

The Appropriation of Social Media Technologies by the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) Gaborone Assembly, Botswana

Fidelis Nkomazana

Abstract

The article demonstrates how Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism¹⁵, with a specific reference to the Apostolic Faith Mission Assembly (hereafter referred to as AFM), in Gaborone, Botswana, uses social media to facilitate the effectiveness of its programmes, operations and activities.¹⁶ The paper examines how social media has affected the operations and impacted of their evangelistic strategies and activities.

Participants for the study were drawn from the organisational and operational structures of the AFM Gaborone congregation such as the Church Board, which is the local governing body of the church; the church office, departments and committees of the church. This also included the managers of the different social media platforms used by different committees (WhatsApp, SMS, Facebook) as well as the leaders of the committees, responsible for the day-to – day operations of programmes and activities of their departments. The study, therefore, examines these social media platforms and church leaders, to appreciate the efforts made and the extent to which they impact on the spread of the Pentecostal message. The extent to which they inspire members to participate in the evangelistic programmes and strategies of the church is also discussed.

The findings suggest that the evangelization has always been a primary goal of the AFM and that the church is appropriating social media technologies to facilitate that fundamental mission of disseminating the Gospel to members of the church and the society.

¹⁵ Daniel Ramirez, (2015), *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States & Mexico, 1906-1966*, Carolina: University of North Carolina; Robert W. Hefner, (2013), *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Ogbu Kalu, (2008), *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, new York: Oxford University Press; Elaine J. Lawless, (1988), *Handmaidens of the Lord: Pentecostal Women Preachers & Traditional Religion*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁶ Allen Anderson (2004), *Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Happiers Simbo, (2013), *History of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Africa*, Amazon: Writers Print Shop.

Keywords:

Social Media technologies, WhatsApp, YouTube, SMS (short message service) and evangelistic strategy.

Introduction

The article demonstrates how Christians, particularly Pentecostal churches, are influenced by the social media. It shows how they are using social networks to impact their members and society. Social media has become a widely used tool for church growth and management all over the world.¹⁷ The article seeks to explore how a local Pentecostal church has used social media to advance its activities. This study investigates and examines the use of social media by the different sections AFM. The article focuses on the use of social media, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS and YouTube. The use of social media by the different departments of the church are compared and contrasted. The results show how the congregation and its 16 Departments led by Directors, appropriated social media technologies into their strategies and used for their evangelistic purposes or for the propagation of the Gospel. The article examines how social media has affected the operations and impacted the evangelistic strategies of the AFM Block 7, Gaborone, and the society at large. The article also examines the Biblical and theological justification for this appropriation and the effects on the Christian faith.

Fellowship groups within the church, such as the Sisters' Fellowship, the Tabernacle Youth Department and the Sunday School Department, have their own social media networks for purposes of sharing church news and information from the comfort and environment of their homes.

The article shows that the use of social media has led to an increase in the proclamation of the Gospel, and the communication of church activities. The article, therefore, investigates the use of social media by Pentecostal Churches, in general and the Apostolic Faith Mission Gaborone in particular. The article also shows that social media has offered the congregation an opportunity to form relationships with people of diverse backgrounds.

¹⁷Campbell, Richard et al., (2014), (eds), *Media and Culture: Mass Communication in a Digital Age*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.; Kallenberg, Brad, (2011), *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age*, Eugene: Wipf & Stock.

The purpose of the article is to examine the effect of social media on the Pentecostal churches. It examines its effects on the growth of Pentecostal church and culture at large. It concludes that while it has beneficial effect, it has negative implications on the authenticity of the Christian message.

The article observes that the most used social media technologies in AFM Gaborone are WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, which allow users to both upload and share videos via the internet. The article concludes that social media is making a great impact on the life of the church and its members. Although not the main purpose of the study, the article, therefore, briefly examines some of the negative uses of social media.

Literature Review: The Media and Christianity

Pentecostalism as a religion of the people, adapted itself to the popular culture, including social media technologies, while it remains true to the gospel and leading to rapid growth. Available works in the history of the church show that churches are among the most important institutions in many communities in Africa. Solomon O. Akambi and Jacob Beyers (2017) have, for instance, pointed out that the Pentecostal Movement makes a huge impact on the social, economic and political development of the society. In this circumstance, Christianity is seen to be capable of influencing the society. As a result of its relevance, Pentecostalism has not only become a fast growing movement, but has also gained attention from the society and the media, thus playing a major role in transforming the socio – political and economic lives of people.¹⁸The article “*Crossing Boundaries – A Pentecostal Asia – Africa Networks and Connections in the context of Botswana*” by Nkomazana (2017), argues that new media technology have inspired Pentecostalism to become a religion without borders/frontiers. This is supported by the migratory or transnational nature and practice of the Southern African religions. Togarasei in his article ‘*Cursed be the Past: Tradition and Modernity among modern Pentecostals in Zimbabwe*’ illustrates the point that “many of these fellowships have the terms ‘ministries and/or international’ in their names and seem to have borrowed a leaf from American Pentecostal movement like the Jimmy Swaggart ministries and ministries of other tele-evangelists”, which have used the modern technology to spread globally (Togarasei, 1998).William O. Lesitaokanain in his article “Urban Youth in Botswana and their habitual

¹⁸ Solomon O. Akambi & Jacob Beyers, “The church as a catalyst for transformation in the society”, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 73, No. 4, 14 May 2017, pages 1-8 (ISSN online).

practice of texting” examines mobile phone consumption among urban youth in Botswana. Focusing on texting, he points out that the youth is driven by the need to connect with other people, which has been made easy by the relative inexpensive nature of texting on mobile phones. Lesitaokana observes that this has become not only a reality of their existence, but also a popular culture of our society, due to the need to connect with family, relatives and peers. The major findings of this study is that there is a close relationship between mobile phone use and the socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty and rural settlement. While this article discusses the urban youth and their habitual practice of texting, it has relevance to the subject under discussion, although it focusses on the use on social media technologies in a specific Pentecostal church, the Apostolic Faith Mission.¹⁹ In their co-authored book entitled *New Media and the Mediatization of Religion: An African Perspectives*, by Gabriel Faimau and William O. Lesitaokana (2018) explore and examine how new media shapes religious discourses of different perspectives and multifaceted characteristics in various parts of Africa. The book greatly enriches the existing scholarship in new media and religion in Africa. Finally, the book, makes an immense contribution to scholarship, particularly on the impact of media on religion in Africa, which it argues continuously shapes religious practice, meaning, and expression.²⁰

During the New Testament period the scroll was used by the Apostle Paul and others to propagate the Gospel and is considered by Peter White, Fortune Tella and Michael Donkor Ampofo (2016:2) as the cutting edge technologies of the time. Furthermore, they point to the cutting edge technologies used by Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation of his day, the printing press, which resulted in the production and distribution of the “Luther Bible”. The Protestants argued that everyone should have access to the Bible for an intimate personal relationship with God. They used print media as a tool for the preaching of the Gospel. White (et al) The work of White (et al) shows that in recent years, social media has introduced a new reality and opportunity in connecting or communicating with a large number of people (White, Tella & Ampofo, 2016:2). The Guttenburg Bible, which was the first book to be printed using

¹⁹ William O. Lesitaokana, “Youth in Botswana and their habitual practice of texting”, *GSTF Journal on Media and Communication (JMC)*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2016, pages 34 -38.

²⁰Faimau & William O. Lesitaokana (2018)(eds.), *New Media and the Mediatization of Religion: An African Perspective*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 173 pages, ISBN: 978-7-5275-0902-3.

a printing machine back in 1600s had a huge impact on the growth of Christianity. The church had taken advantage of this new technology of its time to advance its activities.

Bringing the effect of the printed Bible technology closer home, the Setswana Bible was translated to Setswana and made available to Batswana in 1857.²¹ (source) In 1869 the Bechuanaland District Committee (BDC) continued to discuss the issue of translating the New Testament into Setswana as part of their missionary business. The missionary form of education briefly examines some of the negative uses of social media, which was closely associated with the missionary objectives, basically aimed at effectively propagating Christianity using the printed Bible in order to convert Batswana to Christianity. Seeing the printed Bible as their main text, they considered their own European cultural values to be superior to those of the indigenous people.²² It was also due to the use of the Bible as a new technology that they regarded the educational systems of the Batswana to be heathenic, barbaric and backward. Quoting AJ Dachs, Part Mgadla observes that:

In Christian Faith Mackenzie saw a means to God so that his entire life was transformed. The heathen was to be converted in his beliefs and customs, industry was to be encouraged, education fostered, and a new society created and western civilization established. Change was to be profound, but it was also to be peaceful and beneficial to the eyes of the Victorian Englishmen confident in their industrial and commercial wealth and their technological supremacy.²³

The printed Bible was an important medium of communication, source of information and proclamation of the Gospel. Bible, as a new technology was important for reading, evangelisation and the training of school teachers and evangelists. Missionaries, therefore, saw religion to be the pillar for education. Extracts for reading and writing lessons, teaching on morality and other subjects were drawn from the Bible and printed for use. Missionaries came

²¹ John Mackenzie (1871), *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, Edinburgh: Hodder & Stoughton, page 394

²² Mgadla, (1989); Mgadla, PT, (2004), *A History of Education in the Bechuanaland Protectorate to 1965*. Landham: University Press of America; Moffat, R., (1842), *Missionary Labours in Southern Africa*, London: Shaw; Mackenzie, J., (1871), *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, Edinburgh: Heinemann.

²³ Mgadla, PT, (1989), *Missionaries and Western Education in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1859 – 1904: The Case of the Bangwato*. Gaborone: University of Botswana.

with this approach in order to kill two birds with one stone.²⁴ The purpose of the missionary education was to develop the whole life of an individual. It also equipped learners to contribute to the society. The traditional forms on education saw tolerance and compassion, which are also emphasized by the country's education policies and 'Vision 2016 as crucial components of education. The role of the printed Bible text was central in all these interactions.²⁵

In the 1970s, while the approach in the teaching of RE changed slightly, the use of the Bible remained key for the church and in Botswana schools. The Bible knowledge programme focusing on major themes such as Jesus' life and ministry, continued to be taught in some schools until the mid-1980s.²⁶ The programme was blamed for indoctrination, because most teachers lacked training in comparative religions, philosophy and ethics. However, the programme was life-oriented and emphasized fundamental values of *botho*, such as respect, unity, co-operation, self-reliance and tolerance.²⁷ The LMS used the Bible as the main printed media technology to facilitate their work. Today Pentecostal churches are using new social media to propagate Christianity. It has replaced the Bible as a printed form of technology of the 16th and 19th century.

Studying the use of social media in Pentecostal churches in Botswana, Boago Sephutho (21 March 2019) observes that the Royal Assembly founded by Boago Frank Ramogapi in 2009 in Gaborone with branches in Palapye, Francistown and Lobatse, had well organised new media platforms in the form of Instagram and Facebook to promote activities and information dissemination. The use of billboards in Gaborone and Francistown is also common. For soul winning they also use adverts and fliers, which are distributed to people on regular basis. TV interviews and other media platforms are also used to promote their vision and what they stand for. Through social media they go live on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to share their messages, testimonies and worship services in general. They also post their profiles, photos in these platforms as well in their website.

²⁴Mgadla, (1989), *Ibid*.... page :80

²⁵Moffat,(1842) Missionary Labours.

²⁶Campbell, DBJ (1986), *The Synoptic Gospels: A Commentary for Teachers and Students*, Harare: John Murray

²⁷Chapman, G,(1985), *Developing in Christ Book 1*. London: Cassell.

Method: Participants and Setting

The study adopted qualitative method, focusing on personal observation and interview data collection methods. The observation took place over a long period of time. The researcher observed how members were using social media technology platforms, what they were using them for and how they were being used. After the observation exercise was undertaken, qualitative interviews of the leadership of the youth, the Sisters Fellowship; the director and coordinators of the Sunday School Department and other administrators of the church were engaged. The study also wanted to know the type of social media technologies that are being used in the church; the reasons for using these new technologies in the activities and its effects on the spiritual growth of the members and the congregation as a whole.

In-depth interviews were also further conducted with the leaders of Departments, committees and the general membership. The collection of data was organised and done in various departments of the church. Purposive sampling targeted those groups within the church that were using social media. This was done by sampling and interviewing the leadership of the different departments mentioned above, who were approached and asked to participate in the study.

As already pointed out above, the study was conducted with AFM, an urban Pentecostal assembly, located in Block 7 Gaborone, the capital and the largest cosmopolitan in Botswana. Gaborone, has a large number of Pentecostal churches, which suggests a high level of competition for membership and indeed greater mobility, migration and exposure. A quick comparison with a rural AFM sub-station of Lentsweletau, which is much smaller in size is interesting.

Procedure and data collection

Permission for the study was granted by the National Executive Committee of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Botswana. All participants representing various Departments and groups were over the age of 16. The purpose of the study were clearly explained to the leadership.

Data Presentation and Findings

Preliminary investigation revealed that the majority of the Pentecostal churches in the city were using social media technologies more than Pentecostal churches in a rural area. Pentecostals in a rural place were not exposed to much external pressure to adopt newer technologies as the city based Pentecostals. The youth in urban settings possess more advanced mobile phones, hence the more usage of social media technologies for evangelism in urban areas than in rural settings.²⁸ The skills possessed by urban youth greatly differed with those in rural areas, due to the fact that majority of people are at tertiary institutions studying ICT related courses.

As already pointed out above, AFM Gaborone boasts of about sixteen (16) departments, each of which has its own social media networks for servicing their constituents and for administrative purposes. Each of the 16 departments had a director. The collection of data was therefore organised and done according to the various departments of the church. This was done by sampling and interviewing the leadership of the different departments mentioned above, who were approached and asked to participate in the study.

Content analysis has also been used as a method of data collection for the study. White, Tella and Ampofo (2016) defined content analysis as “the primary message centered methodology”. They point out that content analysis focuses on the characteristics and language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text, which might be verbal, in print, or in an electronic form, interviews, focus groups, observations, print media, such as articles, books, or manuals.²⁹ The article used the social media platforms and activities of different church groups within the AFM Gaborone, as a case study, between January 2018 to July 2019. The objective was to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of social media on the growth of the church. The views of church members were collected, recorded and analyzed. The key phrase or concept or objective for the use of social media is networking, which is facilitated by its flexibility, efficiency and rapidity.

Data collected from the church was collated and generally presented under the following categories:

²⁸ Lentsweletau AFM Church, Interaction with the Youth Department, April – May 2018.

²⁹White, P, Tella, E, & Ampofo, M.D., (2016), “A Missional Study of the Use of Social Media (Facebook) by Some Ghanaian Pentecostal Pastors”, *Koers (Online)*, vol 81 Number 2, page 3 (pages 1-8).

1. The profile of the church leadership structures, from which the respondents were selected
2. Types of social media technologies appropriated and used by the church
3. The purpose and reasons for the use of social media
4. Effects of social media appropriation and use on church activities
5. The challenges to using these social media technologies

Types of Social Media Technologies and Platforms Commonly Used

Facebook/WhatsApp

Facebook and WhatsApp facilities that promotes the exchange and sharing of information. They provide idea ways of keeping the church community updated on news, events and services hosted by the church. As a social networking interface, it allows members, who choose to participate to share any type of information: their experiences, upcoming events, discussions and videos.³⁰ These social networks are free of charge. Members joining a Facebook and WhatsApp community pages do so without paying anything. They help them to become part of the day to day life of the people as they easily connect with old friends, brothers and sisters for free. They allow for sharing or sending photos, messages, video calls, voice calls, texts and recorded voice messages, images and other documents. It is a messaging platform for finding friends, sharing memories and allow chat online. It is user friendly for both young and old generations It is able to connect more people, follow interesting topics, stay in touch with family and contact anywhere in the world, advance diversity and inclusiveness, allow people to participate in planning for events and save lot of money spent on SMS and video calling.

³⁰Brady Sheaverer, "A Simple Social Media Strategy Every Church Needs – The Ultimate Social Media Blueprint for Churches", <http://www.instagram.com/bradyshearer>.

Short Message Service (SMS)

SMS allows every individual member of the church to join a group for discussion or to receive important text messages/information and announcements between mobile phones. It is, however, costly and not free but accommodates everyone willing to join a social group. SMS like other technologies also facilitate follow – up activities of new and old members.

Email

It is a number one form of professional communication tool for sending programmes and activities to members. It allows people to send and receive messages at the comfort of their homes and offices. It also allows for an effective and efficient interactions, support, training and counselling activities. Email can be excellent for cell group activities, since it is fast, efficient, and cheap to allow members to introduce themselves. It will reach out to any contact or contacts without physically visiting the person or group. It can used to send notes and reminders on previous interactions with individuals or groups.

Through these platforms information in the form of messages and pictures that facilitate and promote interaction within a fellowship is posted. The use of these social media technologies is believed to promote and encourage quality, the spirit of unity, togetherness and association. These platforms provide opportunities for information sharing. In this way, social media are believed to empower the youth and women fellowship groups in the church. They allow the youth group known as the Tabernacle Youth, and the women, generally referred to as the Sister's Fellowship, to strategically communicate programmes and activities and foster effective participation. They provide an environment, where the youth can become responsible and develop good values. Active engagement in social media help young people to fulfil their goals most effectively. Social media platforms allow the church the opportunity to quickly embrace members facing challenges and difficulties in life. They ensure that members do not walk alone or struggle on their own without support and encouragement. In AFM Gaborone indications show that 80% of the women in the Sisters' Fellowship use WhatsApp and SMS. The use of internet has become part of their way of life or means of communication. The youth department known as the Tabernacle Youth, is youthful and dominated by the young generation, which is also characterized by almost over 80% usage of the internet and social

media. The Facebook, WhatsApp and SMS are most commonly used social media platforms in the church for the promotion of interactions, participation and church unity.

The church fellowship groups are therefore able to keep in touch with the general membership. They equip the committee and leaders to upload photos, videos, send messages that unite and cement members together for a greater purpose.

General Observations

It was observed that the church used social media to attract new members and to communicate to members the upcoming services, activities and events of the congregation. The investigation shows that social media is becoming part of church practice. It is taking church activities into the online world. This is becoming part of the church's everyday life. Members are able to share insights from the Bible or their experiences. They can also bring their Christian viewpoint to discussions on local, national and international arena. It has also helped to open up the church to the views of the members. It also encourages people to be comfortable enough to ask questions about faith. They offer opportunities for the 24/7 engagement. Specifically, the following was observed:

1. Almost all young people and many members, especially those with smartphones, had a downloaded Bible on their phones, which they carry around and can read it at any time they want.
2. Prayer points were communicated to members through social media platforms.
3. Church vision and mission statements were widely shared by members and were generally seen as part of these platforms
4. Some of the platforms of the different church departments and units, provided the contact details of their members and committees.
5. Video versions of sermons or at least key points of sermons and songs are posted on the Facebooks of some of the Departments, especially those of the Tabernacle Youth Department and the Sister's Fellowship.
6. Programmes, activities, announcements, Bible passages shared by members of these Departments are posted on WhatsApp platforms for the benefit of members.
7. The younger generation regardless of their gender and social background were generally more attracted to using social media than older generations.

8. The results also showed that females were generally higher in numbers in all church social media groups, except in higher church leadership positions such as the Church Board, where men are the majority, but generally showing low aptitude to using social media compared to females in leadership positions. This is despite the fact that all pastors and full-time workers have attained at least a higher diploma degree. Age and gender therefore had some influence on the use of social media.

Participants characteristics: gender and age

Strictly speaking no deliberate decision was made to categorize participants according to their gender and age. The main categories were the various departments of the congregation, some of which were obviously gendered and mixed in terms of age. Age categories in some groups and departments could range from younger males and females of 18 years to older members of up to more than 50 years. The establishment of some of these departments were according to gender. The Fellowship Department within which you have units such as the Brothers Fellowship, Sisters Fellowship, Widows and Widowers, Singles and Single parents, are very interesting groups whose use of social media will differ greatly. The Brothers and Sisters Fellowships were respectively for male and female members of the church, with mixed age ranges from the youth to the adults, while units such as Widows and Widowers; Singles and Single parents include both genders, and belonged to the same unit, giving an impression that their issues and challenges in life were the same. In all these categories, the enrolment suggests that they were higher numbers of females and also higher numbers of youths that used and participated in social media than their male counterparts on the one hand and older counterparts on the other. The other observation is that comparatively there is higher participation of females in church activities and attendance than males, even though the church overall leadership is mostly dominated by men, who are slow in using social media technologies.

Efforts of the Church to Adopt media Technologies

In 2012/2013 the church board resolved to form a media and communication Department, made up of IT and media experts in the church to facilitate efficiency and effectiveness in the

operation and management of church activities.³¹ The proposed plan resulted in a team of experts put together, but the team never started its work due to the failure of the church leadership to provide clear terms of reference and mandate. Towards the end of 2018, the church board once again, tasked Mr Steward Muchuchuti, a church board member and lecturer in IT, to revisit the issue of putting up a team of experts in media and internet technology to facilitate a rapid and effective usage of media and communication technologies in the church. A recommendation has been submitted to the church board for endorsement and sanctioning. This development shows that, while AFM Gaborone has not fully utilised the media technology, it has basically embraced it and has progressed or advanced ahead of churches like the African Independent Churches³², which seem to be sceptical to the idea of using such technologies to advance their evangelistic programmes.

The Organizational, Administrative and Operational Structures of the Church

The study observed that the church has sixteen (16) departments, which are individually and corporately making efforts to adopt social media technologies. It also found that these departments are using different types of social media platforms, and key ones being Facebook and WhatsApp due to the fact that they are cheaper to use. The other observation is that the creation of these social media forums are attracting members to participate and engage in discussions, happily receiving valuable announcements, providing feedback, and asking necessary questions for clarity.

The sixteen Departments of the church are the Pastoral Department, the Administration Department, the Tabernacle Youth Department, the Sunday School Department, the Treasury Department, the Outreach Department, the Follow-up Department, the Counselling Department, the Social Welfare Department, the Prayer Department, the Music Department, the Projects and Investment Department, the Home-Cell Department, the Fellowship Department and the Strategy Department. Each of these departments have created their own social media platforms for their activities, operations and administration as follows:

³¹Lesitaokana, W., Makgabana, I., Maseeko, L., & Ramatlhakwana, D., Taskforce on the IT Strategy for the Apostolic Faith Mission, Gaborone, 2006. W

³² James Amanze (1998), *African Christianity in Botswana: The Case of African Independent Churches*, Gweru: Mambo Press, pp. 62-88; Daneel, M.I., (1987), *Quest for Belonging*, Qweru: Mambo Press.

1. Pastoral Department, provides the overall spiritual and administrative oversight and did not have a specific social platform of its own, possibly due to the fact that all the other departments reported to the pastoral department and that it played a supervisory role.

2. Administration Department which is responsible for ushering, security and safety, registration of members, secretariat, correspondence, constitutional reviews, media and communication, public relations etc. The Department has an SMS social platform for welfare matters and emergency purposes.³³This WhatsApp for the AFM Gaborone assembly was created by Albert Tamado and Conny Walebatla on the 24th December 2017. The platform is used by the church office to primarily reach church board members, church elders, deacons, and the church general membership. The information communicated on this platform is usually of an emergency nature, including the following:

- i. Death of a member or a close relative of a member.³⁴
- ii. Funeral arrangements of a death that affects the church
- iii. Memorial service of a member
- iv. Announcement of a meeting for church elders and church Board.

The Church Board secretary also created two other WhatsApp platforms, one being for Church Board members and the other being for church board members without pastors. The main objective of these platforms is for administrative purposes, that is, to communicate board meeting agenda proposals, for brainstorming matters needing urgent decisions, announcements of meetings etc. The two WhatsApp platforms work side by side the church email group (afmgabs@gmail.com), which is used for sending minutes, reports, correspondence and other important information, such as the communication from the National Executive Council, Regional National committees, National Youth, Sisters and Sunday School.³⁵ Both the social media and the email group have an active participation of about ten members of the church board. Only two members of the board have not signed for participation and normally receive hard copies of the same documents, which is costly, and resulting in high printing and circulation charges.

³³The SMS platform is administered by Mrs Ketlalepula Tomeletso (71874294), the telephone administrator in the church office.

³⁴ Policy adopted by the AFM Gaborone Assembly Annual General Meeting, 6 August, 2017 & 28 October 2018 AGM Minutes of November 2019

³⁵ The latest communication from the Acting Secretary of the National Executive Council announced the postponement of the 65th Workers Council, which was to be held on the 9th March in Thamaga. Document emailed on the 7th March 2019 using the afmgabs@gmail.com.

3.Strategy Department

The strategy Department also created an SMS group for all the Departmental Directors for the coordination of the church strategy, budget and evaluation reports. The platform was created by Nka Monyatsi on the 27 January 2019. It has 18 active participants.

4.The Brother's Fellowship

WhatsApp for the Brothers' Fellowship, which was created by Mr Malachi Tshipayagae on the 30th August 2017. It has 42 participants.

5.Treasury Department

The use of social media does not only support the numerical and administrative growth of the church, but has also contributed to financial stability and growth. Mobile phone banking has enabled the church to receive offerings, tithes and donations online by making available the church account numbers through which members can transfer money electronically. The Treasury Department usually projects church accounts information on Sundays to encourage members to deposit their contributions, tithes and offerings directly into the bank to avoid handling of too much, which might also attract thieves.³⁶

6.Music Department

With their phones, members are able to record songs and messages and send them to each other to allow members to enable interaction with the songs for edification and mastery of the music and lyrics. Social media have given members the opportunity to receive daily devotions via phones for purposes of personal spiritual growth. At times they send songs for rehearsals to members, which allow members to acquaint themselves with the music and lyrics before they practically present them to the church. The music director is also able to give specific directions on song style, lyrics and dynamics, that by the time the band arrives for rehearsals on Friday evening they would already have been resourced with everything they need. Social media is also important for giving the band a plan for the service. If there is a new song, it helps if a member hears it several times on their phone for familiarity and mastery of the songs. It also helps the team to share the order of the service, and music cord charts.

³⁶ Sunday projections reads

7. Sunday School Department

The Sunday School Department has moved rapidly to use social media technologies to facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities. They have adopted social media to avoid expensive calling charges and high bills. Two types of social media platforms were adopted and are being used: the WhatsApp and Facebook. The Director of the Department Mrs Kehilwe Atta, has linked all the coordinators to a WhatsApp platform for the coordination of Sunday School programmes, planned meetings and activities, such as national and regional Sunday School Conferences. WhatsApp is also used for purposes of administration, brainstorming and online discussions of documents, such as the Sunday School strategy. Through the platform they are able to develop the departmental strategy, share ideas, make input and give feedback and probe questions. WhatsApp is said to have facilitated teamwork and participatory spirit, hence motivating members to pool their knowledge together, tackle challenges quickly, without having to try to bring people together, which is always difficult due to clashes in other responsibilities each member had. They also claimed that team engagement produced better quality work and promoting increased participation, which has gained them excellent input and feedback from coordinators and teachers. It has also allowed coordinators to see themselves as co-workers and being able to buy into ideas and have their say included in decisions and resolutions. Furthermore, they felt that the use of WhatsApp promoted consensus approach and high openness in decision making. WhatsApp therefore is seen to be more people oriented and aiming at improving people's skills and knowledge.

The Sunday School also has WhatsApp Groups that have also been used to link all the Sunday school teachers with their coordinators on the one end and teachers in each class having their own platform for purposes of coordination of meetings, announcements, administration, sharing of programmes, communication of schedules and materials; sharing of class registers and to facilitate quick replacements of teachers in cases of emergencies. WhatsApp has made everything to become affordable, efficient and quick.

The Facebook platform is used for the promotion of interaction between the teacher and the 13 to 15 and 15 to 23 classes. The teacher interviewed pointed out that since Facebook stores files in the cloud, it can accommodate big files and thus allowing the teacher and her class to send and share pictures and exchange large files of information. In the process of exchanging information, members of the group freely exchange ideas and engage in discussions without fear of clogging the network.

8. Prayer Department

Social media platforms are also used to send and receive prayer requests and to mobilize group prayer efforts. The social media is also being used as a channel to pray for people. Church prayer requests and the sharing of prayer assignments, assessment of progress being made and new developments. The Prayer Department also closely work with other social media networks, which are not necessarily part of AFM Gaborone, but are interdenominational and national in nature and outlook, and with a strong leadership role and presence of members of the congregation in these networks. They are as follows:

1. The Hannah Prayer Team WhatsApp, which was created by Daisy Molefhi and has 13 participants, all of whom are females. The motto of the platform is, “Out of the mouths of babes and infants God has ordained strength” (Psalms 8:2). The main purpose of the Hannah Prayer Team is the “Birthing of something special in the nation”.
2. The Botswana Revival Chain Prayer Group, which was created by Albert Tamado on the 26 March 2018 with a membership of 156 participants. Through this WhatsApp platform there is always someone fasting and praying every day of the month and for 24 hours. The motivation of the group comes from Numbers 14:21, which says, “And the nation shall be filled with the glory of the Lord”.
3. Kingdom Discipleship Botswana Group WhatsApp was created by Moipone Lopang on the 7 Tuesday 29 January 2019. It has a membership of 66 participants. Its aims are to train intercessors in Botswana through the help of Intercessors of Botswana; to plan and post training schedules; to follow – up what God has said about Botswana and be good stewards.
4. 700 WhatsApp Prayer Group was created by Albert Tamado and other on the 22nd of December 2018. It has 50 participants. Its key assignments during the December 2018 IFB conference were as follows: To mobilise 700 people to pray for 7 minutes daily for 70 days under the theme: “Possessing the gates of the enemy”; To observe 100 days for the healing of the nation and to start kingdom discipleship classes to equip believers to receive and possess the kingdom of God (Daniel 7:18) and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20).
5. The Lunch Hour With God WhatsApp Group was created by Thapelo Monyere on the 22 June 2017. It has 32 active participants in its roll. It is based on the prayer: “May the Lord open the floodgates of ‘heaven and pour His blessings on you and your entire household”.

6. The Botswana Leaders Praying Forum WhatsApp Group was created by Albert Tamado on the 29 June 2018, which has on its wall a Botswana Flag lifted by two leaders. It has 75 participants. They hold the position that righteousness uphold, preserve and protect a nation (Prov 19:17; James 2:14-17); Crying out to God for a mighty outpouring of his Spirit (Ps 132:1-5); the outpouring of the Spirit of God that releases great grace in the church (Acts 4:33); Stir yourself up and take hold of God (Is 64:7); Watchmen setting their eyes on the walls of Jerusalem (Is 62:6); letting others to see Jesus in your life, which is a book before their eyes.
7. The SU National Soul Winning WhatsApp Group, which was launched in September 2018 by Albert Tamado. The main reason for the group was to engage with different teams who were moving around and visiting schools. It was also used to update or give participants directions and clarity about the project. Fifteen other Christian organizations participated and with another 256 individuals also participating in the campaign, which covered 34 Senior Schools from the 10th to 16th September 2018. About 52 000 children were reached and 27 160 giving their lives to Christ. Other successes were that the SU groups were revived, many people sacrificed, committed their resources and actively participated. The school management; churches and pastors appreciated this project and now understood that SU was not a church but an interdenominational organization; SU Alumni, veterans and action groups were revived the campaign

9. Sister's Fellowship Department

Sisters'Fellowship has several social media platforms. The department has 12 character groups, each with its own WhatsApp group platform. The main Sister's Fellowship has its own WhatsApp group for the overall coordination, communication and leadership.

The benefits of using social media for Sister's Fellowship are as follows:

1. Empowerment and fellowship of members. It also absorbs and accommodates visitors.
2. It helps members to know each other.
3. Efficiency and effectiveness in running their service and activities each month, such as to serve as ushers. The schedules and reminders are posted through the social media.
4. As part of empowering themselves, they want to embrace Biblical character qualities as presented in Galatians 5:22. They call them the fruit of the Spirit. Their relevance and appropriateness of these qualities are nurtured through social media.

5. They talk about their experiences as women, their challenges in the home, church and work. They also talk about their dreams and future prospects.
6. Sisters'Fellowship WhatsApp Group is fully functioning and providing services to many people. According to the register of each service, the total number of sisters that attend the monthly service is 80-100 which changes each service out of a total estimated membership of 400 members, which is taken from the total number of registered sisters in the different character groups. The committee has created social media platforms for purposes for coordinating their meetings, discussing regular feedback, interaction on issues of management and day – to – day running of the fellowship.

Character Groups and Social Media Networks

There are 12 character groups with each representing their serving month of the year as follows:

- i). January is Holiness with 23 members.
- ii. February for Self Control with 33 members
- iii. March for Love with 37 members
- iv. April for Unity with 46 members
- v. May for Obedience with 19 members
- vi. June for Faithfulness with 31 members
- vii. July for Goodness with 28 members
- viii. August for Kindness with 25 members
- ix. September for Harmony with 20 members
- x. October for Peace with 33 members
- xi. November for Righteousness with 30 members
- xii. December for Joy with 28 members

The purpose for these character groups was, first to absorb and accommodate visitors and strangers and help them know each other and bear one another's burdens. They are also responsible for running of the services and activities of each month. They also serve as ushers during their month. The committee takes overall responsibility of running the Sisters'Fellowship. Their names were influenced by Galatians 5:22: The fruit of the Spirit and other Biblical character qualities. Each of the 12 groups has its own WhatsApp group but the group leader also communicates with SMS for the sake of those without WhatsApp. The use of smartphone for announcements and coordination is efficient, effective and fast. The

decisions of the committee are communicated within a day. Death and sickness information of members is also quickly passed to the membership.

There are those who are members of their character groups, who never attend the Sisters' Fellowship meetings/services but are actively involved in their character groups. They also participate in their group WhatsApp.

The Sisters' Committee has two Social Media platforms, that is, the WhatsApp and Facebook. What this information shows is that in the exception of the youth Department, women are driving the social media revolution in the AFM at Block 7. These members are very active on social media like is in other spheres of life. They generally communicate naturally across themselves because they share similar logic and dreams. By practice and definition, women are very expressive and feel comfortable holding several conversations in a day than men will do. They take this advantage to talk about their challenges and successes. They are also actively involved in prayer sessions each day than men do. These platforms have further provided women in the AFM an opportunity to fellowship with each other at any day in their lives.

Women active participation in social media networks has broken down old stereotypes and demographic categories, such as age, education, marital status, class differentiation. They cross those boundaries and relate with each other at different levels and deal with different issues than their male counterpart will do. The use of social media is especially generating a real impact in advancing the vision and mission of the church in various ways. These platforms are used for spiritual fellowship, and also for advertisement and entertainment as well as empowerment of each other's life. A quick glance at their social media communication that goes on in the different groups of the Sisters' Fellowship, one realises that women are more active in social media than men. The men's Fellowship does not only have an active, running committee, but also have no functioning social media platform to allow the men to discuss affairs affecting them.

AFM Block 7 women are making trends and are typically adapting more and better to the technology than their male counterpart. Unlike men, they freely participate in social networks, upload photos, as part of sharing their experiences and joys. Unlike men, they are not selective in their engagement in conversations, which are full of emotional component that prevails in their actions and is naturally allowed to spill on social networks. This is possibly why those interested in selling products, will prefer to target and use women. Because they know that women like beauty, pictures, colours, they capture that in their language, videos and music.

This is possibly why AFM women have chosen to use WhatsApp and Facebook, which allows them to engage in feminine stuff than YouTube and Twitter, which are generally used by men for political and economic issues.

One other important observation, when looking at these social media platforms and the conversation is that they have overcome an environment, where women are marginalized in social networks. They have been able to dismantle the degrading stereotypes that are usually there to distort the image and contribution of women. They are free to be themselves without the interference of men, who would immediately want to dominate, claim power and influence. The fact that these social media platforms are closed for men, there is no chance for them to start dictating terms. They have given themselves an opportunity to hold power in their hands and influence their activities themselves. This also shows that when women set their eyes and hands on something they stick to put their energies and minds to. Another point is that women are powerful dissemination of information, especially their messages.

Other Individual Social Media Groups by Women

Some women who happen to be members of the Sisters' Fellowship at Block 7 Gaborone have also created their personal social groups for specific purposes. Oesi Thothe, one of the most creative, bold and intelligent woman of the Sisters' Fellowship is a very good example. She has two Facebooks - Oesi Morehi Thote, created in 2012/13, with close to 4000 followers. She created the Facebook for social engagement, to amplify her voice and to engage with a broader community. Most of her followers have tertiary education and are from 35 to about 60+ years. She also has Oesi on Real for blogging and Our Writing Journey for a writing community, which can only be accessed by members. As a Christian, part of Oesi's effort is to use media to impact and benefit the church and society. She therefore created the page with a concept of empowering Christians and other interested persons in society. She created the page and posted life impacting personal stories and experiences to provoke discussions, comments and encourage other women to also share their experiences and life journeys. The majority of commentators and readers were Christian women. Oesi's Facebook pages quickly grew its user base as it continued to expand and engage people on various issues, which were discussed. In 2018 the Facebook rebranded itself and created a sister Facebook page called Oesi Real, to focus on business ideas, empowering and challenges individuals to also revisit their dreams and put them down, through writing and practically applying them to real life situations.

In conclusion, therefore, it must be pointed out that at least from the official information available at the AFM Block 7 church, women at this church use social media more than men to advance church work. This shows that the tendency to think that technology is a male dominated arena, has changed or is changing quickly. Looking at how women have organized their affairs in church, we can conclude that women are successfully making strides. While men occupy key leadership positions, women are utilizing social media more frequently than men. They generally visit the WhatsApp frequently in a day. During the week days women are busy at work and with children, and do not have time to go church, but they continue to socialize via social media than face to face. It is also possible that Pentecostal women like other now women on other spheres of life may spend more time in the social media than with their spouses. They may be finding them to be more enjoyable and significant. This fact will make a very interesting future study.

10. Tabernacle Youth Department

According to AFM, youth is an individual who falls within the age group 15 to 35 years. The tabernacle youth has a younger and youthful leadership, whose perceived benefits of the use of social media technology and skills markedly differs with that of the older members including the pastors generally. Their youth leader, for instance, drives the younger generations towards the usage of new technologies more than other older leaders. Her understanding is that failure to strategically employ these technologies for the benefit of the church is perceived by the youth unnecessarily fighting against globalization and technological advance.

Talking to the leaders of the Tabernacle Youth Departmental, one realises that efforts have been made to encourage members to use the newer social media technologies to promote their activities. Attending their Friday services and other activities, one notices that information on weekly services and programmes, is generally shared with members through the social media platforms. Bible study notes and other messages are shared with members through the WhatsApp and Facebook platforms that they have created for their members. This is done for purposes of encouraging more young people to attend their services and also as a way of observing the Great Commission (Matthew 28:20) that calls the church to preach the gospel and make disciples of every nation, tribe and kindred. Photographs and other materials are posted on these sites for their members to appreciate and also use it to invite more people as already pointed out.

A critical examination of the role of social media and the factors influencing them at Block 7 are mainly demonstrated by age. Its use is high among younger adults. They communicate more online than older members. WhatsApp and Facebook remain the most popular platforms. These play a major role in the propagation of the Gospel as employed by the Tabernacle Youth at Block 7. It provides easy access to youth activities and information, which can be received through smartphones. Tabernacle Youth Department has a Facebook account and can easily post its services and other activities and also update their followers on the progress in their lives. They also use smartphones as a platform to watch their other favourite preachers, singers etc. Through these they encourage their members and other young people to attend their services and be part of what is happening. Those who miss services have an opportunity to watch them on Facebook. As long as they have data they can remain connected.

Tabernacle Youth also uses social media as an advertising platform using Facebook and WhatsApp. Upcoming events are advertised on their Facebook pages to improve their attendance. It is a free medium for advertisement for the church and its groups. Tabernacle Youth vary their postings, biblical verses, messages, pictures or videos, testimonies and products depending on their theme, occasion and audience.

The other advantage of using social media for youth is that it offers space for interactions between members and for the discovery of shared identity. Each young person joining the page, finds accommodation and space to comment and contribute freely. They also are able and happy to find willing audience and friendship.

Pamel J. Brubaker and Michel M. Haigh (2017) says social media brings growth in many religious groups and individual worshippers. He further points out that social media is an expressive medium where users can both give and receive spiritual guidance, religious resources and entertainment for themselves. He again mentions that social media provides an outlet through which religious needs and desires are expressed and fulfilled online.³⁷ Brubaker and Haigh further observe the composition of social media networks reflects a socio-economic class. It is an important means of getting the youth closer to each other to help them develop critical values; to extend personal relationships and friendships; to encourage members of the Tabernacle Youth to communicate more efficiently with one another and to facilitate the

³⁷Pamela J. Brubaker and Michel M. Haigh (2017), "The Religious Facebook experience: Uses and gratifications of faith-based content" *social Media & Society*, 2017:3(2), page 1-7, [Scholar.google.com/sage/Journals](https://scholar.google.com/sage/Journals)

sharing of information. The social media networks therefore play an important role in the health and well-being of believers. As believers the youth through social media share scriptures on divine healing of people on the platform.

Results, Analysis and Discussions: The Role of Social Media in Church

The findings indicate that social media technologies fostered positive spiritual and character development on the youth, women and the general membership and also encouraged a spirit of active engagement on and participation in the life of the church.

The use of social media is therefore seen as playing an important role in the life of the church and in the process of contextualizing the Gospel. It is seen as an important tool that is effective, efficient and fast in sending information to church groups and members. It is also believed to be inclusive and not discriminatory, not restrictive, not hierarchical and not under the control of the church leadership referred to as the Board of Elders or Church Board, which is the local highest church governing committee. People generally feel that once these operations get controlled by the church hierarchy they will soon lose their efficiency, relevance, inclusiveness, and democratic nature. At the moment different groups in their different social and spiritual groups, are able to share their experiences and views within their confines.

Social media technologies are not only the most evident and powerful benefit for the church, but channel of empowerment. Through this channel, members are equipped to succeed and gain control of their lives. Empowerment brings qualitative transformation in society. As part of the empowerment process the youth is equipped to take over the various leadership positions in the church in tune with the popular believe that “today’s youths are the leaders of tomorrow” that Botswana believes in. In a nutshell, therefore, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are seen to have the potential to develop qualities such as competence, confidence, connection, character, compassion and contribution.³⁸

In this way social media is **seen** as an important technology that has the power to promote the person to person or group interactions. As has been pointed out above, the church had numerous Departments, with various social media platforms and each having their specific purpose and focus, but generally addressing the vision and mission of the church. As such social media technology plays an important role on positive spiritual and social development of members.

³⁸<https://www.quova.com>; Also see March A. Zimmerman, “Empowerment Theory”, pp. 43-63 in Rapport J & Seidmen, E., (eds), *Handbook of Community Psychology*, Bo...Springer (<https://doi.org>).

The youth and women, are examples of church groups that have taken advantage of these technologies to advance their activities and ministry to their members.

The research has also observed that there are many factors that have influenced the church to adopt media technologies. Some of these factors that have influenced the church and its members to adopt social media technologies are as follows:

1. External pressure and prevailing culture

The older Pentecostal churches, like the Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, Holiness Union Church, are experiencing a serious challenge from the newly established Pentecostal churches, generally known as the fire churches. Young people in particular are migrating to these “Fire Churches” in large numbers.³⁹ The church has therefore started using the social media technologies to ensure continuous survival and also to confront the competition coming from these churches. The prevailing or dominant culture is influenced by the social media. Social media culture is seen to possess three very important and necessary parts, first, namely communication, which is about people feeling connected for better relationships; second, socialization, which is about how to act and present oneself and, thirdly, the factor of change, an important factor in business, which must be communicated to key stakeholders. These three aspects are facilitated or produced by social media. In other words, social media platforms such as Facebook increase the visibility and priority of social networks, which were created with the purpose of giving users the ability to communicate and feel connected. Hence, you find social networks as Facebook marketing platforms, Facebook stores, social commerce, social gaming and social business. Facebook and WhatsApp enable people to take their social networks with them.⁴⁰ They have the power to reach, accommodate and change everyone and the world.

2. Media experts and professionals in the church are generally encouraging the church to employ technology for increased efficiency and effectiveness in its administration responsibilities and evangelistic programmes.
3. The church also sees the need to adopt the use of social media so as to improve its image among its contemporaries and the youth.

³⁹ Fidelis Nkomazana, (2018), “The Role of Women, Theology and Ecumenical Organizations in the Rise of Pentecostal Churches in Botswana”, 181-202 in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa* (eds. A. Afolayan, O Yacob-Haliso & T. Falola), cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴⁰ Belew Shannon (2014), *The Art of Social Selling: Finding and Engaging Customs on Twitter, Facebook, Linkelin and Other Social Networks*, New York: Amacom; Glenda Boone (2017), *The Church Social Media Marketing Guide*, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform Online, <https://www.amazon.com/church>.

4. Age has a profound influence on the use of technology. The older the church leadership the less it will be ready to embrace technology. The AFM Gaborone, has in recent years seen the young generation rising to occupy key leadership positions in the church, who want to see the church adopting new media technologies in running its operations and activities.

The connections between the church and these networks will create new impacts at both local, national and global levels. Evangelization has always been a primary goal of the AFM, especially in preparation for the second coming of Christ. The use of the social media technologies is a very important tool for dissemination or expansion of the Gospel to the masses. Again, the members and the church as a whole deem the appropriation of the social media as an attempt to transform and Christianize popular culture and make it safe for consumption by the born again Christians, especially the youth. Social media is accepted and used as a weapon for God's purposes against Satan. It is a way of gaining territory, sanctification and teaching.

Studies on the role of social media seems to point to the understanding that it contributes towards creating and finding of meaning. When used in a church set up, it expresses an interest in the interrelations between God, the Christian community and society. As the members of the Pentecostal social group participated and contributed to the discussion of different issues, the lives of all Pentecostals become missionary.

Social media also defines African response to the Gospel, which represents the breakaway from the conservative and evangelical understanding of the Bible as interpreted from the pulpit to simplicity, immediacy, vibrancy and freedom in selection of songs, music and dance. Ogbu Kalu has observed that Pentecostal Christianity focuses and emphasizes specific miracles, vision, dreams and healing.⁴¹ This observation by Kalu⁴² is also evident in the AFM church, where interaction through social media reflects the intense religious experiences of the people, leading to a talk about seeing visions, dreaming dreams, experiencing miraculous healing and resulting in community building. In this way social media contributes to the growth and development of the church. It promotes the vision, dreams of the church, which in many ways determine the voice and message of the church, consequently believed to be the voice and message of God.

⁴¹Ogbu Kalu (2013), *African Christianity: An African Story*, Department of Church History, University of Pretoria, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2016/829>

⁴²Ibid, page 283

Through social media platforms, Pentecostal churches attract people from different social classes, gender and age groups, who seek for miracles, healing and deliverance. The understanding is shaped by the Pentecostal believes in power and prosperity.

Social Media enhances the communal aspects or notions of community of the Pentecostal Christianity within the AFM Block 7 Congregational Fellowship. This observation is also strongly expressed by Verschoor Kirss (2012:9) who says that Social Media can enhance religious practices through the expression and creation of religious communities. He argues that Social Media increases religion through church attendances, observance of rituals, preaching on YouTube and worship songs and dancing.⁴³Chaeyoon Lim and Robert D. Putnam (2010:) also observes that social networks offer strong evidence for social and participatory mechanisms shaping religious impact on life satisfaction.⁴⁴ Also supporting this observation, Sean F. Everton (2015) stated that social networks are crucial for the recruitment and retention of members of churches, the diffusion of religious ideas and practices and motivation of individuals to volunteer in church work and become politically active.⁴⁵Gabriel Faimau and Camden Behrens (2016) go a step further to observe that Facebook posts, reviews and comments on a religious community.⁴⁶ This is a powerful role played in Social Media promoting interaction among members and non-members; nurturing maturity; shaping religious identity and inter-religions encounters, thus nurturing reflexivity and contextuality and proximity faith-to-faith encounter of religions.⁴⁷

Social media offers much space for congregations to actively engage with sermons by posting messages, asking questions, sharing photos of church activities. It is a way of establishing online communities, which continue discussions throughout the week, not just on Sundays. It

⁴³ Verschoor – Kirss, Alex, (2012), Dynamic Interplay of Religion and Technology Online Social Networks, *Journal of Religion and Society*, January 2012 (14), (<https://www.researchgate.net/public>).

⁴⁴Chaeyoon Lim and Robert D. Putnam (2010:914), “Religion, Social Networks and Life Satisfaction”, *American Sociological Review* 75(6), 914-933, <https://asr.sagepub.com>.

⁴⁵Sean F. Everton (2015), “Networks and Religion: Ties that bind, loose, build up and tear down” *Journal of social structure*, 16(1), pp 1-34.

⁴⁶Gabriel Faimau and Camden Behrens, (2016), Facebook Religion and the Technologization of Religious Discourse: A Case Study of a Botswana – Based Prophetic Church, page 66, *Online Heidelberg Journal of Religion on the Internet*.

⁴⁷J.N.T. Kritzinger (2008) “Faith-to-Faith Missionary as encounterology” *Verbum Ecclesia* 29/3, 764-790 <http://doi.org/10.4102/Ne.V22913.31>.

allows people to share their personal experiences and provide opportunities to host online conversations about the Bible for local reading groups. These online engagements are used for reaching people who can't be in church personally.

Conclusion

The article has examined how the Apostolic Faith Mission Block 7, Gaborone has appropriated social media technologies to facilitate its operations, programmes and activities. The article outlined the major reasons the congregation through its departments, committees and leaders opted to use social media technologies. Among some of the reasons for the use of social media by the church was that it improved the service quality it offered to its members. It added more efficiency and effectiveness to the service of the church to its members.

Social media also become an instrument through which the church impacted not only its members but also communities with the gospel. It advanced, promoted and facilitated the evangelistic strategy of the church. The use of social media has practically impacted on the operations and growth of the Apostolic Faith Mission Block 7 congregation in a massive way and its role in the life the church continues to be evident in the different departments of the church.. The findings show that the adoption of social media by the church has had a great impact on the spread of the church message and activities. There is general belief among members, particularly the young generation, but also even among those that are not effectively using social media technologies, that its usage has contributed to a rapid and wider spread of the Gospel. These new technologies, have indeed, motivated the church to continue seeking for new strategies of evangelising the local communities, the nation and world as commanded by Matthew 28:20 and Acts 1:8.⁴⁸

The article also raised other important factors that have influenced the use of social media technologies as gender and age. The research observed that the fellowships of the sisters and youth rapidly adopted the use of social media and utilized it as a means of communication, evangelism and propagation of the gospel, than did the fellowships of the brother's fellowship and committees with dominated by older male leaders. As such the factors of gender and age become important in the appropriation of social media technologies.

⁴⁸ Lovemore Togarasei, *Mediating the Gospel: Pentecostal Christianity & Media Technology in Botswana & Zimbabwe*, Published online 23 April 2012, pages 257-274, <http://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2012.675740>.

The article has also observed that education facilitated technological progress. Apostolic Faith Mission Block 7 Gaborone being an urban based church attracts many tertiary going young people, who are advanced in these new technologies and are always available and willing to help the church appropriate these for the benefit of the church.

Interdenominational relations and church competitions for members in a city life has become an important factor that is pushing the church towards a spirit of excellence, efficiency and effectiveness. Social media is an important facility that has equipped the church to achieve these goals, hence their appropriation.

The use of social media has had an impact on the operations and growth of the church as a result of its effect on evangelism. The findings show that the adoption of social media by the church has had a great impact on the spread of the church message and activities. In conclusion, therefore, it must be pointed out that social media technologies have immensely contributed to the growth and spread of the Gospel. It has facilitated the Pentecostal mission to evangelise the nation and communities as commanded by Matthew 28:20 and Acts 1:8.⁴⁹

The popularity of social media makes it imperative for the church to take advantage of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It offers an opportunity for people outside to listen, know and appreciate what the church is doing. Through social media they are able to proclaim relationships, to connect with and stay connected with members of the congregation.

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⁴⁹ Lovemore Togarasei, *Mediating the Gospel: Pentecostal Christianity & Media Technology in Botswana & Zimbabwe*, Published online 23 April 2012, pages 257-274, <http://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2012.675740>.

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