percentage
Pastors	13	2.5%
ICTs Technocrats	55	10.6%
Older Lay Christians	220	42.4%
Youth	220	42.4%
Church Clerks	11	2.1%
Total	**519**	**100%**

Source: The Researcher (2022)

From table 3.2, the purposively targeted population (with all the target groups) for the study was 519 informants, which included all the 13 pastors and all the 11 church clerks in Nyanchwa Station; 55 technocrats picking 5 from each of the 11 selected churches; it targeted 20 elderly lays Christians from each of the 11 churches making a total of 220 informants. Finally, the study targeted 20 youths from each of the 11 churches making a total of 220 youths. The criteria for the choice of this target population was their knowledgeability and experience of cyberspace technologies (WhatsApp Messenger, Website users, Facebook, You Tube, Webinar, Zoom, email, and the like) and those with experience of conventional traditional church model that underscores face-to-face church operations.

3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

The researcher used purposive sampling technique in the intent to have a manageable sample size from the above target population of 519 participants.

3.5.1 Sampling Method

The study employed purposive sampling technique. First, to collect data from information communications technologies (ICTs) technocrats. Second, to gather data from the old and young faithful church members who also had experience with both the new cyberspace technologies and the traditional church model. This was used to guarantee that appropriate and representative sample of respondents was selected from each cluster for the study. Censors was used for pastors and church clerks. The choice of purposive method was informed by (Patton, 2015), who contended that purposive method enables the study to select the participants from the population to capture the cluster's characteristics and qualities, which entails knowledgeability, and experience that enrich the study. Using purposive sampling facilitated the capture of rich and diverse data from the informants who were most knowledgeable with the nature of study. Censors was also used to gather information from pastors and church clerks.

3.5.2 Sample Size

Having appropriate sample size is fundamental for the authenticity of the study findings. Therefore, the determination of the sample size for this study was informed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), who posited that a sample size of 10% is suitable for a population surpassing 1000; whereas a sample size of 30% is preferable for a population of less than 1,000. But for a population of 100 and below the researcher should apply 100%. Guided by these postulates, the

sample of 30% was purposively adopted in this research (for Elderly lays Christians and the youth) as illustrated in table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 The Sample Size

Target group	Target Population	Sampling procedure	Sample size	Percentage
Pastors	13	Censors	13	7.3%
ICTs Technocrats	55	Purposive	22	12.4%
Old Lay Christians	220	Purposive	66	37.1%
Youth	220	Purposive	66	37.1%
Church Clerks	11	Censors	11	6.2%
Total	**519**		**178**	**100%**

Source: Researcher (2022)

The researcher involved various clusters of respondents with the exclusive goal of employing a multifaceted representation of informants in the study for a true reality of the SDA church in terms of cyberspace and traditional church models that are used. Accordingly, the sample size for the entire study was 178 respondents comprised of all the study clusters as illustrated in table 3.2 above.

3.6 Data Collection Tools

The study used two data collection tools - a questionnaire and interview schedule guide. The choice of these two tools was informed by Creswell (2003) along with Cozby and Bates (2012) who maintained that using more than one instrument for collecting needed relevant data for the study avoids bias, since it facilitates to cross-check the credibility of data collected and maximize the validity and reliability of the study. And also by Kumar (2014) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003)

who sustained that qualitative studies primarily use questionnaires and interview schedules for data collection.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The researcher applied a constructed questionnaire with specific themes in the Likert Scale arrangement where respondents were requested to fill, which afterwards were put together for analysis. The constructed questionnaire provided quantifiable data in terms of frequencies of shared ideas by the participants on the study items in regard to cyberspace church and traditional church models. The questionnaire was given to the cluster of both older members of the SDA church who had experience of traditional church model operations and the youth that were considered to be accustomed to the use of ICTs. The thematized closed-ended questions and the pre-given responses in the questionnaire limited the informants to what they should respond to as per the needed data. The questions were standardized to ensure that they were the same for all informants who participated in the study in this cluster.

The themetized questionnaire aided the researcher to produce as much and varied quantifiable data as possible for analysis since that minimized the margin of error, thereby opening more possibilities for the generalization of the study findings. It further facilitated the study in establishing opinions and attitudes that the informants had on the implications of cyberspace technologies on the traditional SDA church model in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii County. As informed by Kothari (2010), the choice of the questionnaire was because of its ideal nature in terms of efficiency, simplicity, convenience and speed in the data collection process. Furthermore, the questionnaire guaranteed confidentiality of the source of data as a requirement in research ethics that considers the anonymity of the respondents as a key principle. And more

importantly, the questionnaire helped to generate quantifiable data on specific themes that was computed to give the levels of agreement and disagreements. The questionnaire was divided into two sub-sections: sub-section one was centred on the respondents' demographic data, and sub-section two was focused on substantive themes contained in the study objectives.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule

Advised by Bryman (2012) who explained that interview is the most widely method of data collection used for qualitative research, and by Cozby and Bates (2012) who asserted that qualitative research works best on collecting in-depth information from relatively smaller and focused strata or cluster samples, the study used interview schedules that engaged key informants for the needed verbatim data. The choice of this tool was further informed by Johnson (2017), who asserted that interviews are primary means of getting information in many qualitative studies.

Therefore, informed by these researchers, the study employed open-ended structured interview guide questions. Faithful to the nature of qualitative studies, the essence of the open-ended interview questions was to collect the informants' perceptions and knowledge appertaining to the assessment of cyberspace technologies and traditional SDA church model in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference. Guided by McGonagle, et al (2015) the use of face-to-face structured interviews in the study were considered an appropriate way to obtain in-depth data for a qualitative study since they availed verbatim information that complemented the quantifiable data that was obtained from the questionnaire (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). This implied that the structured interview schedules because of their detailed nature provided in-depth information since they presented opportunities to respondents to intricately explain themselves on the issues under

research (MacArthur et al., 2020). The structured interview schedules were purposively conducted with other clusters of informants: pastors Church Clerks and church ICT technocrats.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

To determine the effectiveness of data collection instruments in giving the needed information for the study on the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church traditional model in Kisii County, data collection instruments were subjected to both validity and reliability test.

3.7.1 Validity of Research Instruments

Both the questionnaire and interview schedule questions were subjected to a validation procedure to ascertain their aptitude to measure the content of the data that was collected through them (Orodho, 2009) on the assessment of cyberspace and traditional church models of the SDA church. The same research requirement of validation of research instruments was recapped by Kothari (2010) who held that validity is meant to ascertain how the results obtained are true, correct, believable, meaningful and in order in relation to the item under study. For that reason, the validity of research instruments was done to guarantee their suitability and adequacy in giving accurate information required by the study. Copies of the study questionnaire and interview questions were given to some experts in the field of religion, ICTs, ecclesiology and supervisors who went through them and highlighted possible errors that were possibly to affect either positively or negatively the findings of the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). This helped to attain the objectivity of the study findings that were obtained from the data collected with those tools; it also cured some conceivable ambiguities and vagueness in the implied research instruments.

3.7.2 Reliability of Research Instruments

In research, reliability is envisioned to measure the level to which research tools produce positive and reliable outcomes after repeated trials on the same study variables under the same conditions (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In this research the reliability of the items was done using the pilot study that was conducted with the Pentecostal Assembles of God church in Nyamira County. The pilot study was done following the recommendations of Isaac and Michael (1995) in their study that suggested 10 – 30 participants as ideal in a pilot study. The pilot study helped to compare the findings and established their authenticity in relation to cyberspace church model and related technologies and the traditional model of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii. Piloting ensured that the results obtained from the data analysis represented the outcome of the actual study on the use of cyberspace technologies and their implications on the traditional model of the SDA church. To set up the credibility of the study, the researcher, therefore, prepared questionnaires and interview guides that were distributed to the respondents in the pilot study.

Accordingly, the pilot study served the following aims: checked the regular time it took to comprehend the questionnaire, established how the questionnaire capacity was scored and tested the credibleness of the findings of this study. The results of the pilot study were not used to influence the findings of this main study, and similarly the outcomes of the pilot study were as well not used in the final report of this research.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

Since the study was qualitative, the analysis of data was done through three ways or approaches – content analysis, narrative analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis helped to identify and

spelt out the frequencies of agreements and disagreements of participants on specific issues as shared by participants (summed up in categories of frequencies). Narrative analysis facilitated recapping the stories and reporting the embedded message. While thematic analysis looked at specific themes on the study topic, especially their experiences, views and opinions on cyber church and traditional church models. Thematic analysis majorly took church of data from the interviews. The three approaches were found to be important because they allowed the researcher first of all to thematically analyze salient issues on cyberspace technologies and church operations and later to present data in a manner that facilitated easier interpretation (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). The study also analyzed the content of the themes specified in the study objectives as presented in the content of the questionnaire and the structured interview schedule guide (Kumar, 2014) in relation to the two variables (cyberspace church model) and (traditional SDA church model). The data from structured interviews was also triangulated with that from the questionnaire. The findings from the analysis were presented or reported through frequency tables, verbatim and charts – pie charts, bar charts.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

Cognizant of the fact that the completion of the study does not end with data analysis, other data collection procedures which involved a series of measures and steps were followed prior to actual collection of data. The study first acquired an introductory letter from research and extension from Kisii University. This was used to petition for the research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). After receiving the authority from NACOSTI, the researcher solicited authorization from the leadership of the Seventh Day Adventist church to conduct the study in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii. And for the pilot study, the researcher obtained permission from the leadership of the Pentecostal Assembles

of God church in Nyamira County. After getting all the necessary legal documents, the researcher arranged meetings with the various target clusters outlined in the sample size of the study before making a conventional visit on the agreed dates of the appointments. Further, upon the attainment of the requisite permits the researcher also inducted research assistants that helped in data collection; the goal of induction was to ensure efficiency and quality of the information that was collected. Finally, the research assistants, together with the researcher distributed the questionnaire to older and young church members who took part in the study. However, interviews with key informants (pastors, church clerks and ICT technocrats) respondents were conducted on different agreed dates with them.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is an indispensable element in research since it can either certify or nullify the research carried out, together with its findings. Informed by this requirement, which warranted the study to stay within the frame of good ethical standards (Blaxter et al., 2010; Kumar, 2014), the following measures were observed: First, the researcher clarified to the respondents the intent of the study, which was for academics' goals and the data collected was entirely for academic grounds.

Second, all the participants were required to read and agree to the terms of the study by signing the consent form before taking part in it. This was done to willingly involve them in the study without any pressure or inducement of any kind applied to lure them to become subjects of the research. The participants had the right to associate or dissociate themselves with the information they give. And therefore, they were guaranteed that no information suggesting the identity of any participant will be included in the final report, unless the individual participant consented to it in writing.

Third, the informants were guaranteed that their participation in the research was not only voluntary, but also without any pay (Seale et al., 2004). This was because the purpose of the study was to benefit both the SDA church and ICTs technocrats and owners who gain from the subscriptions of the various church models and technologies that the church employs. The voluntary participation permitted them to either participate or withdraw from the study at any time of their choice with no fear of any contrary consequences. The importance of this was to avoid offering participants any incentives, bribes or compensations to lure them to participate in the study that might compromise the authenticity of the findings (Zandbergen, 2014). Voluntary participation encouraged the respondents and won their confidence and trust, especially as they were deemed to be an integral part of the solution to the problem being studied (Kumar, 2014).

Finally, as outlined by the ethical research department and authorization NACOSTI, the researcher sought for all statutory permits ahead of conducting the research in terms of the distribution of the questionnaire and actual carrying out of interviews with the key informants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of the study based on the data collected. It starts by indicating the response rate and the demographic characteristics of the respondents to give the basis for the findings and discussions under-in. The data that was collected outlined the main findings based on the study objectives: church cyberspace evangelical activities, the implications of cyberspace technologies, and finally, the challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya.

4.2 Return Rate

The study sought to establish the response rate of the participants from two data collection tools used, which included a questionnaire and an interview schedule guide, as shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: The Sample Size

Target group	Sample	Response	Percentage
Pastors	13	13	7.3%
ICTs Technocrats	22	22	12.4%
Old Lay Christians	66	60	33.7%
Youth	66	65	36.5%
Church Clerks	11	11	6.2%
Total	**178**	**171**	**96%**

Source: Researcher (2022)

As was indicated in chapter three and reiterated in table 4.1 above, the sample size of the study was 178 respondents, which included 132 from the questionnaires and 46 for the interviews schedules. The questionnaires that were distributed were 132 (for older lay Christians and youth), but 125 questionnaires were duly filled and returned, representing a 90.7% response rate, while 7 representing a response rate of 5.3% declined to participate in filling the distributed questionnaires. This was in line with research ethical claim made in chapter three above that participating in the study was voluntary and that no informant will be forced to participate in the study. All the targeted 46 respondents (comprising of church clerks, pastors and ICT technocrats), representing a 100% response rate for the interviews conducted participated in the study. In total, there were 171 respondents out of the sample size of 178, with a response rate of 96% that participated in the study. The high response rate was an indicator of the authenticity of the study findings pointing towards the generalizability of the study findings and the interest the study population had in understanding and appreciating the place of cyberspace technologies in the operations of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference.

4.3 Demographic Information of the Respondents

The study sought to ascertain the respondents' demographic information in the areas of gender, age, level of education and type of preferred church.

4.3.1 Gender of the Respondents

The study sought to find demographic data of the respondents distributed as per the gender as presented in figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Gender of the Respondents

72 (42.1%)

99(57.9%)

■ male ■ female
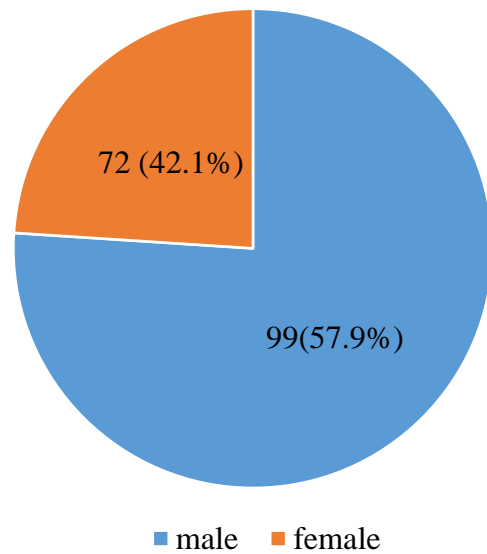
Source: Researcher's Construct (2022)

The study findings in figure 4.1 above showed that the respondents were largely male 99 (57.9%) with 72 (42.1%) females that gave their views on cyberspace technologies and traditional church model in selected Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kenya. This implied that more male than female were interested in the study on cyberspace platforms for church operations even though there were gender preferences and likings of either traditional church model or cyberspace church or both. The finding was not in agreement with Hannover et al., (2018) who postulated that most females than male are interested in church and religious issues. And that females show more concern than males, and are more conversant with the people side of cyberspace technologies.

Despite the disagreement of the study findings with those of Hannover et al (2018) on the use of cyberspace technologies in church, fundamentally, there are significant differences between gender use of cyberspace technologies in the SDA church. Although the study looked at the difference between males and females in embracing, preferring, and liking of cyberspace

technologies, platforms, devices, and services, it also noted this to be fully ascertained by other studies since it was not the concern of this study. However, the notable fact on this finding is that it points towards diversity of opinions that enriched the study regarding traditional church model, modern cyberspace church and cyberspace technologies.

4.3.2 Age of the Respondents

The study sought to establish the distribution of respondents by age in relation to the use of cyberspace technologies in church, as shown in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Age Groups of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
14 – 17	11	6.4%
18 – 35	82	47.9%
36 – 50	57	33.3%
51 – 60	13	7.6%
61 and above	8	4.7%
Total	**171**	**100%**

Source: Researcher's Construct (2022)

With regard to age bracket, the results in table 4.2 revealed that most of the participants in the study 139 (81.2%) were in the age bracket of between 18 years and 50 years. The findings further showed that 11 (6.4%) were aged between 14 and 17 years, another 13 (7.6%) were between 51 and 60 years, while 8(4.7%) were 61 years and above. The all-encompassing age distribution gave a wider range of participants that catered for all age groups for well-balanced study findings. Ten Kate et al (2017) indicated that the inclination towards the use of cyberspace technologies for religious activities in selected SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station increases linearly with age and

later drops down when it comes to 60 years. This implies that there are younger people interested in the use of cyberspace technologies in church compared to older generation of church membership. With the advent of the internet related technologies, Church evangelizing mission has taken a new turn. However, the study also sought to find out the composition of participants in church services and other activities. In the interview sessions, a participant observed:

> A family of three different generations, grandparents at the age 61yrs, parents in the age bracket of 30s and their children of less than 15 years of age all come to attend a church service. The perception of Church by these three generations, of the faithful is not the same and the manner of church organization is also different *(KINF 9)*.

The finding indicated that in traditional church model it is easy to separate these three generations and have different church services, which is not easily possible in online church services. At the traditional church model there is not much same time interaction in the order of worship, except to follow up the pastor from the beginning to the end of the service, while in the online church all the three generations interact with one another in worship, discussions, prayers and so on, undermining the generational age gap.

From the age bracket in the findings, a good number of middle aged 50 years and above worshippers showed great interest and use cyberspace technologies like television and internet related platforms as a tool for the spread the gospel, which resonates with the study by Hyacinth Chimene Orlu - Orlu (2015). The results in table 4.2 showed that elderly church participants (21 (12%) desire online connection, involvement, and interaction with other faithful. This was replicated by another participant who indicated:

> When physical movement to and from the brick and mortar church is not possible, elderly congregants lose that connection, they are cut off from the rest of the church congregation, and not able to enrich other members of the church with their community spiritual experience with them; neither are they able to receive from them the needed community religious and spiritual experience *(KINF 12)*.

The above findings are in agreement with Bolman & Deal (2013) who postulate that the needs of individuals and the church community are discovered to be more constitutive to the spiritual well-being of the elderly experienced church members than that of the church leadership. Moreover, the mission of the church is to share the message of the Gospel (using all available acceptable means) with all those who were willing, including those who are elderly, sick, physically challenged and so on.

However, the study also noted that the oldest-old church members who do not use cyberspace technologies risk of being socially excluded from the church. This was reflected from the interviews where one elderly church member, one informant noted:

> Whenever the church opts to use technology to enhance her mission, most of us who are elderly, with poor sense of hearing and sight feel left out. There is no time to catch up with those who manage technology *(KINF 25).*

This reaction from the elderly informant in the interview was earlier own indicated by Cotten (2017) who asserted that elderly people and those with conservative and luddite regard to the use of cyberspace technologies in church miss much whenever such technologies are used; the church is gradually and steadily embracing digital innovations for her mission. Further, the study noted that less participation of older informants of 61 years and above imply that the old or older members of the church are underrepresented and therefore their views on the church's intent to embrace cyberspace technologies are equally undermined (Kim, Lee, Christensen, & Merighi, 2017).

4.3.3 Respondents' Level of Education and Technology Literacy

The study further sought to categorize the distribution of respondents by their levels of education. Education and knowledge skills in the cyberspace technologies influence the use and appreciation

of technology in church. In other words, education forms a critical factor for the respondents in the study. The informants were asked to indicate their level of education and the results were as presented in table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Respondent's Level of Education

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
University/College	99	57.9%
Secondary	34	19.9%
Primary	3	1.7%
Diploma	35	20.45%
Total	**171**	**100%**

Source: Researcher's Construct, 2022

The results of the study in table 4.3 above show that most of the respondents 99 (57.1%) had university/college education, while 34 (19.9%) had secondary education, 35(20.4%) had diploma, and only 3 (1.7%).

From the findings, it was clear that all the respondents had formal education which informed their understanding and use of cyberspace technologies for the enhancement of SDA church evangelical activities. On this a key informant asserted:

> The majority church members are the youth who have received formal education and more informed on the management and creation of cyberspace platforms that help the church in her attempts to be meaningful to the modern technological society. This informed church population have the ability to inform the church of useful and viable cyberspace platforms. Embracing technology in church demands that people are informed of specific technologies themselves *(KINF 3)*.

Another participant informed:

> Church to continually train members to use cyberspace technologies; civil education on the use of cyberspace technologies and platforms has multiple benefits in all aspects in the life of the church *(KINF 19)*.

While another informant noted:

> My training as a clerk has enabled me to be more useful to the church in the area of the use of cyberspace technologies and archiving of church information. South Kenya Conference arranges seminars that train us, thereby equipping us with relevant knowledge in clerical work like keeping of church records. This widens my competency in this line of work *(KINF 33)*.

In chapter three on the target population and sampling techniques it was noted that the study will engage knowledgeable participants on the issues of the church and also knowledgeable in ICTs as they are able to contribute credible perspectives and views on the use of cyberspace technologies in church mission. They were considered experts, church insiders, highly experienced in church life as either leaders capable of giving credible information sought by the study (Walter, 2003). The consideration of education as a variable in this study was important because literacy level of the respondents is paramount for informed and credible data as guided by sampling procedures as well as cooperation of respondents during sampling.

Cyberspace Technology Literacy

To fathom the level of cyberspace the use of technology in the church, the study further sought to determine the level of cyberspace technologies literacy skills. Respondents were asked to rate themselves by indicating categories they belonged to. Their responses are shown in table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Respondent's Cyberspace Technologies Literacy levels

Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Never had any skill	0	0%
Basic skill level	110	64%
Trained level	61	36%
Total	**171**	**100%**

Source: Researcher's Construct (2022)

From table 4.4 above, the study established that all respondents had in their life interacted with cyberspace technologies and platforms (phones, computers, internet, radio, television, and so on). This means that they all had an idea on the use of cyberspace technologies including the hand devices like cellphones. Those who had trained in computer technology were very few 61 (36%). From the interviews, one informant noted:

> We frequently organize general training for the church since it is now our strong pillar to reach out to our members and others. The information technology department does educate the members on how to access some of the church's social media platforms like the church website, how to access online information, and how to receive alerts on their live streaming sessions *(KINF 36)*.

The study found that the majority of the church members possessed at least some basic computer skills to access electronic devices which enabled them to navigate on social media platforms adopted by the church. This finding confirmed those of White, et al (2016) who conducted a study on the use of social media (Facebook) by some Ghanaian Pentecostal Pastors and found out that many church members had some basic skills in computing which enabled them to access social media platforms adopted by the church with ease. The findings further were consistent with those of Mateus (2017) which indicated that having some basic skills in computing such as the ability to

browse the internet, and the ability to retrieve information and communicate with others was important for the church congregants.

According to Mckinney (2014), Lacy (2021), and Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) training is a key factor when it comes to the use of any information system like social media. Training enables users to obtain basic skills which aided them in the use of social media platforms for church activities. However, the study found that sufficient training on the use of an electronic platform is a crucial factor to determine a church congregant's perception and level of usage.

Thus, informants' literacy facilitated the researcher to interact with all study groups with broader access to church digital information and services among church membership than non-church web-connected. It further helped the study to have comprehensive findings on the issue of technology usage in church, giving more precise insights that helped to reduce potential bias (Bernard, 2018); issues and insights that provided a perspective that the researcher (as outsider) could not otherwise obtain on his own. Based on these assertions expertise and knowledge of study participants on cyberspace technologies and the church were considered paramount as it facilitated engagement and collaboration between a researcher and key informants that is not often reported in library or in written data.

4.3.4 Respondents' Church Model Preference

Finally, the study sought to establish church preference of the respondents to find their opinions on the use of cyberspace church, blended, traditional models for church activities. The results were as indicated in figure 4.2 below.

Preferred Church Model
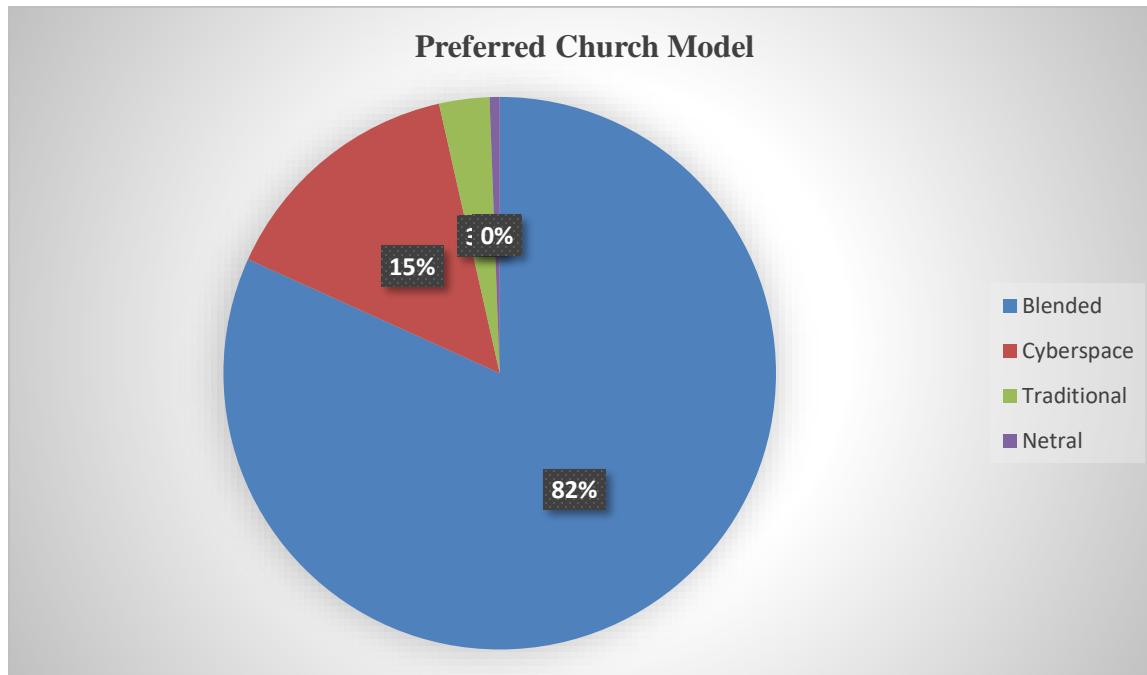
Source: Field Data, (2022)

The results in figure 4.2 above revealed that the majority of the respondents 139 (82%) were of

the blended church model. On the blended kind of church model, one key informant explained:

> There are other aspects of the traditional church model like marriage, rituals, and so on that cannot be performed in cyberspace church. Such aspects demand physical presence. But also cyberspace technological church operations offer the church and congregants many apocalyptic opportunities that have never been seen before; opportunities that connect the church to various new areas of mission that cannot be undermined. Combining these two church models take into account both the traditional and modern realities of the church *(KINF 1)*.

Participant in the interview informed:

> In the aspect of content and activities, there are many similarities between the *motor and brick church and Cyberspace Church; they all have* Bible study, prayer, teaching the Word of God, preaching, and most of the worship inspirational songs are carried out in both. In addition, in both church members get together and discuss issues of faith, share collective spiritual needs, material, missionary work, address issues related to the needs of believers and prayers *(KINF 10)*.

The findings on blended church model are in tandem with the study by Okyere (2018) who asserts that it is not possible to participate in the holy communion/last supper, administer baptism, marriage and visit to the sick online. And also reiterated by Nyakwara and Ichuloi (2022) who affirmed that the SDA church membership both individually and collectively should be meaningfully and cautiously present in cyberspace to witness the Gospel message without undermining the traditional and physical aspects of the church. It is extremely impossible to perform online religious rituals related to those sacraments and activities of the church.

The church must re-prioritize its nature as presenters of God's presence in the world, and to do so she must cultivate habits and liturgies that create the space and circuits for that presence to be felt and known underlining the fact that whichever form the celebration takes should not be taken to substitute the physical and ritual aspects of the celebrating community that demands gathering with an authorized priest/president around 'the Lord's table' (Burridge, 2022). Even with the use of cyberspace technologies, churches should find ways to promote physical gatherings, the celebration of the sacraments together as a believing community in neighborhoods, bodily movement in worship, shaking hands and hugging each other. They should do anything to re-sensitize people to the fleshly reality of the church in the world.

The findings further indicate that 25 (15%) of the respondents preferred pure cyber/virtual church model. On the cyberspace church model, one key informant postulated:

> Online services allow Christian believers and those who are curious about the Christian Church and message to have the joy to have a personal experience of the aspects of church from the comfort of their own homes *(KINF 16)*.

On the same concern of cyberspace church model, one informant informed:

> I do access the church Website every Sabbath, and get all the spiritual guidance and information in it. I even follow up church services and activities online. These

inspire me so much to be a member of my church even though I don't go to an outside physical church *(KINF 15)*.

The findings were in tandem with Grinter et al (2011) and Nyakwara and Ichuloi (2022) who argue that evangelism is one of the major reasons why churches have to adopt cyberspace technologies; church communities situated in remote, secluded, and sparse locations can connect with other members through online services.

On the traditional church model, the findings demonstrated that 5 (3%) were in favour of it. Key informant explained:

> One can claim that all church operations can be represented or symbolized. But this does not provoke deep faith in the congregants more than what physical church images, icons and symbols that are found in the physical church operations and presence *(KINF 7)*.

While another key informant from the rural church setup asserted:

> I would go back to the old traditional ways of engaging in pastoral ministry of the church, but continue to explore the opportunities that cyberspace technologies offer as a supplementary ministry tool *(KINF 33)*.

According to this informant, cyberspace technologies contribute to the betterment of the church's ministry and to completely turn away from them, the church may lose impact and significance in the continually digitized society.

From the findings, it can be argued that the small numbers of respondents would not produce a sufficiently representative sample for the generalization of the findings. Even though this cluster of informants took the conservative and luddite stance to technology as they seemed to focus more on getting the church not lose its basic foundation of physical church and physical church operations, they point to the reality of a sector and aspects of the church that cannot be undermined. While only 2 (1%) were neutral or undecided. However, the findings point towards the importance

of recognizing integration of both models of the church even though this may not be generalized in Nyanchwa Station due to different logistical church setups. But the findings were conscious of the fact that digital technologies have become an integral part of the church since it offers so many opportunities for the church to realize her mission (Stephenson, 2011). The findings were in agreement with Mikoski (2010) who asserted that communication has been made easy within the virtual community.

4.4 General Information

Before the actual analysis of cyberspace and traditional church models, the study first sought to determine the existence of possible Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure in the selected churches. This was important since the study was about cyberspace church and traditional church models and therefore, the use of technology in church operations was key. Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with the thematic statements given on a scale of strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral (N), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA). The results were as presented in figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: ICT Infrastructure in Selected Churches
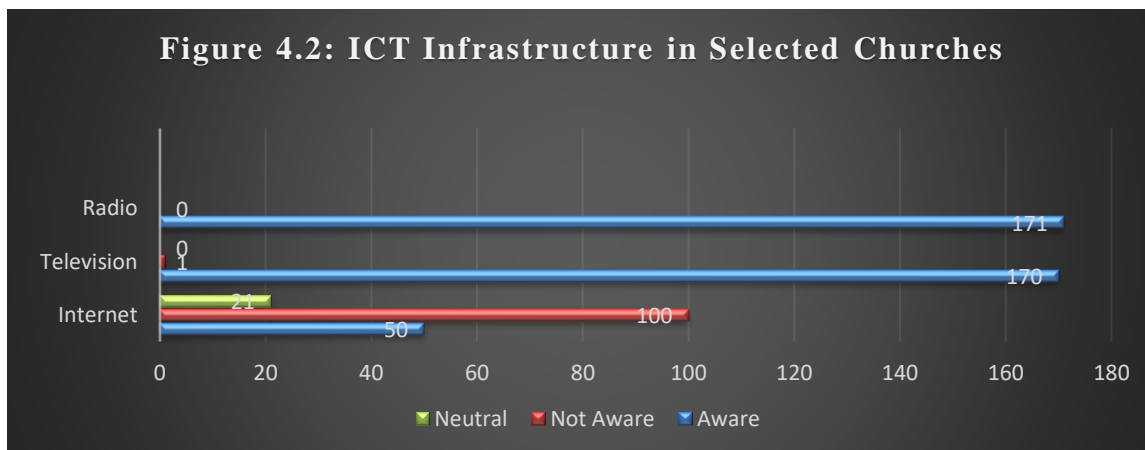
Source: Field Data, (2022)

On the awareness of ICTs infrastructure in selected churches, the results in figure 4.2 above showed that 171 (100%) of the respondents know about the existence of church radio station, and

90

170 (99%) were aware of the church Television (TV) channel used to air some of the church programs. While 50 (29.2%) of the respondents were aware on the existence of internet services, 100 (58.5%) were unaware, and 21 (12.3%) were neutral. The fact of 100 (58.5%) of the respondents not being aware of internet infrastructure and 21 (12.3%) respondents being neutral is an indication that probably the use of church internet websites and related technologies (like emails) is not something that is fully established and employed by the SDA local churches in Nyanchwa Station. This was reaffirmed by one key informant who noted:

> Cyberspace is a growing area of church community and mission; we would be failing in our mission if we didn't provide a cyberspace website for the church community where members can freely relate with each other, find new members and get spiritual information that enrich their faith. The Website and church e-mail is available to all church members since they are meant for evangelism activity for the spiritual development of her members *(KINF 4)*.

On the same footing one participant further noted:

> Being at home and listening to a service with the other callers listening and hearing their contributions, is "very interesting and relaxing" *(KINF 3)*.

While another participant noted:

> For the church to reach many people, especially the younger general in the 21st century, she must have an online presence. Whether the church likes it or not she has to adapt to technology since it is the determining force for the relevance of the church *(KINF 15)*.

The high response on radio and television recourse for church operations implies that online church services are already being used together with the traditional church model by the church congregants. However, the notable fact is that the 100 (58.5%) and 21 (12.3%) of the respondents who posit not to be aware and undecided tended to negate the fact of other related platforms like websites, emails and so forth. In other words, if the SDA local churches in Nyanchwa Station have well organized ICT infrastructure then there could be many of the church membership using church Website and e-mails or for any given reasons they choose not to use them.

The findings were in agreement with Christian Bolu (2012) who contested that contemporary church communications for growth is taking phenomenally great strides all over the world with church growth programs, adoption of electronic mails, telephone and virtual learning environment for communication as well as the deployment of church ICT infrastructure for church administration and human resource management. And also with Hutchings (2010) who contested that cyberspace technologies enable members to reach new audiences with the messages and styles that have proved effective in the life of the church. This has also enabled researchers in the area of church operations and cyberspace technologies.

In general, the findings indicated that church internet, TV and radio infrastructure are valuable instruments that help church members to learn about their church and religion since they can access all the needed information at the time of need and want; they are sources and tools for church information, and missionary outreach. As explained by Mark Morgan Stephenson (2011), the internet is a "wonderful mission field" since it is filled with so many free opportunities to reach out to people that employ it. It gives church opportunities to create religious events on the website and invite others to participate. The internet has created possibilities for churches to enlarge their reach beyond the traditional walls of the church building. Thus, the traditional church way of word-of-mouth is no longer the only esteemed way church information is communicated and dispersed to the congregants and interested persons. However, TV and radio resonate well with the traditional church model since in some way they contain the physical aspects of church operations: images and voices of participants.

4.5 Cyberspace technologies used in conducting church activities in Nyanchwa Station,

South Kenya Conference

In regard to objective one on cyberspace technologies used in realizing the multiple faces of the

church's evangelical mission, the results were as presented in table 4.3 below.

Table 4.5: Reactions on Cyberspace Technologies for church activities in Nyanchwa Station,
South Kenya Conference

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Websites	7	45	25	40	8	125
	(5.6%)	(36.0%)	(20.0%)	(32.0%)	(6.4%)	(100%)
Live Streaming	4	30	18	50	23	125
	(3.2%)	(24.0%)	(14.4%)	(40.0%)	(18.4%)	(100%)
Facebook	15	20	24	42	24	125
	(12.0%)	(16.0%)	(19.2%)	(33.6%)	(19.2%)	(100%)
Twitter	22	28	33	22	30	125
	(17.6%)	(22.4%)	(26.4%)	(17.6%)	(24.0%)	(100%)
WhatsApp	4	25	19	40	37	125
	(3.2%)	(20.0%)	(15.2%)	(32.0%)	(29.6%)	(100%)
You Tube	7	15	15	38	50	125
	(5.6%)	(12.0%)	(12.0%)	(30.4%)	(40.0%)	(100%)
Emails	7	10	31	22	55	125
	(5.6%)	(8.0%)	(24.8%)	(17.6%)	(44.0%)	(100%)
Television	5	9	15	40	56	125
	(4.0%)	(7.2%)	(12.0%)	(32.0%)	(44.8%)	(100%)
Radio	2	5	16	42	60	125
	(1.6%)	(4.0%)	(12.8%)	(33.6%)	(48.0%)	(100%)

As indicated in the bar chart 4.5 above, on the theme of church websites, a significant number of participants 52 (41.6%) were not in support, while only 48 (38.4%) were in support and 25 (20%) were neutral on the use of church websites. Many church members were not aware and informed of the structured role of this church platform. This claim was evident from one of the key informants who complained:

> My church is in a rural setting where all church activities we have are physical; the church still uses manual materials (registers, instructional books, etc) for her operations. My church does not have a church website, and even if it had most church members have no idea of what it serves *(KINF 28)*.

However, for those who know and use church websites, one participant from the interviews observed:

> Websites like Facebook offer a free, easy way to promote church operations and events; they strengthen community sense outside of physical church services on a given time or day. They further engage those interested in using them to find church information they need *(KINF 10)*.

Another participant in the interviews said:

> I am a serial user of internet websites including church websites, but when I open a website, I see various advertisements about Christianity and Jesus Christ *(KINF 2)*.

The high rate of 52 (41.6%) respondents who were not in support corresponds to 100 (58.5%) of those who unaware and 21 (12.3%) who were neutral of internet services in their local churches posited in table 4.5 above suggest the need for traditional or blended church models. It points to the fact that the Church has to have elaborate programs to conscientize the communities on the inevitable nature of cyberspace technological platforms for the evangelical activities of the church. Missing out the internet Websites infrastructure and its use in the development and functionings of the church consequently implies missing its multifaceted functions like instant posting of church

sermons, Bible study outlines, devotional messages, prayer wishes, outlines of Sunday School lessons, short religious and spiritual quotes, announcements, information about the church and its instructional ministries, and so on (Adebayo, 2019). These are services that the church today cannot afford to miss if it has to be relevant to society.

On live streaming of church activities, 34 (27.2%) of the respondents disagreed, 18 (14.4%) were neutral and 73 (58.4%) supported. The overwhelming number of respondents in support implied that live streams allow more church members to participate in the events of their church, which is equally supported by 170 (99%) of the respondents who affirmed of their knowledge and use of church TV services. It was found to be the simplest way to expand the church outreach mission. For example, through tuning to a TV channel for a church service or ministry event, one can reach a much greater audience by giving everyone the opportunity to do so. Once this is completed, one can also record the live streams or clips for later access and use. In live streaming, special church activities, like weddings, baptisms, and so forth can be broadcasted directly through drama and plays for all those who may want to participate. Key participant from the interviews informed:

> Live streaming allows members in poor health, the old, those with disabilities, and those who for one reason or another are able to attend and fully participate in church events. This allows the congregants to attend from home, and record special programs that occur during busy family times. It also furnishes members with more ways to stay involved in the church, regardless of their geography location or of what is happening in their lives that hinders them to be involved *(KINF 47)*.

Another key informant echoed:

> Church members who have moved away from the church but still want to be part of the church community can maintain their connection. This was exemplified during Covid-19 crisis when members could not have physical church operations *(KINF 7)*.

The feelings were echoed by one key participant who asserted:

Even though the population of the young people is big in the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station, equally the population of the church community over the age of 65 years is also increasing. This calls for a need for alternative resources to allow for the spiritual well-being of these elderly people who cannot or choose not to go into the brick and mortar churches *(KINF 34).*

The point in these findings was that churches have the option to live stream their services and hold online services as a means to make themselves relevant, retain their followers, and win more followers. This has resonance with traditional church model since captivating images are visible and inspirational to members. Some of the live streamed services are held on interactive websites to help enhance the experience of worship and community. These study findings were found to be in tandem with Orlu - Orlu (2015) who maintained that many pastors preach online and have online streaming of their services while others send tracts to various e-mail accounts and websites to their followers as a means to keep them participants and informed of the activities of the church. Large churches have satellite branches while other members can worship online at the church's website.

Thus, church live streaming services bring a vigorous potentiality for sharing the sacramental life of the Christian community of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station as realized in sermons, and other religious services and activities. The point not to lose is that what church participants share in live streaming embeds some aspects of the brick and mortar church, although the brick and mortar church participants do not necessarily share that same spiritual connection as those who use virtual live streamlined activities. Based on the responses above, while all of the participants in the study attended, or had attended a brick and mortar church at one time, the same cannot necessarily be said for every brick and mortar church attendee regarding attending a virtual streamline church service. This is in agreement with Merriam (2009) who proposed that for a phenomenological study manifests a common religious experience of participants.

On the use of Facebook cyberspace platform, 35 (28%) disagreed, 24 (19.2%) were neutral and 66 (52.8%) supported its usage in church. The overwhelming support on the use of Facebook was reiterated in the interviews by key informant who observed:

> Facebook presents an amazing opportunity for churches to meet the demands of their mission; through it, they reach out to the mission field. It is a virtual fellowship wall and "a Sabbath gathering place". in my Facebook wall, we form prayer and other support groups where we exchange spiritual information. In Facebook, congregants interact with each other, post videos and comment on them, building online prayer communities *(KINF 11).*

Another key participant noted:

> Facebook and Twitter accounts are used to generate a constant updated cycle of church communication, integrating church discourse into participants' everyday online activities. Facebook is designed with individuals in mind, where a user adds other people as friends, and can also choose to share personal information that is deemed useful to members *(KINF 31).*

From the findings, Facebook cyberspace platform enables the integration of online church communities into wider online activities where Church online community participants sign up to send and receive daily issues, challenges and videos or join those with a proselytizing mission to win more converts. The idea is that Facebook accounts are used by individuals and members of the church to share faith with their friends and communities. In it, the church can form online groups and post all kinks of church information for the congregants. Facebook is a cyberspace platform that is used by many young people in the church because of its appealing nature. Young people like positing images of participants, activities, have instant interactions among themselves, form new church affiliation groups, and so on. These findings are in tandem with Hutchings (2011) who opines that Facebook has been adopted by users with great interest as an informal communication space, where members have an opportunity to not only stay more connected with each other but also to connect to new interested people in different ways. Also with Thumma

(2011) who explained that Facebook offers a platform where church members of religious orientation commune with their friends in an online setup.

On the theme of Twitter platform and SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, the results in the cart above indicated that 40 (32%) disagreed, 33 (26.4%) were undecided, while 52 (41.6%) were in agreement. The findings point to the fact that Twitter platform has a vast amount of resources that are both easy to use and effective in church operations in that the church is able have personal profiles. It has the ability to increase or enlarge church following, reach potential attendees, and also spread the word of God and other important work activities of the church. Having more church followers on Twitter social platform means equally having more opportunities to broaden church outreach programs and also share church information. From the interviews, one key participant asserted:

> In Twitter platform, we twit inspiration bible quotes and verses that help in the spread of the Word of God. We also twit our church leaders and especially the pastors on specific issues of church concern. Twits are more engaging, particularly to the younger generation that is more interested with this platform *(KINF 5)*.

While another key participant indicated:

> Twitter platform enables the sharing of church sermons and encourages those who may not know about our church. We pin posts on top of individual Twitter page to ensure that it is always visible to those who access it. This provides the opportunity for us to promote tailored church activities to tailored audiences in the form of church campaigns that create more awareness on the faithful *(KINF 15)*.

The findings corresponded with those of Sheedy (2011) who postulated that users experience Twitter differently depending on various factors like the time of day and frequency they check their feed, the other people they follow, and the interface(s) they use to access the network. And also with Driscoll (2010) who posited that the flexibility of Twitter cyberspace platform allows users to realize multiple activities of their interest.

However, from the questionnaire findings, the study noted that there is no much difference between those who do not agree 40 (32%) with the use of Twitter cyberspace platform and those who agree 52 (41.6%) with it. This probably suggests that Twitter cyberspace technology and platform is not the most used and preferred platform and mode of church evangelism in the SDA church Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference.

On WhatsApp, 29 (23.2%) of the participants disagreed, 19 (15.2%) were neutral and 77 (61.6%) were in full support of this platform. From the interviews, one of the participants explained:

> In our WhatsApp group we are about 150 members and we use this platform to share the bible texts in one-on-one conversations. Daily, weekly reflections and worship inspirational songs are shared and accessed easily on WhatsApp platform *(KINF 14)*.

WhatsApp is a popular platform, not just for young people but also middle aged adult members of the church. Like Twitter, WhatsApp cyberspace platform is a common evangelical space where most churches use to display their announcements concerning various activities like church discussions, communication, collection of church financial contribution, positing of group meetings and meeting minutes, seeking of opinions and views of church members on certain issues appertaining to the church, and other necessary information (Wise, 2014). This multifaceted functionality of WhatsApp cyberspace platform, justifies the findings on the overwhelming majority of participants in the study being in its support.

On YouTube, 22 (17.6%) disagreed, 15 (12%) were undecided and 88 (70.4%) supported. This overwhelming support that point to the positive usage of You Tube platform was corroborated in interview session by one of the key informants who noted:

> YouTube as an online technology enables my church congregants to upload videos on the web and other mobile devices, sharing them with others with the same faith or interests *(KINF 15)*.

On the same footing one key participant added:

> Through YouTube, my pastor and other members of the church offer a time of worship and prayer to reach the faithful wherever they may be at their convenient time. We receive video clips of Bible study and spiritual Scripture texts, prayers and so on *(KINF 14)*.

You Tube has proven to be the most preferred social media platform more than all the rest as it facilitates the exchange of video clips on religious teachings, lessons, sermons, songs, that enhance religious knowledge and faith. It facilitates the archiving of religious content for further use. The field findings were in agreement with (Lewis, 2016) and Wise (2014) who postulated that YouTube provides church members with the opportunity to watch church services or other related church programs at their own stride, as well as recommend programs by sharing links to other church members, family and friends. This implies that YouTube allows Church members to share media content like pictures and video and other information (sermons).

On the theme of E-mails, the findings showed that 17 (13.6%) disagreed, 31 (24.8%) neutral and 77 (61.6%) were in support. Results from the study interviews revealed that the church newsletters transmitted through emails are the greatest assets or liabilities for the church. From the interviews, a key participant informed:

> Church email does several important functions and responsibilities when it comes to the church's relationship with its members. Most SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station send emails that update members on Sabbath service and other church programs. This makes church members feel connected to what's going on in their churches *(KINF 21)*.

Today, as one opens his personal or even church email, one gets so many other unsubscribed church tracts. However, the notable fact in the study was in the traditional church model the Church always used mails to send and receive messages with the possible available medium throughout its existence. For instance, the Apostle Paul was sent to Damascus with a letter which was the best

available means for distance communication at the time (Acts 9:2). Most of the New Testament writings or books are letters to Christian communities. However, today, this is not the case; mails are sent instantly with ease, through electronic platforms, with minimal physical contact.

On the theme of TV as cyberspace communication platform for church activities, 14 (11.2%) disagreed, 15 (12%) were neutral, while 96 (76.8%) were in full support. The overwhelming number of participants in support of the use of television for church activities in Nyanchwa Station is an indication that television platform is one of the active devices for the church ministry. There are many activities done by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station through television: televised sermons, discussions, video and other life programs. Church congregants listen to, see and follow what is going on through live telecasts and highlighted church programs. From the interviews, a key participant said:

> Television plays a vital role to members of the church who do not have the possibility to use other internet related platforms. Many members of the church have television in their homes. This means that a large number of church members have access to what is going on in the church. Church services and sermons which enrich the faith of members are broadcasted *(KINF 8)*.

One key participants from the interviews informed:

> During Covid-19 pandemic, the church could not carry out most of her evangelical activities on face-to-face brick and mortar church arrangements. However, the church was able to realize some of her activities through television broadcasts. This helped nourished us spiritually and we never felt distant from the church *(KINF 35)*.

While another participant in the interviews explained:

> Through television broadcasts we are facilitated to listen to and watch spiritual church music videos, films, dramas, church sermons, Christian films, worship services, and so on which bring us close to God in the comfort of our geographical location *(KINF 30)*.

On the use of radio for church evangelical work, 7 (5.6%) disagreed, 16 (12.8%) were undecided, while 102 (81.6%) were in full support. The findings showed an overwhelming support to the use

of radio as a technological tool for the evangelical mission of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station. Corroborated with the questionnaire findings, one key informant explained:

> Sermons, discussions, music and other programs on Christian works that enrich the Christian faith are broadcasted through the radio. We listen to Christian songs on the radio, we receive enriching lessons on thematic issues of faith and church *(KINF 17).*

Another key participant in the interviews informed:

> On a daily basis I tune to church radio station and listen to inspiring songs, teachings, church sermons, and other entertainments. This enables me to feel part of my church in my old and sickly situation in the rural setting since am not able to physically participate in church *(KINF 33).*

While another key participant informed:

> The only cyberspace technology we congregants in the rural setup know is the radio. The radio serves us with all that we need regarding our church in the region. We can fail to have cellphone networks of either Safaricom or Airtel, but don't lack radio signals or connectivity *(KINF 37).*

The radio was found to be the most preferred and used medium by almost everyone, especially the old members of the church who were found to have it. Even the young people expressed their interests in listening to programs aired through church radio station. This was probably because it is the oldest, cheapest and also engaging form of communication available, including in one's mobile phone device; it is engaging in the sense that participants can make calls and enquire issues of their church interests and are responded to promptly. The findings were in agreement with David McClendon (2008) who postulates that radio plays a vital role to the people who do not directly access internet its related cyberspace technologies. The radio has the ability to reach a large group of people at the same time. As a cyberspace platform for church evangelical activities, it was found to be more meaningful in both urban, rural and even in remote settings.

The findings of objective one indicated that cyberspace technologies are instrumental for the church ministry. To respond to the Great commission Jesus gave to his disciples of going to the

whole world and proclaim the Good News (Mt. 28:19-20), the church is obliged to use all appropriate means that speak to the people in context without compromising its fundamental principles. Cyberspace technological platforms play a fundamental role in dissemination of the Christian message and the realization of other religious activities and experiences (Dawson, 2005; Pautler (2010). Supported by Cloete, (2015), from the instrumental level, today, cyberspace platforms take up the functions of meeting the goals of religion for its relevance; they do this as a medium through which the faithful receive spiritual guidance and participate in virtual religious rituals, services, worship, testimonial and confessional exchanges, religious instructions (teachings), discussions, testimony services, and intercessory prayer groups. This enhances traditional church model activities that are and were carried out through face-to-face modes of implementation.

Today, it is unusual to find people not using internet-related technologies like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, live streaming media platforms, and so on. Cyberspace technologies in the operations of the church have overtaken various aspects of the traditional church model that is rooted in physical and spatial aspects. These assertions are recapped by Francis (2020) who explained that the use of social media technologies in the churches today, can be contrasted as a journey which starts primarily from the office use to web environments, even to the broadcast media, such as radio, television, to the sanctuary, and finally to the (laity) members of the church.

4.6 SDA church cyberspace evangelical activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

In relation to objective two, the study sought to examine cyberspace technologies and evangelical activities or pastoral ministry of the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station, Kisii, Kenya. The results were as presented in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.3: Cyberspace technologies and evangelical activities of the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station, Kisii, Kenya
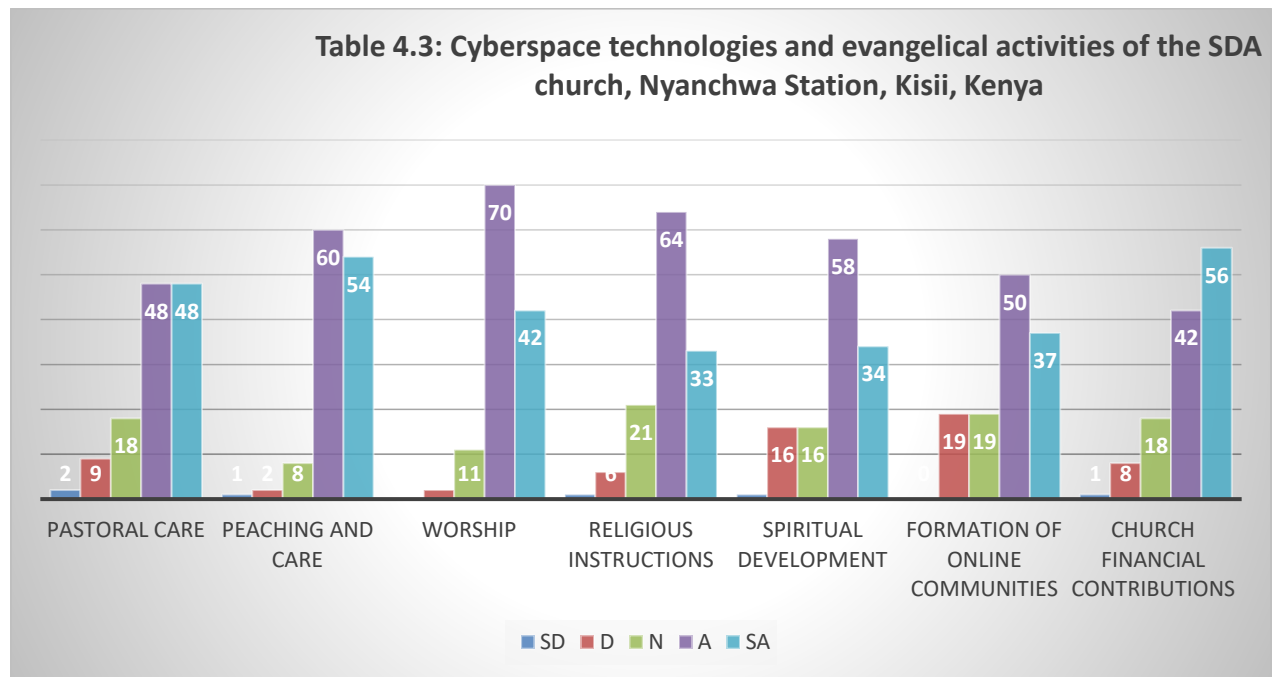
Source: Field Data (2022)

The results in table 4.6 above gave a detailed account of cyberspace technologies on the activities or ministry of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station. On the theme of cyberspace technologies and pastoral care of church faithful. The findings indicated that 11 (8.8%) disagreed, 18 (14.4%) were neutral, and 96 (76.8%) were of the fact that cyberspace technological platforms are instrumental in the pastoral activities of the church. This was corroborated by the interview finding from a key informant who opined:

> Church ministers should embrace the use of the cyberspace technologies in their pastoral ministry. While the traditional physical means of pastoral ministry should be continued even though they are limited in nature, church ministers should research on how to make

cyberspace technological ministry not only as an alternative ministry, but also as supplementary to the traditional ways of doing mission *(KINF 13)*.

In the same line of thought, a key informant from the interview observed:

Cyberspace technologies enable the church to enhance and promote traditional church ministries like worship, fellowship, pastoral care, education, mission, community outreach, evangelism and communications *(KINF 28)*.

The findings are cognizant to the fact that traditional forms of church operations are limited and can therefore be enhanced by use of cyberspace technological platforms. This was found to be consistent with Helland (2007) who explained that ICTs provide faith support educational programs that are difficult or impossible to practice in the person's actual physical setting of the church that in most cases are constrained by sickness, age, pandemics, distance, and so on. Various cyberspace platforms are a valuable tool for church congregations to enlarge their abilities so that they too can participate fully in the activities of the church and have their sense of belonging to church membership. In the view of Helland (2007), cyberspace platforms essentially duplicate traditional church functions by bringing religious services to wider audiences and contexts. In a more challenging and indicting manner, Højsgaard (2005) posits that a church congregation that does not strategically engage available cyberspace technologies is likely to be perceived as out of sync with the contemporary world. Today, we have satellite churches, and other affiliated churches that are led by one church minister. Through digital broadcasts, members in satellite churches are able to watch and listen to the sermon through a screen behind the pulpit that stream the pastor's image from the main church during the time of the sermon. As argued by Grinter et al (2011) and Tan (2009), evangelism is one of the major reasons why churches have to adopt cyberspace technologies since social networking has become part of the church's pastoral ministry.

On the church activity of preaching, 3 (2.4%) of participants disagreed, 8 (6.4%) were undecided, and 114 (91.2%) exalted the use of cyberspace technological platforms for preaching or proclamation of the Gospel message, which is the core mandate of the church. Participants in the interviews observed:

> During Covid-19 pandemic when all churches and services were closed, we never lacked to listen to sermons from our pastor. Live sermons were streamlined, we could watch and listen to sermon clips of our pastor through YouTube, smart phones and television at home and even at work whenever we wanted (*KINF 21*).

The finding was confirmed by another participant who informed:

> In our social online church group, we use mobile phones and email to send and receive prayer requests and to mobilize members to join prayer sessions. When some miss to be online for prayer session, we immediately call to find out what is happening. In so doing we are able to know the state of our members and pray for those who need our prayer.We do prayer, devotion, and contemplation on the Web *(KINF 11)*.

While another key participant in the interviews added:

> The advantage of the cyberspace evangelism is that the congregants are given the chance to comment on what is preached or shared in text while the teaching and preaching session is in progress. This is not available at the traditional brick and motor church where the custom is to listen to the sermon and go home without getting the platform to discuss or ask questions about the issue preached or taught *(KINF 7)*.

The view of many participants in the interviews was that they were comfortable with online preaching without having to leave the comfort of their houses, they could follow, listen and hear a sermon and receive other prayers. Cyberspace technological platforms are devices that promote church outreach services, supports proselytizing, preaching, sending and receiving prayers. Church communities situated in remote, secluded, sparse and spatial locations of the globe through online service, are given the possibility to connect with other members around the globe, especially online preachers and worshipers. Furthermore, online services allow Christian believers and those who are curious about the Christian church and message to have the joy to have a personal experience of the aspects of church from the comfort of their own home different from the traditional model

that esteemed the physical presentation of the church. Online technologies make church members accessible any time of day, allowing them to share and gather information at ease.

On worship, the results were as follows: 2 (1.6%) of the respondents disagreed, 11 (8.8%) were undecided, and 112 (89.6%) agreed. Echoing the positive constribution of cyberspace technological platforms, referring to COVID-19 outbreak, a participant in the interviews informed:

> Other means of engaging with worship during the outbreak referred to in the 'other' category included playing DVD and CD church music, video services hosted on church websites, and Bible study text messaging through social media platforms, which reinforced Christian church worship in the church. Worship or fellowships groups were able to continue, despite the outbreak *(KINF 36).*

Another participant in the interviews said:

> The church use of technology in worship has resulted in a shift in the way congregants worship, particularly in worship experience of the congregation. Also in the area of contemporary Christian music that accompany the worship. In worship the faithful are used to hearing the songs on the radio or at concerts of major Christian musicians, the worship band often plays music as closely to its original style as possible *(KINF 20).*

However, another participant in the interviews was of a different opinion:

> With digital technology, we able to integrate multi-media equipment such as projectors, giant LCD screens, powered sound speakers, high capacity cameras, digital sound recording devices to dramatize, enhance sermons, and reach a larger group of worshipers, especially the youth. But the flip-side of these devices is the ability and tendency to manipulate the atmosphere spiritual to excitement or vice versa *(KINF 7).*

Despite the difference in opinion of participants, to cure the challenges, Liesch Wayne (2001) in his study had argued that some churches opt to have one service that uses only traditional music, and another that uses only contemporary Christian music in an attempt to please those from both sides. The study observed that to rectify the traditional versus contemporary controversies in worship, it would be proper to use both - a blended worship where some traditional hymns and forms and some contemporary Christian music and forms of worship are all blended in one worship. This was found to be in line with Lundby (2010) who emphasized that blended form of worship is important for the continuity of online and offline worship, and any understanding of the

online and offline as parallel worlds is never to be allowed. According to Duncan Ligon et al (2009) this approach worked well for many American evangelical churches that have integrated both traditional and modern technological aspects in church worship.

And also the findings were in agreement with Williams (2008) who in his study of a Baptist local church in the USA found that that there is a changing worship trend and experience with the emergence and use of media technology in contemporary worship by evangelical churches in the sense that there more preference on cyberspace modes of worship to traditional forms. Religious application of cyberspace technologies in worship have attracted a lot of attention and participation (Campbell, 2005; Grinter et al., 2011; Hoover, 2006). This attraction to cyberspace technologies use implies that cyberspace is a sacramental virtual scope, a space or forum that shapes both traditional and new religious worship rituals that nourish the lives of the Christian community. In the traditional church worship arrangements, the most popular old technological devices used in worship were audio systems, microphones, soundboard, processor and improved monitor systems. Christians replicate church worship sessions in cyberspace using an online multi-user virtual world to enhance their religious experience of God. The content and the office of the formal structure of worship and prayer meetings are transferred from face-to-face services into the virtual church services, which permits more forthright exchanges between church participants, while enlarging the worship and prayer platforms since it enables access from all over the world that is not possible in conventional church services.

On cyberspace technologies and religious instructions, the outcome was as follows: 7 (5.6%) of the informants disagreed, 21 (16.8%) were undecided, and 97 (77.6%) supported the postulate that cyberspace technological platforms are instrumental in religious instructions. Grounded on these

findings, the study inferred that cyberspace technologies are used to promote religious and church knowledge, grow the faith, develop relationships, which support the pursuit of spiritual wellness and the cultivation of a meaningful lifelong learning in the church. These sentiments were supported by participants in the interview schedules who informed:

> We listen to church and Christian lessons from other pastors as far as the USA. Instructional programs are broadcasted and stored for us to be able to access them when we need. I don't need to be physically present to receive religious instructions. I can google and find any information I need. We watch the church educational proceedings in our homes through video live streaming on the television, zoom, or YouTube *(KINF 19)*.

> I do get Scripture texts, instructional and other religious worship materials on my smartphone. Instructional religious content is projected on the screen whenever we have seminars. We get email, Twitter and WhatsApp posts on specific faith issues *(KINF 18)*.

These findings were in agreement with those of the Barna Research Group (2001) in its Cyber church Report which claimed that about 100 million Americans rely upon the internet to transmit some aspects of their religious learning and experiences. And also with Orlu - Orlu (2015) who explained that church leaders and instructors go to online bible and church schools for instructions and other faith educational materials. What the findings point is the fact that cyberspace technological platforms are a medium through which online evangelism training is conducted. Some pastors have their live video streaming time where members from all over the world can interact with them and inform their faith (Campbell & DeLashmutt, 2014).

As reiterated by many participants in the interviews, church members are enabled to watch and follow church educational and instructional proceedings in their homes through streaming video on the television, zoom, or You Tube. They have Scripture texts and other religious materials on their hand devices posted to them by religious instructors or other informed faithful interested in educating and instructing church members on religious matters; through cyberspace technologies, church members are facilitated to access whichever instructional material they need. Church

membership is able to check out and contrast the content of what is projected to them on the screen; many use these computerized technologies to research and prepare church lessons that will be taught on their stipulated days of church services or on other instructional meetings.

The postulate in the findings that is supported by Gunton (2011) was that cyberspace platforms are optimally used by the church membership to engage church members to educate others in a manner of sharing the faith, discussing faith issues, and coming up with instructional themes for discussions, thereby widening the knowledge scope of the church believers beyond church sermons and also enrich the faith of the community in the technology contexts of the church as a learning community. Thus, online church services permit worshipers and those who are curious about the Christian message to have the opportunity to experience aspects of the and faith church from the comfort of their own homes and chosen environments.

On the item of cyberspace platforms and spiritual development of church members, 17 (13.6%) of participants disagreed, 16 (12.8%) were neutral, while 92 (73.6%) were in support of the claim that the use of cyberspace technological platforms has enabled them spiritually. Reiterating the place of cyberspace platforms in spiritual development of their users, some participants in the interviews postulated:

> I use internet to get informed of other peoples spiritual experiences and also share my personal experience of God with others. When I watch live stream broadcasts of spiritual healing services, I get more nourished and my faith is revitalized *(KINF 14)*.

> Since one can access or join any spiritual event in the web, cyberspace technologies have increased spiritual syncretism, which confuses many of the church faithful. There is not control of spiritual religious content that is contained and transmitted in the Web *(KINF 20)*.

Despite the differences in opinion of the respondents, the findings were in tandem with Larsen (2000) who in his empirical study found that 83% of polled churches and temples online believed

internet usage as aiding congregational life by strengthening the faith and spiritual development of its members through the activities and practices it promotes. And also with Brasher (2001) who claimed that technology invigorates the concepts of sacred time, presence, and spiritual experience; online religion allows believers to witness religious cultural heritage of many faiths, thereby contributing to interfaith church endeavors. Internet and its related technologies is an intermediate spiritual platform that facilitates religious experiences and the sharing of those experiences. Online spiritual experiences are an extension of offline spiritual ones, and thus cyberspace technologies support existing religious practices and also explores new ones.

Validating the argument of objective two on cyberspace evangelical activities, today, cyberspace platforms provide a suitable and limitless space for spiritual engagement of members for enhancement of their spiritual relationships, while re-configuring traditional religious spiritual activities. They are an ideal medium for users to engage in spiritual search for meaning, they are used to communicate spiritual content and initiate spiritual conversations and offer prayer to those in need. Spiritual ideas and practices are being disseminated and introduced online by cyberspace users, which in essence enables spiritual seekers to meet with Christians in the "virtual bar" chat room to find information about Christianity. Web spirituality enjoys unprecedented access on a global scale, thus allowing established religious communities and spiritual movements to reach non-allied potential followers like never before in the traditional church model. Traditional spiritual sites are re-interpreted through the internet and related technologies. Traditionally, physical space determined spiritual content for church members but today the time for sharing the spiritual Word of God is available as one wishes; prayer resources are readily available online than offline.

There are online groups that facilitate interactions for spiritual development of believers, separated by geography, but sharing some sort of spiritual connection or convictions; technology reconnects people with different spiritual beliefs that seek to offer spiritual advice through various cyberspace technologies. Cobb (1998) had earlier suggested that engaging in cyberspace becomes an aid to humanity's spiritual progression, as the Internet serves as an "important way station" on humanity's journey towards a greater spiritual evolution. While Shoba (2020) reaffirmed that the use of digital platforms provides church congregations with spiritual motivation, through daily devotionals, prayers, and sermons; phone calls, twits and instant messaging enabled the sending of encouraging text messages. From the findings, integrating all available technological platforms to support the Word of God in a worship service allows a greater number of members of the congregation to fully understand the message, which is a very important dimension and mission of the church in the attempts to give spiritual nourishment to church members.

Another item for objective two of the study was that of formation of online religious communities facilitated by cyberspace technological platforms. The findings from the questionnaire showed that 19 (15.2%) of participants disagreed, 19 (15.2%) remained neutral, while 87 (69.6%) were in agreement with the postulate. Corroborated with the interview findings, a key informant reported:

> I feel of being in community with no physical touch. We always chat in our online community wall where were feel supported, comforted and encouraged by each other. There is no need to have a physical gathering at all. Through our online church community, each one of us feels to have a deep spiritual relationship with God. Today, God speaks to us through the technological medium. Thinking of the physical church is retroactive and we don't feel to get back there in the life of the traditional church operations that esteemed physical presence *(KINF 1)*.

Similar to the findings on the blended church model explained above in the biographical information of the informants, another key participant asserted:

> Although the virtual reality of cyberspace facilitates the formation of online church communities, it cannot substitute real interpersonal religious community life, it can only complement it by attracting members to a fuller experience of the community dimension of faith, and enrich religious lives of users *(KINF 13)*.

What is expressed in the findings is not something unique. From the Acts of the Apostles, the early church was engaged in forming physical church communities and it operated as a physical and tangible community. Today in the technological society, this has moved a step further in that building a community online requires specific technology designed for that purpose consequently leading to various cyber church communities with different specifications. For instance, some online church groups enjoy the benefits of electronic discussions which enable the members to communicate with those who are familiar with the beliefs and practices of that specific online movement, and who have shared, and perhaps still share, the same ideals, hopes, values, and fears that they themselves hold (Barken, 2005).

The concern is also recapped by Campell (2005) who explained that the use of internet to reinforce or maintain religious identity in the Anglican tradition can also be seen in the online discussion group the Anglican Communion Online. Likewise, the Pew Foundation's *Cyberfaith* report (Larsen, 2001) indicated the increasing phenomena of "Religion Surfers," where those who solicit religion or spiritual information online seek to colligate themselves with others on specific faith undertakings. In other words, online church communities are defined by specific issues of faith, ranging from general issues mysticism or spiritual development to specific focus on beliefs like the gift of prophecy or religious affiliation. Because of this, many churches today have turned to cyberspace technological platforms and social walls to create virtual spaces for their communities in specific online settings. Through various virtual platforms they attract interested people of all ages, thereby diversifying their congregations and creating networks of interested individuals who bring different perspectives and views that enrich the church.

Another aspect that the study could not undermine is that of cyberspace technological platforms and church financial management and contributions. The basis for this theme was that there is inefficiency in the ways church finances are managed sometimes accompanied by acts of corruption, which call for church internal finance control systems. The findings indicated that 9 (7.2%) of the respondents disagreed, 18 (14.4%) were neutral, while 98 (78.4%) affirmed that cyberspace technologies are instruments that enable the management of church finance and also enable the collection of church finances. On this, participants in the interviews explained:

> Before the digital age, traditional donation methods consisted of cash envelopes and offering plates during services. Today, this same function is done through online platforms like Mpesa thereby lessening liquid cash management. Holding liquid money is tempting and it is a possible way that leads to its embezzlement *(KINF 27)*.

> With technology, there is no need to manually count tithe and offerings at the local church on Sabbath. Furthermore, individual local church treasurers should hold less cash since much of the money should go directly to the banks instantaneously through the system *(KINF 15)*.

Even though majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that management of the church is committed to the operations of the accounting and financial management systems in place, some respondents think otherwise. For instance, in the interviews, a participant informed:

> My church does not have church accounting software with features like accounting, employee payroll, donor management and fundraising and membership tracking. Lack of church accounting software makes my church to continue using traditional or semi-traditional forms of finance management, which leads to many financial problems like embezzlement of church finances *(KINF 11)*.

The point was that cyberspace technological platforms not enable the creation of cyber church communities, but also facilitate collection of church finances and their management, thereby reducing financial fraud like embezzlement of funds. These findings were in agreement with Henrickson (2012) who claimed that churches are prime targets to financial fugitives who seek to

embezzle money precisely because their internal controls are disreputable and not tight enough. Church accounting software is an accounting system that facilitate churches to properly keep their financial records balanced. The accounting software, for instance, offers pre-made reports that present church's financial picture to members and stakeholders in an easy-to-understand format since it contains features like track income usually in the form of member and donor contributions, covering regular tithing, giving, and management of fundraising, grants.

Since administration of church finances is a sacred trust, then its digitization helps to eradicate or reduce mismanagement of church financial resources. it is very important for church financial managers to establish strong systems of internal control because they have the responsibility for overall stewardship of church resources. Use of technology helps to increase church financial stewardship. In the traditional church model, finances are stored in material form in the church walls or premises, but today, with advancements in technology money can safely be stored in the Web like Mpesa account, online Banking and withdrawals which allow for tracking for accountability. Bank financial statements can be downloaded from the Web for scrutiny, which brings more accountability and safety of church finances, where churches are able to track incomes and expenses. Shaibu (2013) suggested that frequent reconciliation of bank statements related to church finances when instituted and digitized help to avoid any vacuum created for people to take undue advantage to pilfer church finances. This was not all possible in traditional church banking models.

Cyberspace technological platforms were also found to facilitate modalities for raising funds to meet the demands and projects of the church. It provides easy ways where members and

nonmembers alike are able to make their financial contributions in the form of donations, tithes, offerings and other forms. On this, a participant in the interviews affirmed:

> We have been raising funds for our church through WhatsApp platform, Mpesa and bank transfers. It is an easy way where interested members make a WhatsApp group circulate it and members send their contributions. We do not need to go round physically to knock their doors requesting for donations. In the same group we give the total of all the collections and all those in the group are instantly informed *(KINF 33).*

The argument of this theme is that reliability of church financial information can only be obtained through the implementation of effective financial procedures which are capable of faithfully recording all the operations performed by the church. While poor internal church finance controls can only lead to asset misappropriations, corruption, organizational fraud and fraudulent financial statement.

4.7 Implications of cyberspace technological platforms on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Historically and traditionally, direct word-of-mouth and physical operations of the church were the main relevant ways churches use to expanded their outreach mission. Today, this aspect of relevance is given by modern technologies that have created new options for doing exactly the same and getting church services out to those who wish to participate given their inability to attend a church service in person. The study sought-after the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operation in Nyanchwa Station. The results were as demonstrated in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: *Implications* of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Horizon where many people are	3 (2.4%)	8 (6.4%)	4 (3.2%)	90 (72.0%)	20 (16.0%)	125 (100%)
Storage of Religious Data	5 (4.0%)	15 (12.0%)	26 (20.8%)	50 (40.0%)	29 (23.2%)	125 (100%)
Cyberspace New Area of Mission	5 (4.0%)	6 (4.8%)	8 (6.4%)	90 (72.0%)	16 (12.8%)	125 (100%)
Communities in Cyberspace	6 (4.8%)	20 (16.0%)	29 (23.2%)	55 (44.0%)	15 (12.0%)	125 (100%)
Limitless Area of Mission	7 (5.6%)	14 (11.2%)	9 (7.2%)	70 (56.0%)	25 (20.0%)	125 (100%)

Source: Field Data, (2022)

The findings in table 4.6 above showed the following: On cyberspace as a horizon where many people, especially the young people are present, 11 (8.8%) disagreed, 4 (3.2%) were neutral and a majority 110 (88%) were in agreement with the assertion. The overwhelming majority of those who support the postulated thesis implies that, today, many people, particularly the youth, are found in cyberspace using cyberspace platforms for various purposes: relationships, church groups, education, and so forth. Due to technological influence, many SDA churches to be relevant seek to implement new technological forms and practices that appeal to younger generations. Technology adds value to the church and put it in context of the technological society. This was echoed in the interviews conducted where participants expressed interesting views. For instance, key participants in the interviews opined:

As young people, we are not so much enticed by the boring physical church operations where we do not have a humble space to exchange views and contribute in a manner of raising our concerns without being victimized. In the cyberspace locations we are free to raise and criticize issues that we feel the traditional church model does not take into account *(KINF 2)*.

As young people we engage ourselves most of the time in the net. We spend many hours networking either in search of employment, church spiritual matters or any other activity of our interest. Cyberspace is our new area of interactions *(KINF 12)*.

Both the findings from the questionnaire and those from the interviews were in tandem with those from the research by Heidi Campbell (2006) which indicated that the cyberspace church is most preferred by the youth people and is becoming a substitute for current physical church-based religious practice and manner of expressing religious experience. And also with Bolu (2011) who claimed that more and more young people are turning to internet related platforms to find personal, social and religious information. Campbell (2006) further affirmed that because of this many church institutions are employing much more resources to improving their presence on the web platforms. According to Bolu (2011), young people constitute the majority of church membership, and most of them are found in cyberspace engaged with cyberspace technologies. The same point is reiterated by Wobodo (2020) who explain that young people are most of the time engaged with technological platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, television, satellite systems as well as the various services and applications related to them such as video conferencing and distance learning and the like used to create and realize online church communities and functions. Online technologies are now an integral part of the younger generational culture for operations, which churches need to understand and exploit the potential within these technologies.

It is not only about young people, cyberspace platforms have opened another door for the spread and development of religion, particularly the Christian church. Today, it is practically impossible to carry out religious instructions outside of technology; through technology, the faithful in all life

conditions can receive information relevant to their faith. Through cyberspace technological platforms, religion has crossed the boundaries among family, society, country and belief to all people as it was from the inception of the church intended by Jesus in his commissioning of the disciples. One of the participants in the interviews informed:

> Church members and many others that do not have the possibility of attending face-to-face worship service are able to take part in the service through the website or social media platforms as they watch everything that goes on in the service live or recorded online to be accessed at their convenient time in whichever place they may be *(KINF 32)*.

This webbed relationship among church members makes it easier for the Christian evangelist of today to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. The substantive issue in the findings was that online church engagement is not merely a new type of media outreach but more essentially a modified form of 'church planting', which reconstitutes traditional church approaches and forms that call for physical presences for the evangelical activities of the church. Online church communities represent a quite different approach to being church in the ever growing technological society. As explained by Lewis (2014), due to the evolution of technology and ways of doing mission the Church is seeks to engage with digital culture as a virtual space many spend a considerable amount of time daily. With cyberspace technologies, there are great improvements in ways in which the church does religious instruction of the faithful and of transmitting the gospel message in the present technological society. In a bid to incorporate the use of cyberspace information technologies in Christianity, the study noted that various SDA local church communities search to articulate the word of God that resonate with the needs of the church in the present technological age.

The further set to find out the agility and effectiveness of cyberspace technologies in storing religious information. The findings indicated that 20 (16%) of the respondents disagreed, 26

(20.8%) were neutral and 79 (63.2%) were of the view that cyberspace technologies store and enable church members to access all the information they need. On the same theme, participants in the interviews responded:

> My church has made a step to keep records and data of the church membership and financial reports. This makes it easy to access the information about financial reports of the church. Cases of disappearance of paper records is now sorted out (*KINF 30).*

> Today, whenever the church does her activities, anywhere, data (records) are easily stored electronically in cyberspace. The epoch of file folders, file index, file storage units or lockers are steadily disappearing *KINF 26).*

Religious data is a key component of the church that is used by the membership for their spiritual and human development; it entails the history, activities, projects and financial records of the church. Based on this, safe and sure storage for posterity of such data is key. The study findings were in consistent with Laney (2005) who affirmed that religious websites and other cyberspace platforms offer a wealthy depository of religious issues for exploration, ranging from religious radio and television sites on the Web to sites for denominational leaderships, churches and ministry organizations and personal homepages. Cyberspace technologies offer a paperless operations of the church where church data can be stored and retrieved through the digital medium instead of paper; churches use specific software and databases to process and store membership records. Storing membership data, in an electronic and organized manner brings efficiency in the management of church affairs. A church database enables easier identification of members with special needs such as health & marital, jobs, housing, financial, and educational, relationships issues, and so on. This helps the church to be able to plan and prioritize her mission.

As per cyberspace as a new area of mission for the SDA church, 11 (8.8%) of the informants disagreed, 8 (6.4%) were neutral, and 106 (84.8%) supported the claim. The overwhelming response of those who agreed with the assertion that cyberspace platforms is a new area of mission where the church encounters a number of new members across all generations, especially the

young generation shows the place of technology in the life of the church. For instance, with the advent of cyberspace technological platforms, Christian evangelism has taken a new turn, where people do not need to go physical environments for church operations, everything about the church is at their reach at any given time. This inescapable reality has made even those with luddite stances on technology (old-time worshipers who did not believe in modernism like the television and the internet) to embrace it wholeheartedly by using it to spread the gospel of Christ to the whole world. For instance, a participant in the interview schedules expressed:

> Today, online evangelism is indubitable. When one opens a website, he encounters various advertisements about Christianity and Jesus Christ. Many church preachers preach online and have online streaming of their church services *KINF 29).*

Today, churches endeavor to have satellite branches while other members worship online at the church's websites. Apart from online services and websites, there are also WhatsApp and telephone services used by preachers to animate the membership and win also followers. Christian literature are also available for free or paid for download online. There is a lot of popular religious topics discussed through the online platform. All this reality indicates that cyberspace is an inescapable anew area of mission for the church. The findings were in line with Tan (2009) who posited that social networking has to become part of the pastoral ministry of the church, and therefore, if the church is not to find herself marginalized in the lives of digital world, she must embrace technology. And also with Feijter (2006) who explained that to make better use of cyberspace as a new area of mission, the church needs to be up to date with new modern technologies to enable her properly carry her mission of winning people to Christ in today's technological society that is saturated by electronic media. Therefore, Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, in their attempts to accomplish the missionary mandate of Jesus

Christ to go out to all nations to proclaim the Good News, are challenged to reach out to unchartered cyberspace platforms to share the message of Christ.

As a new sphere of mission, cyberspace technological platforms are not just where people are found, but more importantly is mission itself beckoning those given the mandate to evangelize it. This is fundamentally because all forms of false teachings and prophesies are transmitted through cyberspace technological platforms and therefore making it the mission of the church for evangelization. As it was earlier on noted, cyberspace technologies that are used by the church are no mere instruments nor are they neutral, rather they contain both negative and positive aspects that raise the need for them too to be evangelized. According to Pautler (2010), the Church needs to keep up with what is going on in cyberspace platforms; she needs to be informed of the reality and nature of cyberspace and related technologies, otherwise she will not truly realize her mission in the technological society.

Another concern for the study was the formation Christian communities in cyberspace technological platforms; something that was not possible in the traditional church model of physical operations. The findings were as follows: 26 (20.8%) of the respondents disagreed, 29 (23.2%) were neutral, and 70 (56%) agreed with the formation Christian communities in cyberspace technological platforms. This overwhelming support to formation of cyberspace religious online communities from the questionnaire was also supported by a key participant in the interviews who argued:

> We have an online fellowship community in WhatsApp platform not limited by physical geographical location where we share many spiritual issues, organize church activities and collect funds to help our physical local church *(KINF11)*.

However, another respondent in the interview was of a different opinion:

I cannot regard cyberspace fellowship a full church fellowship in the sense that it does not substitute the physical Church. But I consider it as addendum to physical churches since it is a part of the larger Church that has the mission to develop Christians mentally and spiritually *(KINF 10)*.

The views of the KINF 10 above were in agreement with Larsen (2001) who explained that activities of cyberspace communities supplement offline religious practices and activities. And also with Hoover, et al (2004) who indicated that along with increased internet use for religious goals (64% of American Internet users) religious ideas and practices are being reconstituted and reshaped. In line with (Katz & Rice, 2002; Campbell, 2003, 2004a), this study noted that in the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station in South Kenya Conference there is a tremendous rise in church interests on online religious "practice" rather than physical traditional religious practices. However, this is challenged by Dawson (2005) who argued that the creation of online church communities erodes the embodied social and natural actions of the church, such that cyber-religion may turn out little more than an individual intellectual endeavor. Dawson (2005), further, argues that inter-community activities are being reduced to the provision of email feedback, the electronic equivalent of letters to the editor, or entering chat rooms where the level of discussion is often less than religiously inspiring.

The indubitable concern noted by the study based on the findings was that aspects of traditional church operations are likely to disappear with time; physical mobility and the significance of the geographical church matrices that determined traditional church model are steadily reducing. This means that traditional ecclesiology is being reconstituted by cyberspace platforms. As affirmed by Jones (2011), the aspect which differentiates emerging churches from others is ecclesiology, and today the emerging cyberspace church communities represent a new form of congregationalism, which is a 'relational ecclesiology'. Jones (2011), further states that the advent of technological

devices usage, the 'new media' and the significant generational differences have enabled substantially new forms of intra-church and inter-church relationality.

On the theme that cyberspace church activities are not limited by time as the case with the traditional physical church, the findings were as 21 (16.8%) of respondents disagreeing, 9 (7.2%) being neutral and 95 (76%) in agreement with the postulate. While key participants in the interviews added:

> I consider myself to have grown in the knowledge of God through boundless cyberspace ministry and also able to pastor to others outside of their former physical situation that restricted them in their four walls *(KINF 28)*.

> Church participants who are not able to attend the regular Sabbath day or regular Bible study programs on the physical weekdays are able to get the same services online with the cyberspace technologies and cyberspace church which are accessible without the restrictions of time and place *(KINF 16)*.

The concept of the limitless nature of cyberspace church activities is embedded within the transcendental nature of the technological platforms used; they transcend space and time. The findings were congruent with Davis and Ichuloi (2022) who asserted that in today's technological society, the reality of the Church in relation to cyberspace has greatly changed, particularly the concept of time and place; they postulated that with the use of cyberspace technologies, the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, thrives to herald a phase of the Christian religion to evangelize and propagate the message of Christ beyond the physical walls of the church. This was earlier on posited by Jewell (2005) who said that cyberspace technologies allow for greater exposure of the church and in turn the gospel message beyond established physical spaces and time making the gospel message have a greater chance of being heard and influencing the lives of many yearning for it as commissioned by Jesus Christ. In line with this, Eddie Gibbs (2009) asserted that 'church' must be interpreted as referring to a people rather than to a place, and a congregation represents not just a physical weekly gathering that people are a part of, but a

community in which each person in whichever environment actively belongs, receive support, and is encouraged to make this own distinctive contribution.

Therefore, it is limiting to consider church as a physical entity. This was something unimaginable in the traditional church model, where church leaders used the pulpit to relate with, manage church operations, and even lead their congregations. But today, due to the unprecedented impact of cyberspace technologies used by the church there are radical changes and shifts in the above traditional strategy. Thus, the adoption of cyberspace technologies in the areas of church operations has taken the Church into an age of efficiency that had never been seen before in the traditional church model. By placing church and religious operations and also members' daily religious experiences in the context of a broader system of technological order, technology makes the church and religious status quo different from the usual face-to-face model of operations and functionings.

4.8 Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Finally, the study sought to examine the challenges faced by the SDA church in her use of cyberspace technological platforms. This was done by asking participants to show their level of agreement and disagreement on thematic issues raised in the questionnaire and corroborated with those from the interviews. Based on the response of the participants the results were as presented in the table below.

Table 4.6: Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

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

The results in table 4.6 above demonstrated that cyberspace technologies used by the church despite being good, also embed negative aspects that cannot be undermined. It would be erroneous to think that cyberspace technologies are absolutely good.

On the theme of mechanization of religious experience, 11 (9%) participants disagreed, 25 (20%) remained neutral, while 89 (71%) were in full agreement with this assertion. The findings are echoed by those from the interviews where participants said:

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

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

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

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

Nonetheless, it was important to note that evidence in the New Testament seems to point to the fact that physical meeting and presence of Christians is normative in contrast to mechanic cyber one. Of course, one can argue that online church was non-existent at the time. The findings are explained by Van Niekerk, brimadevi (2017) explained that religion is a matter of faith and spirituality places greater emphasis on direct experiences. And Barna Research Group (2001) in its *Cyberchurch Report which affirmed* that about 100 million Americans rely upon the internet to transmit some aspects of their religious experience. While the study by Zhao (2019) inform that

electronic communication is an era of multiplicity and secularization of religious beliefs and experiences.

On the same sentiment, an earlier study of prayer meetings by Schroeder & Noel & Lee (1998) in a multi-user virtual reality environment found that prayer meetings in the cyberspace world do not provide the same type of religious experience as a conventional church service, but it certainly reproduces some of the essential features of the latter in novel way. This implied that despite the benefits of online operations, there should be importance attached to the physical space church, where rituals can actually be carried out. Rituals are important aspects of worship that cannot be replaced by cyberspace technologies in performing worship rituals; they will never replace ritual performance in a physical sacred space (O'Leary, 2005). Rituals are filled by face-to-face Church operations for the deepening of religious experience among the faithful; physical nature of religious experience is still relevant and should not be undermined. There is a lot of uncontrolled mediation of religious experience in cyberspace through its related technologies to the height that it has become a mechanical church exercise (Dawson, 2005). The findings are further in agreement with Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) who informed that the power of cyberspace technologies as instruments for the realization of the church's mission reconstitutes in a manner of manipulating real religious and spiritual experience of the faithful, making them mere excitements or vice versa.

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

> With the use of cyberspace technologies to mediate the operations and mission of the church, it is impossible to celebrate some sacraments like marriage and Baptism and other

rituals that require a physical presence of the celebrating church community. For instance, as a Christian community we cannot consider a virtual marriage to be authentic marriage since it lacks basic rituals like physical contacts. Marriage requires at least the physical presence of the couples, coming together physically on the date of their marriage to exchange their marriage contract promises *(KINF 4)*

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

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

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

What is important is not physical presence but the intention of those celebrating the sacrament. All sacraments are symbolic and therefore to argue for the physical presence of the celebrating community is not necessary. Emphasizing on physical contacts is restricting the people's concept of God and religious experience *(KINF 27)*.

What is pointed in the data was that it is doable to celebrate some of the sacraments through cyberspace platforms, but this may be unbiblical and may lead to loss of religious meaning envisaged by the Holy Scriptures and the church. For instance, the celebration of baptism demands physical presence of both parties in order to perform the rituals entailed. Even though there are many Biblical interpretations and understandings on how to carry out baptism, most religious faiths and movements require a full body water immersion accompanied by public confession from the person who is being baptized, and the person who is baptizing has to do it following a certain formulae and ritual that cannot easily be carried out cybernetically. O'Leary (2005) argued that the state of cyber or virtual religion that employ various technologies for its activities will have to become considerably apt to authentically present the visual, aural, and symbolic dimensions of religion to create a serious experience of God in the virtual space.

On the theme of poor internet power connectivity and disruptions of church activities, 19 (15.2%) of the respondents disagreed, 14 (11.2%) remained neutral, while the majority 92 (73.6%) were of the opinion that poor internet connectivity is a major challenge to church communities that fully embrace technology. The findings were replicated in the interviews whereby key informants asserted:

> Most often when there is poor internet or power connectivity, the video stopped and the screens went dark and we could not continue with worship. But when the lights came back, we are forced to resume, but much time was wasted *(KINF 3)*.

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

These findings show the reality of electricity supply in the area to the point that dismissing it will imply turning a blind eye to it. To pretend to embrace cyberspace platforms demands a consistent energy and power supply for its realization. The findings were supported by Egere (2012) who explained that in some African and Middle Eastern countries the usage and installation of internet services is very poor, particularly where internet signals could disappear for days and weeks; in the case of its presence, internet connectivity is very slow. While Craigo-Snell & Johnson (2020) contends that the 3G and smart phone that support internet communication is not easily available for every one everywhere. These include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram amongst others. While this may be relatively functional in urban regions, the pastors and church members who are in rural areas face challenges when it comes to using such technologies for lack of network and other logistics which leads them sometimes to remain offline.

Underlining these sentiments, Swain and Badenhorst (2020) concurred with the study findings arguing that technology allows for potential communication through online applications which

enable the ministry to continue, however, many rural areas lack online connectivity and both pastors and congregants cannot afford data and airtime which are very costly, especially when many of them are not at work due to the lockdown or are unemployed. Internet speed is very low which does not support video chat and voice transmission that breaks between lines that requires a great tolerance from those of us who live in countries where the technology is advanced. The interruption of internet services could militate against a potentially vibrant Online Church.

Another incontestable item was that of high cost of installing a full-fledged ICTs infrastructure in the church. The results from the questionnaire indicated that 10 (8%) disagreed, 18 (14.4%) were neutral, while 97 (77.6%) agreed. While results from the interviews echoed the same sentiment where a participant explained:

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

The challenge of the cost of installing a full-fledged Church ICT infrastructure for effective development of internet technologies (such as VSAT, TV station or TV production, computers, central storage or repository, database server, SMS server, web portal, email server, Internet bandwidth, local area network (within church buildings), wireless network infrastructure, optical fiber cabling, ICT resource center, CD/DVD production studio) is something that SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station is confronted with. But the truth of the matter is that this is a massive project that many local churches, particularly those in rural setups cannot afford. The findings are in tandem with those of the study by Bolu (Bolu, 2012) which reported that because of financial

constraints very few churches in Nigeria manage to have standing ICT infrastructure and committees while many others are not able. And also with Thumma and Travis (2007) who asserted that larger churches are utilizing online technologies to a large extent, which is not the case for the smaller and poor churches; these poor churches will not be able to see the full light of the benefits of cyberspace technological platforms. Financial constraints make it difficult for the SDA church to effect cyberspace programs for members to enhance their use of the Internet as outreach medium to many who need to hear and receive services from the Church.

On cyberspace technological platforms and church attendance, there was a thematic claim and contestation that cyberspace technologies used by the church have led to a decline in church attendance. The response findings to this claim showed that 13 (10.4%) of respondents disagreed with the claim, 26 (20.8%) remained neutral, while 86 (68.8%) were in full agreement. These findings resonated well with those from the interview schedules where a key informant indicated:

> What is the need to attend a physical church when I can comfortably have all the services in my computer or smart-phone. Most young people have declined to physically participate in the physical church because they find all that they need in the online cyberspace church mediated by cyberspace technologies *(KINF 23)*.
>
> The apparent media-mania experienced among the young people in the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station creates a false sense of being comfortable with the "cyber-church" realized through cyberspace technologies than the real face-to-face ecclesial assembly of God's faithful *(KINF 31)*.

The findings reverberated with those in the study by Fitzgerald (2014) which informed that the use of cyberspace technologies in the church leads to a decline in Church attendance. Fitzgerald (2014) explained that in countries like the United States of America fewer Christians go to face-to-face Church because the rest are busy logging into internet. There is the tendency for some Christian faithful, especially the young people not to go to Church under the pretext that they can access the church service or prayers on mobile internet applications and therefore no need to physically be

present in the church to undertake its activities. This challenge makes some members of the church to take the luddite stance on cyberspace technologies in relation to church operations and evangelical mission.

Another item raised in the study was that of individualism and limited human interactions in technologically determined cyberspace based church. The questionnaire findings indicated that 10 (8%) of participants disagreed, 20 (16%) were neutral, while 95 (76%) were in support of the assertion. These findings were reverberated by those from the interviews which some of the participants indicated:

> I fear for the future of my local church if church members get stack behind a computer screen all time and avoiding the personal interaction and physical contact to fellow believers; this loses the meaning and the purpose of being a local church *(KINF19)*.

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

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

The findings were supported by the study of Nilles (2012) which asserted that attempts to advocate and underline for a sacred space on the internet and its related technologies tends to threaten basic human communication and interaction among members. As argued earlier and in whatever case, the reality is that ongoing and community interaction in cyberspace is missing, and the individual tends to replace the church community. This was earlier one raised by Nilles (2012) who argued that the use of cyberspace technologies creates a situation of Church gadgets without human interactions. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo, Gmail, WhatsApp,

Snapchat just to mention a few are privately-oriented. And also by Wellman (2001) who explains that 'rather than fitting into the same group as those around them', 'each congregant has his/her own "personal church community', supplying 'the essentials of community separately from other church congregants that use the technology: support, sociability, information, social identities, and a sense of online community belonging'. But the great implication of this is that the sense of real face-to-face communication disappears endangered. Aside from the false sense of community it creates through information sharing and communication with people we may not know or have seen, it appears that creating a "church" on cyberspace would further entrench individualism. While Onyulo (2020), referring to poor church attendance during covid-19 pandemic asserted that reduction in church attendance also affects the Church's financial status where reduction in church offerings and tithes were experienced thereby adversely affecting various outreach programs of the church. On individualism, a participant in the interviews retorted:

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

Herman and Sloop (1999) had argued that while cyberspace technologies may increase the creation and spread of new religious communities by overcoming some of the constraints imposed by space and time, in the process they may be working against the development of bonds of true religious group identities, also of individuals with human flesh and experience that are witnessed in traditional forms of being church. Worshiping, reading and discussions on thematic church and religious issues, and asking questions are critical to individual spiritual development. But having such interactions over text, email, or social media is not as effective or valuable as physical interactions. Even though cyberspace technologies allow one to post a request, for

intercessory prayer for example, and to receive some limited acknowledgement of the request or offers of spiritual counselling, human communication whether interpersonal and group is crucial in defining the Church and her operations (Nilles, 2012). This is an aspect that gives the traditional church model its authenticity in defining the faith of the members that cannot be completely swept by the technological development of the church operations.

The study findings were also supported by Felicia Wu Song (2009) who argued that the cyberspace technologies, especially the internet related ones do not promote the sense of community life; it is not a suitable place for community building. In cyberspace religious communities it is not easy to know who the real participants are and what is their real identity because a person can claim who he is online which may be a fake identity without any proof for what he claims in the real world of religious communities. This is because Christianity is a life style and the person's real identity matters in order to accept him as a Church member. Felicia Wu Song (2009) contends that since popular websites frequently rely on the support of advertising revenue, they influence a consumerist mentality that favor the individual and undermines affiliation with wide social institutions, particularly the community dimension of faith.

Another challenge that the study could not underrate was that of knowledge in cyberspace technological platforms. On this, the study sought to find out whether there was lack of or limited knowledge of ICTs among church membership. The questionnaire results showed that 16 (12.8%) participants disagreed with the statement, 22 (17.6%) remained neutral, while 87 (69.6%) were in full agreement with the statement. From the interviews, some respondents informed:

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

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

The findings raised the concern that not many church members are informed of the structured cyberspace church platforms like church websites and other technologies, which meant that they lacked training to enable them obtain basic skills on the use of social media platforms for church activities. Training on the use of an electronic platform is a crucial factor to determine a church congregant's perception and use of cyberspace technologies (Mateus, 2017; Mckinney, 2014; Lacy, 2021). The findings are in line with Jewell (2005) who raised the concern that Christian institutions are not doing enough to equip their audience, especially those going into the ministry in the digitalized world. And also with the study by Mary Hess (2005), which recommended that theological institutions should recognize that today's audiences differ from the ones in which the educators may have been raised.

The study further sought to establish and assess community tensions among church believers created by the use of cyberspace technologies. The findings indicated that 17 (13.6%) of the respondents disagreed, 15 (12%) were undecided, while 93 (74.4%) affirmed the existence of such tensions, especially between users of cyberspace technologies and non-users. In the interviews, one participant informed:

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

From the findings, worship the study noted that tensions arise as a result of those who believe only in traditional model of church asserting that only traditional hymns should be used in worship.

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Some of these are old members and those who hold a luddite stance on technology use in church; those who grew up singing from hymnals and therefore not open to the contemporary style of church worship music. The findings are in agreement with Hubert Spence (2002) who sustains that some older generations of church members prefer traditional church music sang from hymnals, while others are more adamant to their use opposing any change in church music. And also by Woods, et al (2007) who assert that sometimes those who are against contemporary church music have valid concerns claiming that the use of contemporary praise choruses tends to propagate shallow theological language that does not entail the same rich doctrinal depth of traditional hymns.

Finally, the study sought to find out the misuse of cyberspace technologies. The findings indicated that 15 (12%) disagreed, 15 (12%) were neutral, and 95 (76%) affirmed the misuse of cyberspace technologies in the operations of the SDA church. When asked in the interviews which technologies are mostly misused and how, there were mixed reactions from the respondents as follows:

> WhatsApp is the most misused platform, followed by Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These platforms despite being used for religious purposes, they also transmit harmful content devoted to defaming and attacking religious groups, particularly the SDA church *(KINF 13)*.
>
> Even among church members, especially the youth, it is customary to exchange twits. However, these messages do not reflect Christian content due to large scale distribution and transfer of personal data on the network, which had led to hacking and disclosure of personal information to the public, thereby violating the privacy of individuals or a group *(KINF 19)*.
>
> The sterling challenge is not that of scarcity of the information in the church rather too much of it. It is practically hard to find where to start and how to reduce the huge amount of church information available on the internet and its related technologies. It is difficult to determine how reliability of the vast available church information. It is equally difficult to determine the source and the authenticity of the avalanche of available church information *(KINF 14)*.

> In cyberspace online church communities, participants in prophesy, prayer and worship join and leave the online room at will. There are many false prophets and false teachers, people who swindle and take advantage of innocent church believers who authentically seek help for their daily problems. There is no effective supervision of the online church content and also no supervision given those who access the available church content *(KINF 21).*

The salient issue from the findings was that while the internet and related technologies outstandingly uphold the evolution of religion, in them there are several kinds of false and unpleasant occurrences under the pretext of religion, such as terrorism, religious extremism, network fraud, cults, and so on. On the misuse of cyberspace and its technologies, Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) warned that the capability of cyberspace technologies used in church can reconstitute in a manner of manipulating real religious information and spiritual experience since the technological platforms used make that information and spiritual experiences mere excitements or vice versa. The same is reiterated by Himma (2007b), who explained that cyberspace's secular nature, content and technologies tend to obscure those using them in a manner of not able to fully understand religious, moral values because they are constantly challenged by the specific technologies they employ. Today, it is becoming impossible to distinguish strange doctrinal interpretations, personal devotional practices, and ideological advocacy carrying a church label from the authentic positions of the church. However, key participants in the interviews noted:

> The SDA church in Nyanchwa Station seems to be doing little to surpass the online pagan trends in the use of cyberspace technologies for the good of the church and her membership *(KINF 18).*
>
> It is important that religious and church groups consciously and calculatively design online worship spaces that endeavor to re-create in authentic ways the traditional religious worship experiences in a digital environment and contexts. SDA church groups and individual members should engage themselves to counteract and evangelize cyberspace content, technologies and operations *(KINF 12).*

The withdrawal of the church presence implies endorsing unreligious content in cyberspace technological platforms. On this, Magnani (2007) postulated that the church, which traditionally exercised its moral power, should continue to do it even in cyberspace technologies. Magnani

(2007) further claimed that same technological knowledge has become our moral duty in our technologically determined world. For that matter, the SDA church membership individually and collectively should be creatively present in cyberspace platforms to witness the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in a technologically inundated environment. There is need to Christianize, spiritualize or even evangelize technology itself.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presented a summary of the study findings, conclusions, recommendations and finally suggestions for further research on the assessment of cyberspace and traditional church models of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference. This was done in line with the four study objectives: to assess church cyberspace evangelical activities of the SDA church in cyberspace church; to evaluate the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operations; and to examine the challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya. While suggestions for further research were grounded on the study gaps from areas that were not directly the concern of the study objectives but relevant for future research in the area of church and the use of cyberspace platforms that determine the various models of the church.

5.2 Summary of the Study Findings

The study looked at the assessment of cyberspace and traditional church models in selected Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya. It found that there is an unavoidable influence of cyberspace technological platforms on the reality of the church in terms of its operations; cyberspace technological platforms have reconstituted and enhanced the identity and functionings of the SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station. This is in addition to the already existing traditional church model that is embroidered within the physical operations. This assertive finding was justified by the 139 (81%) of the questionnaire respondents

who opted for the blended church model, 15% for the cyber church model, and 3% who represented the traditional church model. However, the study also stressed the importance of maintaining the traditional church model as there are aspects that define the church's operations (marriage, visit to the sick, and so forth) that cannot be realized or transmitted cybernetically. This summary is in line with Okyere (2018) who asserted that it is not possible to participate in the holy communion/last supper, administer baptism, marriage and visit to the sick online.

5.2.1 Cyberspace technologies used in conducting church activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference

Notwithstanding the luddite stances on technology and fears of secularization deemed to be embedded in cyberspace technologies, the findings of the study pointed out a broad-based acceptance and application of various cyberspace technological platforms by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station as was evidenced by the thematic analysis on the use of cyberspace technologies with more Christians 96 (56%) of participants consenting that they turn to cyberspace technologies to find any needed church information.

On specific technologies like official church Websites, live streaming of church activities through zoom or webinar, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Emails, television, and radio, the study found that 53 (42%) of the respondents were in disagreement, and 56 (45%) were in support of the thesis on the use of the stipulated technological platforms. However, the point to note in these findings is that the difference margin was so minimal, thus raising a concern for the study that will form the theme for another study. This summary finds support from Christian Bolu (2012) who contests that contemporary church communications for growth is taking phenomenally great strides all over the world with church growth programs, adoption of electronic mails, telephone

and virtual learning environment for communication as well as the deployment of church ICT infrastructure for church administration and human resource management. Internet related technological platforms give the church opportunities to widen its scope and contextualize its operations, thereby enlarging its reach beyond the traditional walls of the church building. Thus, traditional church way of word-of-mouth is no longer the only esteemed way church information is communicated and dispersed.

Among the technological platforms employed by the church, radio was found to be the most preferred, with 102 (82%) of the respondents endorsing its usage by the SDA church in her evangelical work. The television was found to be the second most preferred cyberspace platform for church activities, with 90 (72%) participants in its full support. However, the study noted that technologies used by the SDA church are of the most basic nature; they were simple and not sophisticated technologies, while not many of cyberspace technologies were not being used. This was probably because they resonate well with the humble and semi-rural environment of most churches in Nyanchwa Station.

5.2.2 SDA church cyberspace evangelical activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

The study findings showed that church activities realized through cyberspace technological platforms included: pastoral care of the faith, preaching, worship, religious instructions, spiritual development, formation of online church communities, finally, financial management and church contributions. However, among the most ranked activities realized through cyberspace technological platforms were preaching and prayer services, which counted with 114 (91.2%) of the respondents in its support. The second most realized activity in cyberspace platforms was worship, with 112 (89.6%) of the informants endorsing it. This implied that there is a changing trend in worship and experience with the emergence and use of cyberspace technologies in

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contemporary worship by the SDA churches. Religious application of cyberspace technologies in worship tend to attract a lot of attention and participation among the church faithful. The third church activity that enjoys the use of cyberspace technologies was the area of church financial management and contributions, with 98 (78%) support base. Technology has brought efficiency in the ways church finances are managed, thereby reducing acts of corruption and mismanagement of finance. However, the study noted that most SDA churches do not have church accounting software with features like accounting, employee payroll, donor management and fundraising and membership tracking. Lack of this accounting software makes those churches to continue using traditional or semi-traditional forms of financial management, which leads to many financial problems like embezzlement of church finances. Therefore, even though there are those unwilling to fully embrace technology in church, cyberspace technologies provide a suitable space for religious and spiritual engagement of members, while re-configuring traditional religious spiritual activities.

5.2.3 Implications of cyberspace technological platforms on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Objective two was about the implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station. The study findings revealed that the majority 114 (91.2%) were in agreement with the assertion that for several reasons, cyberspace is where many people are found and reached through various cyberspace technologies. The implication of this is that the church has to move to cyberspace platforms for various purposes of its mission: relationships, church groups, education, and so forth; cyberspace platforms have opened another door for the spread and development of religion, particularly of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station.

Another area that enjoyed a majority support in the study is that the church has moved to cyberspace as a new area of mission for the SDA church, with 106 (84.8%) supporting the claim. The SDA church has taken a new turn from the traditional approach defined by physical operations to modern technological model determined by virtual operations.

5.2.4 Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Finally, the study looked at various challenges face by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station. The high cost of installing a full-fledged ICTs infrastructure in the church with 97 (77.6%) of participants endorsing it. Because of this, poor churches in the region are not able to see the full light of the benefits of cyberspace technological platforms. The second highly ranked challenge was that of decline in church attendance, with 86 (68.8%) in full agreement. The study noted that there is a tendency for some church members, especially the young too lazy about by not going to church under the pretext that they can access the church Service or prayers on mobile internet applications or platforms. The third highly ranked challenge was that of individualism and limited human interactions in technologically determined cyberspace based church, with 95 (76%) participants in support of the assertion. Finally, the fourth highly ranked challenge was that of the misuse of cyberspace technologies, with 95 (76%) of the informants affirming it. Today, due to avalanche of fake information transmitted in almost all social networks and on the websites, it is becoming impossible to distinguish strange doctrinal interpretations, personal devotional practices, and ideological advocacy carrying a church label from the authentic positions of the church. In them, there are all sorts of false and unpleasant occurrences under the pretext of religion, such as terrorism, religious extremism, network fraud, cults, and so on. Olanrewaju and Adebola (2019) cautioned that the capability of cyberspace

technologies used in church has the ability to reconstitute in a manner of manipulating real religious information and spiritual experience since the technological platforms used make that information and spiritual experiences mere excitements or vice versa. The same was reiterated by Himma (2007b), who explained that cyberspace's secular nature, content and technologies tend to obscure those using them in a manner of not able to fully understand religious, moral values because they are constantly challenged by the specific technologies they employ.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study Findings

The study was about the assessment of cyberspace technologies and traditional church model with special reference to selected Seventh Day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya. Based on the findings, the study made that following conclusions:

On the postulate of church model (traditional church, blended, or cyberspace church) preference, majority of 139 (81%) of the respondents were in favor of the blended church model. The study concluded that the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station is open to embrace technology, but careful not to lose the physical aspects of the church operations since some of its aspects (marriage, visit to the sick, and so forth) cannot be realized cybernetically. Another important conclusion is that opting for the blended church model is an indicator that modern technological platforms enhance the traditional model of the church in its operations and functions. Therefore, the physical church going may not be the usual practice for future generations in the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station as going to a building which we call a church my not be the most determining factor of being church.

5.3.1 Cyberspace technologies used in conducting church activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference

The study concluded that the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station endeavors to employ cyberspace technologies in her evangelical mission. This conclusion is grounded upon the fact that the church employs Websites, live streaming of its activities through zoom or webinar, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Emails, television, and radio. These technologies have increased awareness of what it means to be church, beyond the co-ordinates of the physical space manifested in brick and mortar church. However, among these technologies the most preferred was the radio, with 102 (81.6%) of the respondents endorsing its usage in the evangelical work of the SDA church in Nyancwha Station. The radio is available to many congregants in all walks of life, facilitating large church groups and congregants to enjoy church services and programs.

Therefore, there is a considerable intent of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station to embrace technologies since they make it easy for the faithful to access all the activities of the church as compared to traditional church model that use physical records that are vulnerable to get lost and incur damage. However, the study noted that technologies used by the SDA church are of the most basic nature; the church has not opened her space to more modern cyberspace technologies.

5.2.2 SDA church cyberspace evangelical activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

The use of cyberspace technological platforms is relevant to many to the church in Nyanchwa Station since most of its activities and programs are realized through them; they play a significant

role in disseminating the Gospel and empower the activities of the church in a proficient manner. Church activities realized through cyberspace technologies included: pastoral care of the faith, preaching, worship, religious instructions, spiritual development, formation of online church communities, finally, financial management and church contributions. Cyberspace technologies are a tool that promotes church outreach services, supports proselytizing, preaching, sending and receiving prayers. The study concluded that the among the activities most realized by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station through cyberspace technological platforms were preaching and prayer services, with 114 (91.2%) of the respondents in its support. Many participants were comfortable with online preaching without having to leave the comfort of their houses since they could follow, listen and hear a sermon and receive other prayers. The second most realized activity in cyberspace platforms was worship, with 112 (89.6%) of the informants endorsing it. The conclusion that can be inferred from this is that there is a changing trend in worship and experience with the emergence and use of cyberspace technologies in contemporary worship by the SDA churches. Religious application of cyberspace technologies in worship attract a lot of attention and participation among the church faithful. The third church activity that enjoys the use of cyberspace technologies was church financial management and contributions, with 98 (78.4%) support base. Technology has brought efficiency in the ways church finances are managed thereby reducing acts of corruption and mismanagement of finance in the SDA church. But the study noted that there are no modernized financial accounts systems in most SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station.

Thus, the general conclusion for objective two and as supported by the above findings was that even though there are those unwilling to fully embrace technology in church, any attempt to go back to the traditional church model where human physical activities are the measure of the church operations will be like rendering the church irrelevant in terms of operational space and means in the modern technological society.

5.3.3 Implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

For objective three, the study concluded that cyberspace technologies have multiple implications on the church operations, improving church ministry effectiveness in the areas of education, pastoral care, fellowship, worship and mission. Cyberspace technology platforms have become an alternative avenue for pastoral ministry at all levels of church operations. The conclusion is founded on the basis that the majority of the informants, 114 (91.2%) were in agreement with the assertion that cyberspace is where many are found and reached through cyberspace technologies. This implied that for the SDA churches to remain relevant in the 21st technologically determined society they must seek to implement new technological forms and practices that appeal to younger generations. Cyberspace platforms have opened another door for the spread and development of religion and the church, particularly the Christian church; they add tremendous value to the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, putting her in appealing context of the technological society. Cyberspace technologies reconstitute traditional church approaches and forms that call for physical presences for the evangelical activities of the church. Before the coming of cyberspace technologies, church ministry and life was managed with a scheme of physical operations. For instance, church leaders used the pulpit to relate with, manage church operations, and even lead their congregations. The adoption of cyberspace technologies in the areas of church operations has taken the Church into an age of efficiency that had never been seen before in the traditional church model.

Another conclusion is that cyberspace and its related technologies are a new area of mission for the SDA church, with 106 (84.8%) supporting the claim. The advent of cyberspace technologies, has reconstituted Christian evangelism, in a manner of making a new turn from the traditional approach that is defined by physical operations to modern technological model determined by virtual operations. Equally, those who had luddite stances on technology, old-time worshipers who do not believe in modernism like the television and the internet, have today embraced technology wholeheartedly and use it to spread the gospel of Christ to the whole world. As a new sphere of mission, cyberspace technologies are calling on those given the mandate to evangelize cyberspace itself since all manner of false teachings and prophesies are transmitted through it. The SDA church in Nyanchwa Station needs to be present in cyberspace and keep up with what is going on in its related platforms; she needs to be informed of the reality and nature of cyberspace and related technologies, otherwise she will not truly realize her mission in the technological society.

Thus, the study revealed a broad-based acceptance of cyberspace technologies by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station as an indispensable tool for the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to her by Jesus Christ. The SDA church in Nyanchwa Station cannot choose to ignore cyberspace and its related technologies if she has to be relevant to today's sophisticated technological society; the technological revitalization of her mission is indispensable.

5.3.4 Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

Objective four of the study looked at various challenges face by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station in its endeavor to use cyberspace technological platforms, which included: Mechanization of religious experience; reduction of symbolic and ritual dimensions of the church; poor internet

connectivity (disruption of church activities); high cost of installation of full-fledged information communications infrastructure; decline in church attendance; individualism and limited human interactions; lack and limited knowledge of ICTs; worship wars among believers; and Misuse of cyberspace and its related technologies.

However, the study concluded that among the challenges that received high labelling was high cost of installing a full-fledged ICTs infrastructure to enable the church carryout its functionings with 97 (77.6%) of participants endorsing it. The informants posited that it is costly to install ICT infrastructure such as VSAT, TV station or TV production, computers, central storage or repository, database server, SMS server, web portal, email server, Internet bandwidth, local area network, wireless network infrastructure, optical fiber cabling, ICT resource center, CD/DVD production studio. This is a challenge that the SDA churches in Nyanchwa Station is confronted with given the fact that many of the local churches, particularly in rural setups cannot afford. The poor SDA local churches are not able to see the full light of the benefits of such cyberspace technologies because of the financial constraints makes that make them difficult to effect cyberspace programs for members to enhance their use of the Internet as outreach medium to many who need to hear and receive services from the Church. Furthermore, poor SDA congregants cannot afford data and airtime which are very costly, especially for those who are unemployed.

The study also concluded that decline in church attendance as the second highly ranked challenge with 96 (76.8%) in its full support. There is the tendency for some church members, especially the young people to become lazy of not going to church under the pretext that they can access church services or prayers on mobile internet applications.

In the findings, the study concluded that individualism and limited human interactions in technologically determined cyberspace based church was the third highly ranked challenge with

95 (76%) participants in its support. Rather than collectively fitting into the same group, each congregant in various online religious communities has his/her own "personal church community". According to the study, unlike the traditional church model of physical interactions, cyberspace technological platforms have made church congregants individualistic and introverted where they tend to choose online communication rather than having real time conversations. This adversely affects the sense of real face-to-face communication disappears endangered.

Finally, the study concluded that misuse of cyberspace technologies was the fourth highly ranked challenge with 95 (76%) of the informants affirming it. The study argued that as a result of avalanche of fake information transmitted in almost all social networks and on the websites, it is becoming impossible to distinguish strange doctrinal interpretations, personal devotional practices, and ideological advocacy carrying a church label from the authentic positions of the church. In them, there are all sorts of false and unpleasant occurrences under the pretext of religion and church, such as religious extremism, network church fraud, cults, and so on. Because of their complex natures, the church lacks control over such flow of fake information and fraud.

5.4 Recommendations

Guided by the study objectives, a number of recommendations to the SDA church and church researchers were made. On the general objective or purpose, the study recommended for a blended type of church, which takes into the account both realities: traditional meaning of the church and the modern technologically driven church. This includes oldest-old and other interest groups of church members who do not use cyberspace technologies so that they do not run the risk of being excluded from the church. And also account for the aspects of the traditional church model that cannot be substituted by pure cyberspace technological platforms. The study also recommended

for a shift in methodology in carrying out church mission. In the 21st century technological society, it will be inappropriate to purely employ traditional method of doing mission in addressing church challenges. The SDA church to open up in her missionary approach and methods to embrace cyberspace missionary space and its related technologies.

5.4.1 Cyberspace technologies used in conducting church activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

For objective one on cyberspace technologies used, the study recommended the SDA church to invest more in cyberspace technology infrastructure to improve the general finding of the study. The existing technological infrastructure to be upgraded and open more space for technologies that are not of conventional in nature. Some of such modern cyberspace infrastructure that the study found necessary include day light screens, e-boards, virtual school, and so forth. Further, the study recommended the SDA church to employ cyberspace technology experts that would provide relevant skill and refresher courses to church members. This recommendation was also informed by the reasonably big number of participants who were neutral in various thematic issues addressed by the study, which seem to indicate lack of information on cyberspace technologies and church operations.

5.4.2 SDA church cyberspace evangelical activities in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

For objective two on the SDA church cyberspace evangelical activities, the study recommended the SDA church to research more on activities that are problematic in terms of technological

applications. That is, activities that pose a challenge to cybernetic operations (activities that appear impossible to realize through cyberspace platforms).

5.4.3 Implications of cyberspace technologies on the SDA church operations in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

For objective three on implications of cyberspace technological platforms, and acknowledging that cyberspace as a new area of mission for the SDA church, the study recommended that the church should find ways to evangelize the enormous anti-Christian content presented in the various cyberspace platforms. The SDA church leadership together with its theologians to come up with effective ways to evangelize cyberspace platforms. This implies that the membership of the church, the leadership and theologians should be fully engaged with technology. Technology is here to stay and will always determine the reality of the church, and therefore, having luddite stances on technology will only aggravate the problem.

5.4.4 Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya

For objective four on the challenges, the study acknowledged that despite the applaudable role of cyberspace technological platforms used by the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, it recommended for improved computer literacy among the congregation; greater levels of inclusivity in the design of church content that embed both traditional and modern aspirations of the church; a broader range of affordable technological gadgets (such as phone, postal and online) to ensure that all members of the community are accessed and are able in a protected way able to access church content; better pastoral work plan; and shared theological content with other Christian churches that are unable to have a full-fledged cyberspace platforms. The SDA local

churches should promote computer literacy programs for members to enhance their use of the Internet as outreach to many who need to hear about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Training programs for both church members and leaders to factor in needed computer skills that address the needs of the SDA church and the entire Christian church.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Informed by the study gaps, the following suggestions for further studies were made:

1. Cyberspace technologies and women participation. This suggestion comes from the gap noted in the demographic information of the study participants which noted that the ratio of male to female in the use of technology in church was 99 (57.9%) to 72 (42.1%).

2. Church and misuse of cyberspace technologies. This was prompted by the overwhelming support 95 (76%) of those who endorsed the thesis that there is misuse of cyberspace platforms and that it is impractical to control anti-religious content found in cyberspace technologies.

3. Technology and financial accounting systems of the Church. This theme for further studies came from the study informants who expressed that SDA church does not have computerized accounts systems.

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APPENDIX 1: RESPONDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read the instructions given and answer the questions appropriately. It is important to read carefully and correctly before making an attempt. The information provided will strictly be used for this research purpose.

1.1 Section A: Demographic Information

I am Davis Anunda Nyakwara, a student at Kisii University with registration number DAS/60207/15, taking a Doctoral Degree in Religious Studies now carrying out a research on the involvement of the implications of cyberspace technologies on the traditional church model, with specific reference to selected SDA churches in SKC, Kisii. Kindly your assistance rendered to me through filing in this questionnaire will help in achieving the goals of the study that are intended to help the SDA church. Do not include your name anywhere on the questionnaire.

Item	Frequency
Gender	
Age	
Academic Level	
Preferred Model of Church	

Respondent's Cyberspace Literacy levels

Participants	Frequency
Never have any skill	
Basic skill level	
Trained level	

1.2 Section B: General Information

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	%	Total
In Nyanchwa Station more Christians turn to cyberspace technologies to find any needed information							
My Church has Official Website, e-mail address							
The Website is accessible to all members of the church							
My church has ICT infrastructure							

Section C: Implications of Cyberspace Technologies on the life of the church in Nyanchwa Station, SKC, Kisii

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	%	Total
Cyberspace is where many young people are found							
Cyberspace is a new area of mission for the church							
In cyberspace you reach more people without limits							
People seek religious information in cyberspace							
Cyberspace is inclusive (old, sick, young, immobile people) all find their place in it							
Easy to form Christian communities							
Activities in cyberspace are not limited by time and location							

1.3 Section C: Cyberspace Technologies used in conducting church activities by the SDA church, Nyanchwa SKC, Kisii

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Websites						
Live Streaming						
Facebook						
Twitter						
WhatsApp						
Emails						
YouTube						
Television						
Radio						

1.4 Section D: Church Cyberspace Evangelical Activities of the SDA church in cyberspace church, Nyanchwa SKC, Kisii

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Preaching						
Prayer						
Worship						
Religious Instructions						
Spiritual Support						
Formation of Online Religious Communities						
Data Storage						
Pastoral Care						
Church Financial Contributions						

1.5 Section E: Challenges faced by the SDA church in the use of cyberspace technologies in Nyanchwa Station, SKC, Kisii

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Mechanization of Religious Experience						
Reduces symbolic and ritual dimension of the church						
Poor internet Connectivity (Disruption of church activities)						
High Cost of installing ICT infrastructure						
Decline in Church Attendance						
Individualism and limited human interactions						
Lack/Poor knowledge on ICTs						

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

I am Davis Anunda Nyakwara, a student of Kisii University with the registration number DAS/60207/15, studying for a PhD in Religious Studies. I am conducting a research on the involvement of the implications of cyberspace technologies on the traditional church model, with specific reference to selected SDA churches in SKC, Kisii. You have been selected to take part in

the study by giving key information. The information you provide will be treated confidentially.
In advance, I appreciate your anticipated co-operation in giving information that will serve to better
the activities of the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station, Kisii and the entire Christian Church in the
world.

2.1 Section A: Background Information of the Participants

Item	Frequency
Gender	
Age	
Academic Level	
Preferred Model of Church	

2.2 Section B: Specific Questions for Pastors

1. What factors necessitate the use of cyberspace technologies in the SDA church, Nyanchwa
Station?

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2. What technologies do you use in the church to enhance your evangelical missionary activities?
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3. What are the many missionary activities carried out by cyberspace technologies?

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4. What is the age bracket of those who use and prefer cyberspace technologies in the Church?

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5. What do the faithful think of the use of cyberspace technologies in the Church?

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6. With the use of cyberspace technologies, has the membership of the church changed? Explain.

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7. How would you rate online church services? Explain.

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8. Is the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station investing enough in cyberspace mission? Explain.

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9. What are the benefits and demerits of traditional church model?

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10. What are the main challenges posed by cyberspace technologies to the modern SDA Christian Church………

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11. What is the SDA church in Nyanchwa Station doing to improve the use of cyberspace technologies?

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12. Do you offer computer training to your congregants? If yes, what kind of training?

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2.3 Section C: Specific Questions for ICT Technocrats

1. Does your local church have a standing ICT Committee?

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2. Does your local or national Church have a Learning Management System for members and adherents? How many members use it?

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3. What technologies are majorly used in the church? Why are they mostly preferred?

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4. Does your church have a Website? How often do the congregants use it?

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5. What content do you upload in the Church Web?

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6. Describe the main factors that hinder the church to embrace cyberspace technologies in the church

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7. How is the connectivity or accessibility of network in the church areas?

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8. Which of the following ICT infrastructure does your local church have?

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9. Any additional information or suggestion you will want to give on ICT human resources for Church growth?

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10. Does your local Church have a Computer-based Church Management information System? If yes, which areas does it cover?

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11. In your Opinion, how will you rate the impact in the use of Information and Communication Technology for the following Church growth activities? Explain your response.

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12. Does your church computer training to your congregants? If yes, what kind of training?

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2.4 Section D: Specific Questions for Church Clerks

1. What factors necessitate the use of cyberspace technologies in the SDA church, Nyanchwa Station?

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2. Are you trained in your profession are a clerk? Describe your qualifications

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3. Is your church equipping you with the necessary skills in cyberspace technologies? How?

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4. Which cyberspace technologies do you mainly use?

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5. How is the response of the congregants on the use of cyberspace technologies in carrying out church mission? Describe it.

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6. Does your church have a Website? How often do the congregants use it?

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APPENDIX III: LETTER FROM KISII UNIVERSITY

KISII UNIVERSITY

Telephone: +254 20 2352059   P O BOX 408 – 40200
Facsimile: +254 020 2491131   KISII
Email: research@kisiiuniversity.ac.ke   www.kisiiuniversity.ac.ke

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

REF: KSU/R&E/ 03/5/ 583   **DATES:** 16th May, 2022

The Head, Research Coordination
National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation
(NACOSTI) Utalii House, 8th Floor, Uhuru Highway
P. O. Box 30623– 00100
NAIROBI - KENYA.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: DAVIS ANUNDA NYAKWARA   DAS/60207/15

The above mentioned is a student of Kisii University currently pursuing a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies. The topic of his research is, *"Assessment of cyberspace technologies and traditional church model: A study of selected seventh day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya"*.

We are kindly requesting for assistance in acquiring a research permit to enable him carry out the research.

Thank you.

for Prof. Anakalo Shitandi, PhD
Registrar, Research and Extension

Cc: DVC (ASA)
       Registrar (ASA)
       Director SPGS

APPENDIX 1V: AUTHORIZATION LETTER FROM NACOSTI

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: 666633

Date of Issue: **24/May/2022**

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Mr.. Davis Anunda Nyakwara of Kisii University, has been licensed to conduct research in Kisii on the topic: " Assessment of cyberspace technologies and traditional church: A study of selected seventh day Adventist churches in Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference, Kisii, Kenya" for the period ending : 24/May/2023.

License No: NACOSTI/P/22/17668

666633

Applicant Identification Number

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &
INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

COUNTY COMMISSIONER
KISII COUNTY

NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

APPENDIX V: AUTHORIZATION LETTER FROM THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

South Kenya Conference
P.o Box 22-40200 Kisii-Kenya
Email: *southkenyaconference@gmail.com*

February 11, 2022

Pastor George Nyamongo
Nyanchwa Station

Dear Sir,

RE: RESEARCH - PR. DAVIS SAISI

This is to let you know that the above mentioned student has been allowed to conduct his research in Nyanchwa Station during the month of February 28 - June, 2022.

Thank you and be blessed as you plan to assist him.

Yours sincerely,

Pr. Tom K. Miyienda
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, SKC

Cc: SKC Officers

APPENDIX VI: AUTHORIZATION LETTER FROM FREE PENTECOSTAL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH IN KENYA

FREE PENTECOSTAL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH IN KENYA

P.O BOX 340 (40500)

NYAMIRA

August 18th 2022

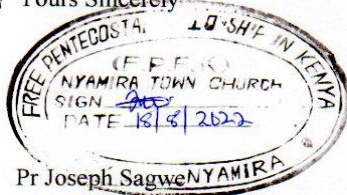Pastor Joseph Sagwe,

Nyamira Station.

Dear Sir,

RE: PR. DAVIS ANUNDA NYAKWARA RESEARCH PILOTING

This is to inform you that the student listed above has been given permission to conduct his research pilot in Nyamira station on August 21, 2022.

We have promised to give him the assistance he requires.

Thanks in Advance.

Yours Sincerely

Pr Joseph Sagwe NYAMIRA

Regional Secretary Nyamira

APPENDIX VIII: STUDY AREA MAP