Towards A Viable Framework for Social Media Utilization in Mediative Dialogue Adoptable by Baptist Pastors

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Abstract

Many faith-based organizations, especially the Nigerian Baptist Convention, have deployed many means to promote peaceful coexistence in the society in an attempt to achieve Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. One such means is mediative dialogue through social media. As the world has metamorphosed digitally and social media changes communication means globally, using social media through mediative dialogue will likely improve promoting peaceful coexistence through mediative dialogue by faith-based organizations. The study examined how the Convention's pastors use social media to promote peaceful coexistence through mediative dialogue in Baptist churches within the Ibadan metropolis. The study was done through three qualitative research methods: sample surveys, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The study focused on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The study discovers that many Baptist pastors in Ibadan have been using at least one social media platform. The study is corroborated by reviewing other related literatures. Specific responses and reviews were also given on each of the focused social media platforms. The study is concluded by giving some recommendations to faith-based organizations generally and pastors of the Nigerian Baptist Convention specifically on how to deploy social media in the process of promoting peaceful coexistence in the society through mediative dialogue.

Introduction

Peaceful coexistence is paramount in any society. The Nigerian Baptist Convention as a faith-based organization has deployed many means to promote peaceful coexistence in the society in an attempt to achieve Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The world has metamorphosed digitally and social media changes communication means globally. So, using social media will likely improve promotion of peaceful coexistence by the Nigerian Baptist Convention and other faith-based organizations. The study examined how pastors of the Convention use social media to promote peaceful coexistence in Baptist churches within Ibadan city. The study focused specifically on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram. This paper aims to review the responses of selected Baptist pastors in this city. The paper also reviews some related previous literatures in corroboration with the

responses of the pastors. Specific responses and reviews were also given on each of the focused social media platforms.

Conceptual Clarification

There have been many uses of the word "pastor" in the contemporary world. However, a Baptist pastor, as used in this study, is a local Baptist church pastor who is a called, trained, and possibly ordained person that is "called" by a local church to be the spiritual and administrative leader of the church. This is in contrast to other pastors or ministers of the gospel who are denominational workers, missionaries/evangelists, and teachers/lecturers in Bible colleges and theological seminaries (*Nigerian Baptist Convention Scheme of Service* [2021 edition]). In churches that practice full or partial multi-staff ministry (that is, where there is more than one full-time or part-time pastor), the head pastor (or senior pastor) is simply referred to here as the pastor while the other supporting pastors are referred to as associate pastors. These associate pastors may specifically be in charge of an aspect of the church like evangelism and missions, education, music, youth, children, and others.

Mediation is simply an intervention to resolve a conflict between two or more disagreeing parties. It is a procedure in which an impartial mediator helps conflicting parties through constructive discussion and negotiation of the contending issue to reach a mutually agreeable resolution. Mediative Dialogue is an art of mediating between two or more conflicting parties by conversing separately with each party through constructive discussion and negotiation of the contending issue to make the contending groups reach a mutually agreeable resolution.

Peace has generally been defined as "freedom from disturbance, tranquillity, absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, violence, and about peaceful co-existence" (Chukwu, 2021) or "justice, development, respect, tolerance and love among people" (Jonah, Abdullahi, & Olawale, 2018). It has been described as a manifestation of harmony with the absence of violence, conflict behaviours, and freedom from fear or violence. It also means a state of quiet or serenity; freedom from uproar or protest; general order or tranquillity; freedom from violence or uprising; a state of reconciliation after conflict or hostility (Enaigbe & Igbinoghene, 2016).

McFarland & Ployhart (2015) simply defined social media as "digital Web 2.0 platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration across people." Many researchers have categorized various types of social media by basing them on their distinctive characteristics. Among these, according to Lukindo (2016), are "blogs [and microblogs (like Twitter, Koo)], cooperative projects (such as Wikipedia), content communities (such as YouTube), virtual social world (such as second life) and social networking sites (such as Facebook and MySpace)." Nonetheless, this researcher agrees with Oseni, Dingley, & Hart (2018) that grouped social media into only two categories: online social network services (SNS) or online social networks (ONS) and instant messaging (IM) apps. On most occasions, the term "social media" is used interchangeably with "online social network services". Consequently, many people disregard instant messaging (IM) apps when referring to or discussing social media. Figure 1 shows the logos of some popular social media platforms.

Figure 1: Logos of Some Popular Social Media Platforms (Wise, n.d.)

As shown in Figure 2, only Facebook and Twitter as social network services (SNS) and WhatsApp and Telegram as instant messaging apps out of many categories of social media are focused on in the study. Against the backdrop that many attempts have been made by other researchers to explain each of these social media platforms and their origins, this researcher did not include such in this paper.
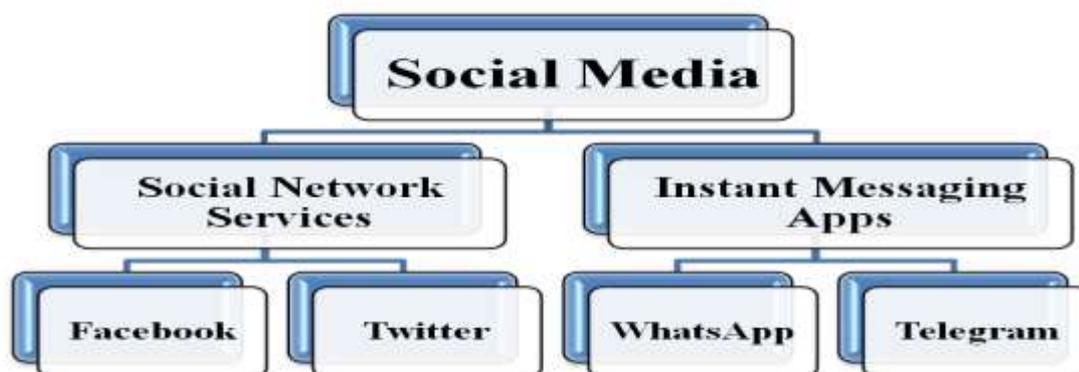
Figure 2: Some Selected Categories of Social Media
Source: Researcher's Construct 2021

Methodology
The targeted population of this study consisted of Nigerian Baptist pastors of churches in the Baptist Associations in the Ibadan metropolis. About two hundred and twenty-eight (228) pastors in the Ibadan metropolis had records with the Ibadan Baptist Conference when this research was carried out (Ibadan Baptist Conference, 2019). Out of these pastors, one hundred and eighty-three (183) (representing 88.2%) were members of the WhatsApp group as at the time the mini-questionnaire was sent out. One hundred and twenty-six (126) pastors (representing 68.8%) responded to the mini-questionnaire. Of interest for this section of the research is the presence of the respondents in each of Facebook and Twitter as social network services (SNS) and WhatsApp and Telegram as instant messaging (IM) apps that are the focus of this study. Figure 3 gives a graphic representation of this presence.
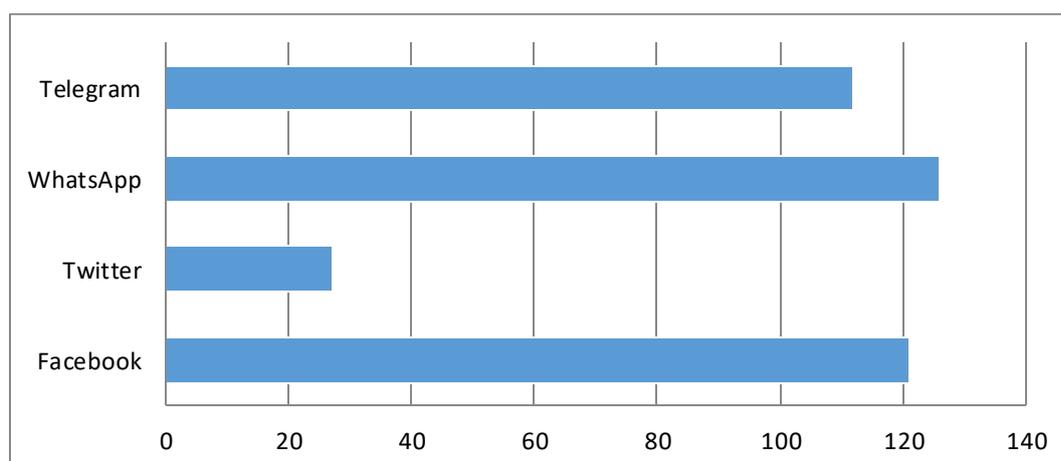
Figure 3: Presence of Ibadan Baptist Pastors on Social Media
Source: Researcher's Construct 2021

From Figure 3, one hundred and twenty-one (121) respondents (representing 96.03%) are on Facebook; twenty-seven (27) respondents (representing 21.42%) are on Twitter; all the one hundred and twenty-six (126) pastors (representing 100%) are on WhatsApp Messenger; while one hundred and twelve (112) respondents (representing 88.88%) are on Telegram Messenger. These findings are similar to findings of another study carried out in Ghana among church leaders where "church leaders and church members, in general, possessed at least some basic computer skills to enable them to access and navigate social media platforms adopted by the churches" (Animante, Akussah, & Darko-Adjei, 2021)

The sample of the population for the study consisted of twenty pastors (fourteen males and six females) randomly and purposively selected from the pool of church pastors with experience in the use of social media in the Ibadan metropolis. Inferences were drawn from this sample to the targeted population of the study. There was also consideration of some main officers at the headquarters of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Ibadan.

This research work was qualitative. The primary data for this study were semi-structured interviews with some respondents randomly selected from the sampled population. The secondary data analyzed in this research are as many documents that the researcher could have access to in local churches, associations, and the conference within the scope of the study and in the headquarters of the Nigerian Baptist Convention at Oke Bola, Ibadan, Nigeria. The study is corroborated by reviewing other related literatures.

Reports and Discussion of Findings
Against the backdrop that a purposive sampling through a mini-questionnaire sent by WhatsApp Messenger was used, all the respondents interviewed are using social media to promote peaceful coexistence among their church members. Some of the pastors interviewed who are in the age range of sixty and sixty-five years claimed to "…belong to the 'old school' and not that skillful in the use of social media" (Samuel O. Oladimeji, personal communication, June 1, 2021). Conversely, most of the pastors are favourably disposed to the use of social media generally in their pastoral ministries, particularly in resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence among their church members and people in society. This is against the backdrop that social media use has become extensively accepted in people's daily living throughout the world (Bonsaksen, et al., 2021). Kumar (2020) affirmed that

…social media is becoming an integral part of present society. It plays a vital

role in our daily life. No one can separate self from its influence. Besides being educative role, social media increases connections and communications. In addition to this, it also builds bridges over barriers and strengthens relationships. Furthermore, it encourages community participation and boosts one's confidence.

Zhang & Yu (2022) scholars supported this affirmation, "social media platforms facilitate the fast and easy exchange of information through sharing, discussion and communication, producing a huge amount of digital content." Furthermore, Oludeyi (2020) asserted, "…the rate at which social media is transforming people's social lives, influencing how they organize themselves, relate with friends, colleagues and family, share thoughts and showcase themselves." To corroborate this, Rizwan, et al. (2021) asserted, "Numerous benefits and global use of social media (SM) have made it part and parcel of lives of the peoples." Despite this, a respondent described social media as ambivalent which can be constructive and, at the same time, destructive. According to this respondent, people tend to promote the destructive aspects of social media more than the constructive aspects (Israel Adelani Akanji, personal communication, November 8, 2021). Many scholars have carried out studies on these destructive aspects and constructive aspects of social media. They referred to them as positive and negative impacts or effects of social media (for such studies, see Khouli [2013]; Bouffard, Giglio, & Zheng [2021]; Siddiqui & Singh [2016]; Abbas, et al. [2019]; Kennedy [2019]; Akram & Kumar [2017]; and Nadkarni, Charkha, & Kulkarni [2018]). On the other hand, Nsereka & Nwanze (2021) gave reasons why

> …many Christian organizations, either out of sheer religious fanaticism, apprehension or misinformation have written off the Internet as some "unrighteous" thing that is apparently not fit as a channel for religious messages hence they have literally thrown away the baby with the bath water. Their position is predicated on the many ignoble, vicious and immoral posts on the Internet via the social media platforms.

One respondent asserted that social media now "…reduces stress and give an opportunity to work at one's pace" (Moses M. Ojuade, personal communication, May 28, 2021). In the words of Baytiyeh (2019), "…social media has opened up new opportunities for public engagement and interactive dialog…." Another respondent opined that social media also "…makes things easy in terms of the arrangement of meetings, following up on discussed issues, and so on" (Tunji Taiwo, personal communication, June 1, 2021). Machmud, et al. (2021) buttressed this opinion: "Social media promotes effortless communication, and supports the achievement of common goals and interests through an impact on societal network formation." To further support why pastors should use social media, Adewara (2018) gave and briefly explained sixteen reasons why every pastor should be on social media. These reasons, according to him, are:

1) Social media builds relationships with the pastor's community;
2) Social media builds a relationship with those outside the community of the church of the pastor;
3) Social media gets pastors into places they otherwise would not have access to;
4) Social media is where people are;
5) Social media grows pastor's personal impact on people;
6) The church members of the pastors are on social media;
7) Pastors get to see what other churches are doing on social media;
8) Social media gives pastors a peek into the real, everyday living of their people;
9) Social media can help pastors to disseminate information or announcements;
10) Social media makes communication with people more effective;

11) Social media is another mission field where souls should be won from anywhere the pastor is;
12) Social media can help pastors to promote their ministries;
13) Social media advertising is most effective and cheap;
14) Social media can help pastors to raise funds for their ministries;
15) Live streaming of church events keeps the church members of the pastor in touch; and
16) There can be feedback and research through social media.

Gallacher, Heerdink, & Hewstone (2021) asserted that "The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and the Internet allows individuals to connect and interact in ways that were previously impossible." However, Martínez-Díaz & Fernández-Ruiz (2021) thought that the growing acceptance of social media is "closely linked to the evolution of society, not only with regard to an easier access to new technologies, but also to the society's new lifestyle and new models of interpersonal relationships." A respondent observed that many pastors were indifferent to the use of social media and did not appreciate the use of social media for a long time until the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown situation in 2020 when many pastors were forced to make use of social media in their ministries (Dickson Madoghwe, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Nevertheless, one of the respondents opined that the use of social media among pastors would depend on the context that such pastors find themselves and the calibre of people they are ministering to (Mary A. Ayodele, personal communication, May 10, 2021). To corroborate this, Lanz, et al. (2021) advised mediators of the "…need to be aware of the different types of [social media] platforms, including open platforms (for example, Twitter), closed platforms (for example, Signal), and platforms that have both open and closed components (for example, Facebook)."

Reuter, S. Stieglitz, & M. Imran (2019) opined that "…social media is used in crises and conflicts for different reasons and by several actors." Nonetheless, some of the interviewed pastors argued that there is no point in using social media to resolve conflicts since they are physically close to their church members. Some of these pastors were philosophical by saying in Yoruba, *"Oju ni oro wa."* That is, it is better to confront a person physically than relate with them through social media. Gabriel, Adebowale, & Omotehinse (2021) expressed a similar fear in online counselling. Therefore, they advised,

> Online counsellors need to be sure that the information provided the client across the internet or any other online media is received and understood as intended in order to determine the type of feedback that will be effective in the counselling relationship, the next line of action in the counselling process, referral provisions and the effectiveness of the counselling relationship itself.

Some weeks after the interactions of this researcher with the selected pastors, this researcher received a WhatsApp message from one of the pastors who strictly pleaded anonymity. Below is the text of the message with the immediate response of the researcher:

> [31/07, 16:16] ... : Hello Reverend. Let me share this with you on condition that you will never disclose the real source of this information to anyone no matter who the person may be. You may however include it in the research you are doing currently on condition of strict anonymity. After your interaction with me on the use of social media to mediatively resolve conflicts among my church members some weeks ago, I have started handling a case now that involves an intending couple that vows not to sit down face to face to resolve the issue that is threatening their wedding ceremony. The ceremony is to take place in the next three months. One of the parties accuses the other of infidelity, and the matter was brought to me as the church pastor of the lady in the relationship. Since both of

them are not ready to meet physically with me to resolve the issue, I have started using Whatsapp Messenger to interact with them. After some separate individual chats with each of them, they have agreed to have mediative dialogue sessions with me through a WhatsApp group that I created for the three of us.
[31/07, 16:27] Bayo Afolaranmi (Pastor): Thanks so much for this. I will include it in my reports based on the condition of anonymity as you requested (A private WhatsApp message received by the researcher on July 31, 2021).

Baytiyeh (2021) corroborated this argument and the experience shared above by asserting that "…social media could offer a platform for people to confront each other and conduct rational discussions to form common understandings, even across socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic divisions."

Whether there is a discussion to resolve a conflict physically or otherwise, social media can be used for follow-up on what has been discussed (Kayode Oyedemi, personal communication, May 17, 2021). This is regarded as a supplementary role. Nonetheless, Subramanian (2017) disagreed with this and argued that social media is gradually taking centre stage in people's interaction with one another. Either way, Décieux, Heinen, & Willems (2019) thought that people (especially the younger generation) are now interacting "…both online and offline and switch between these dimensions or even interact online and offline simultaneously", making the two – physical interaction and social media interaction – to stand side by side.

Social media, despite "its strength and weaknesses", is viewed as "a good means of reaching out to or communicating with church members and non-church members" (Samuel B. Fatoki, personal communication, May 11, 2021). As asserted by Abodohoui, Mohiuddin, & Su (2014), communication is becoming more effective because of the introduction of many digital means of communication, especially social media. Similarly, according to Puldu, Terwase, & Umoh (2019), social media aids communication. The use of social media is crucial in conflict resolution and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in society. As one of the respondents observed, physical contact cannot be used as the only means of resolving conflicts, especially in this digital age (Dickson Madoghwe, personal communication, July 27, 2021). In the words of a pastor, "Social media today is a good means of resolving conflicts because the entire world has moved from analogue to digital ways of doing things" (Samuel AK Olaleye, personal communication, June 2, 2021). Another pastor corroborated this with this statement: "If not because of social media, it may not be easy to see people in conflicts, especially during the COVID-19. Social media has made many things easy" (Toyin Adebayo, personal communication, May 8, 2021). Machmud, et al. (2021) corroborated these views by opining that "...social media plays an important role in mid and post-disaster management. This is achieved through listening, integration, collaborative networking, creating cohesion, fundraising, providing monitoring tools and research media [that] aid effective communication and coordination…." Animante, Akussah, & Darko-Adjei (2021) also supported these views by stressing, "Social media has become one of these critical digital platforms being utilised by these entities to carry out their agenda in terms of propagating information to a larger populace."

In the words of Bastani, Hakimzadeh, & Bahrami (2021) in regard to COVID-19, social media "has become an important medium for information dissemination during the [COVID-19] pandemics and is playing a crucial roles…." COVID-19 did not only affect church members and the pastoral ministries of Baptist pastors in Ibadan, but as Sachs, et al. (2021) reported, the "pandemic is a setback for sustainable development everywhere."

Furthermore, social media makes communication more accessible as they break the distance barrier no matter where people are. The world has become a global village where people can

be reached at a click of a computer or a mobile phone that is Internet-enabled. Puldu, Terwase, & Umoh (2019), in a recent study, reiterated this fact. A respondent stressed, "You cannot meet everyone physically. Using social media will go a long way because one can use social media in the comfort of one's office, room, or anywhere" (Mary A. Adeoye, personal communication, May 10, 2021). Many pastors interviewed cited many instances when they have used social media to mediate between conflicting parties, especially married couples, when they (the pastors) could not readily meet the parties because of distance. This is corroborated by Kim, et al. (2021) when they asserted, "Social media platforms, such as Facebook, are considered useful arenas for closing potential divides across countries."

A pastor opined that "…using social media may reduce tensions that may arise if the conflicting parties are together. This allows parties to open up" (Moses M. Ojuade, personal communication, May 28, 2021). A conflicting party may turn a physical mediative dialogue session into a rowdy one if provoked by what the other party says and does. Nonetheless, the fact that the contending groups are not in the same place but are relating through social media will prevent such unruly occurrences. The pastor, who is the mediator, will know when to pause or end a social media session when the tension is rising. Conversely, a conflicting party may find it difficult to express himself in a physical mediative dialogue session but the conflicting party may be free to say anything he wants to say through social media. Oluchukwu (2021) corroborated this by giving this example: "when a man offends his wife and does not know how to approach her in person, he can make use of phone messenger to send a text of apologies to her, and this has a chance of resolving the conflict between them."

On the other hand, some people may abuse the privilege of using social media to resolve conflict, as a pastor gave an instance of somebody who started to be involved in cyberbullying when the pastor was mediating in a conflict situation (Benjamin Areo, personal communication, May 28, 2021). It is the respondent's opinion that such abusive actions should be one of the rules or guidelines that the mediator should have warned against before starting the online mediative dialogue session (Benjamin Areo, personal communication, May 28, 2021). Cheriyan, Savarimuthu, & Cranefield (2021) attested to this online nuisance thus: "…online abuse has been a pressing issue for decades owing to the widespread use of the internet, which forces nations to enact legislation to curtail hate speech on online platforms." These researchers recommended detective devices to be included on social media to curtail the "offensive language." Agapoglou, et al. (2021) called for "…the need for resilience, critical awareness and safe online navigation emerges as a significant necessity of our times, indicating that digital literacy practices should now inherently integrate critical components to respond both to social and digital encounters."

A respondent opined that "…in expressing one's views through social media, there must be a guarantee that none of the conflicting parties will divulge any information without one's permission" (Samuel B. Fatoki, personal communication, May 11, 2021). This is one of the fears that many people have in using social media to resolve conflicts. The respondent further suggested that "It is not advisable to use social media to resolve conflicts when the conflicting parties cannot keep secret or information that should not be disclosed" (Samuel B. Fatoki, personal communication, May 11, 2021).

As confirmed in a study, the Internet generally and social media specifically are revolutionizing the world and the means of communication in the world (see Ajala, 2021). So, a pastor asserted that "…any pastor that does not know about social media is deficient in a way in his miniseries" (Samuel AK Olaleye, personal communication, June 2, 2021). The reason is that things are not done the same way they have done ten years ago. In fact, the global COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown and physical or social pandemic have changed the ways many things are being done in the world in the last two years (Iglesias-Sanchez, et al., 2021). As a result, pastors and other persons in the world are now

thinking of alternative ways of doing things to meet up with the changing world. This was affirmed in a study carried out a study by this researcher on how the Internet could be used as an alternative means of pastoral ministry during the COVID-19 lockdown in the year 2020 (see Afolaranmi [2020a]; Afolaranmi [2020b]; and Afolaranmi [2020c]). Social media, in particular, is seen by one of the respondents as an excellent means of communication and conflict resolution, especially in the post-COVID-19 era (David T. Hambolu, personal communication, June 3, 2021). Some researchers have referred to this post-COVID-19 period as a "new normal" period that individuals and organisations should adapt to (see Siddiqui & Singh [2016]; Undiyaundeye [2014]; Khouli [2013]; and Price-Mitchell [2019]). A respondent asserted that social media is one of the "new normal" that pastors have to adapt to (Dickson Madoghwe, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Clark & Alberti (2021) corroborated this as the "new normal" period occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic has made many peacebuilders to turn from the "real world" of face-to-face interactions to the digital space.

Nevertheless, some of the pastors are sceptical about the use of social media. One pastor categorically asserted, "…social media can cause or escalate conflicts" (Victor Badaru, personal communication, May 28, 2021). This scepticism is understandable with some abuses and disadvantages of the use of social media, as highlighted by some scholars (see Siddiqui & Singh [2016]; Undiyaundeye [2014]; Khouli [2013]; and Price-Mitchell [2019]). Despite this, one should focus on the advantages, rather than the disadvantages and abuses, of using social media and making good use of digital means of communication (Ajala, 2021). This researcher has earlier expressed a similar opinion after highlighting some of the challenges of using the Internet for the Gospel and Christian ministries (see Afolaranmi, 2009b).

Dave (2021) has commended social media as a means of communication that is "…complementing existing forms of face-to-face gatherings." Nevertheless, a respondent, having regarded using social media as a welcome development, thought that "…using social media should not rule out face-to-face communication" (Faramade E. Odunayo, personal communication, May 14, 2021). The respondent argued further that no matter how good social media may be, the tested traditional ways of interacting with people are still better and should not be jettisoned. (Faramade E. Odunayo, personal communication, May 14, 2021). Despite this, social media should also be given a chance to become one of the proven and accepted ways of interacting with people especially in resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence.

As asserted by Ajala (2021), the younger generation is more at home with social media and other technological tools. Consequently, to reiterate the importance of social media to the youth, a youth pastor counselled, "If you want to retain your youth and teenagers, you have to be in their world by being on social media. This will prevent losing the youth to other churches that are technologically inclined" (Faramade E. Odunayo, personal communication, May 14, 2021). This youth pastor buttressed her argument that youth and teenagers prefer to interact more with their pastors on social media than any other means.

A pastor averred that his church "…has prepared for the use of social media even before the outbreak of COVID-19 that shut churches down [in the year 2020]" (Benjamin Oyetunde Atoyebi, personal communication, May 25, 2021). This really helps this church as the church is doing almost every church activity also on social media (Benjamin Oyetunde Atoyebi, personal communication, May 25, 2021). This is a proactive way of approaching the use of social media in pastoral ministry. It is this pastor's opinion that pastors should be proactive, not only reactive, in their approach to the use of social media. This will make the continuous innovations in this digital age not meet the pastors uninformed and unprepared (Edward Alabi, personal communication, May 27, 2021).

A pastor opined that "…people that will use social media for mediative dialogue must be well

versed in using [social media]" (John O. Odejayi, personal communication, May 18, 2021). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Rome was not built in a day. One should not wait until one is well versed in using social media before starting using it. Practice, constant practice, makes perfect. As one is practising using social media, one will be becoming more versed in using it, and as time goes on, one will be well versed. Social media and other aspects of the Internet are so exciting that if one creates interest and time for them, one would be surprised about the progress one would be making in understanding using them.

1. **Facebook**

Many pastors interviewed have the view that "Facebook exposes secrets" because everything that one posts on Facebook will be visible by many people, especially Facebook "friends" and other "friends" of one's Facebook friends (Moses M. Ojuade, personal communication, May 28, 2021). This view is making many of the pastors to be sceptical and careful of using Facebook for conflict resolution in general and mediative dialogue in particular. In line with this view, a pastor asserted, "Facebook cannot be useful for resolving interpersonal conflicts" (Samuel B. Fatoki, personal communication, May 11, 2021), and another pastor opined that "using Facebook should be restricted!" (Samuel AK Olaleye, personal communication, June 2, 2021). However, these views are not totally correct as many other pastors, Facebook users and scholars attest to the usefulness of Facebook. A respondent opined that Facebook "…can even be used to monitor the process of conflict resolution and project to other people outside the process that progress is been made in the conflict resolution process. This even aids the process. It can even be used to announce the result of the end of conflict" (Tunji Taiwo, personal communication, June 1, 2021).

Many respondents admitted that their major use of Facebook is to post messages on their Facebook walls. These messages may be in the form of short instructive quotes, teachings and preaching of the word of God, and giving information and announcements about the activities of their churches. Interestingly, most pastors did not know that they could use this Facebook feature of wall postings to post messages on peace and conflict resolution. This is a preventive and proactive measure to inculcate the spirit of harmony in the members of their churches and prevent conflict situations that may arise in the future. If any conflict arises, as conflict is inevitable, pastors can refer to such postings in the process of resolving the conflict. Other features of Facebook can be used to resolve conflicts, especially mediative dialogue. These features are highlighted and explained briefly in relation to mediative dialogue as explained by this researcher in a recently published book (see Afolaranmi, 2023).

2. **Twitter**

Many pastors interviewed admitted that they are not on Twitter, not to talk of using Twitter to resolve conflict or promote peaceful coexistence among their church members. A respondent held that he is using Twitter mostly on commenting on political matters based on biblical injunctions (Moses Adelodun Ayangbile, personal communication, May 25, 2021). Some of the respondents also admitted that while they are not using Twitter as a person, their administrative staff members are using it on behalf of the church to post Tweets about the church activities. In support of this, Adewara (2018) has proposed that every pastor needs social media manager that will help the pastor manage his activities and ministries online and also help the church to manage its activities and ministries online. Some of the respondents also suggested some essential skills that such social media managers should have. Some features of Twitter can be used for resolving conflicts, especially mediative dialogue. These features are highlighted and explained briefly in relation to mediative dialogue as explained by this researcher in a recently published book (see Afolaranmi, 2023).

3. WhatsApp Messenger

Since WhatsApp Messenger was used to sample the pastors interviewed in this research purposively, all the respondents are using this instant messaging app for personal and ministerial purposes. WhatsApp Messenger is considered "too effective, convenient and potent more than other social media because more people stay more on WhatsApp than others" (John O. Odejayi, personal communication, May 18, 2021). The most common use of the app is basic communication of sending and receiving messages as it has taken the place of conventional text messaging (short messaging service [SMS]). Another feature of WhatsApp Messenger that many pastors are using is WhatsApp voice message.

In responding to a question about the use of WhatsApp Messenger, some of the pastors interviewed mixed up their use of phone calls and text messages with social media. This mixed-up is understandable to this researcher because bulk text messages (web-based SMS or text messages through the Internet) were part of what he used for a case study in an earlier study among some of the Baptist pastors in the Ibadan metropolis (see Afolaranmi, 2009a). However, some of these pastors admitted that using phone calls and sending text messages have been a stepping stone for them to start using social media, especially instant messaging apps like WhatsApp Messenger and Telegram Messenger.

One respondent argued that it is cheaper to speak for a longer time through WhatsApp voice messages than conventional telephone calls (Kayode Oyedemi, personal communication, May 17, 2021). This can be used for prayers and counselling as the mediative dialogue session continues. Baytiyeh (2021) has recently affirmed the cheaper, easier, and faster features of the Internet and social media that made modern technologies endeared to many people in this contemporary digital world. Animante, Akussah, & Darko-Adjei (2021) also affirmed this in their study.

While some of the pastors admitted that they have not been using WhatsApp Messenger for conflict resolution, some said that it is being used as a follow-up to their physical interactions with their mediatees. The pastors using the app to resolve conflicts argued that the app, especially the one-on-one conversation through it, protects the privacy of the mediatees more than other aspects of social media.

One respondent who does not use WhatsApp Messenger to resolve conflicts in a church setting cited an example of using it to interact with two siblings outside a church setting who were having a conflict. The respondent mediated the conflict through WhatsApp Messenger and could resolve the conflict between them (Deborah Taiwo, personal communication, June 3, 2021). When asked by this researcher why the respondent has not been using the same mode to resolve conflicts in her church, the respondent admitted that she has not had the opportunity and that she would readily make use of the opportunity if it comes.

The use of WhatsApp Messenger in relation to peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution to a respondent is for "…corrections and guidance on postings by church members" (Esther E. Babalola, personal communication, May 18, 2021). That is, the respondent's use of WhatsApp Messenger is to monitor what her church members are posting on the WhatsApp groups of the church and correct or guide the members as to the appropriateness or otherwise of such postings. According to this respondent, this has prevented and de-escalated many conflicts among the church members.

Apart from the features of WhatsApp Messenger mentioned above, other features of the app can be explored to promote peaceful coexistence and resolve conflicts among church members. Against the backdrop that WhatsApp Messenger has become the most widely used social media in the world in general (Rosenfeld, et al., 2018) and Nigeria in particular (Statista, 2017), this researcher compiled and published some of these features and their uses in Christian ministries some time ago (Afolaranmi, 2020d). An adapted version of some of these features in relation to peaceful coexistence and resolving conflicts is reproduced and

presented by this researcher in a recently published book (see Afolaranmi, 2023).

4. Telegram Messenger

Telegram Messenger is a relatively new instant messaging app that many Baptist pastors in the Ibadan metropolis are now migrating to and using in their ministries. This fact is reflected in the responses of most of the respondents. Some respondents even disclosed that they had not started using the app. The relative newness of the app makes many pastors not to be using it for resolving conflicts. However, because of the strength of Telegram groups and channels of accommodation of many people – at most two hundred thousand (200,000) – more than WhatsApp groups and broadcast lists that could accommodate only two hundred and fifty-six (256) people until recently makes pastors start exploring Telegram Messenger for their ministries and the activities of their churches (Udavant, 2021). Nevertheless, a WhatsApp group can now accommodate more than one thousand people (Schroeder, 2022). Besides, WhatsApp Messenger now has a "community" feature – a sort of group – that can accommodate over two thousand people (Birney, 2022). Still, these cannot be compared to the Telegram Messenger group or channel that can at most two hundred thousand (200,000) people. So, a church with a membership of over two hundred and fifty-six people can easily be in only one Telegram group or channel.

Some other advantages of Telegram over WhatsApp were shared on a WhatsApp group. These advantages are:

a) You can go back and EDIT your posts without losing position in the discussion thread.

b) You can REPLACE/CHANGE pictures/video if you inadvertently post a wrong one and still maintain same position on the discussion thread. Just double tap on comment/picture/video to reveal menu.

c) You can delete your comments/pictures/videos for everyone.

d) Administrators can delete any unacceptable post/pictures/videos for everyone.

e) In addition to ability to remove, administrators can temporarily suspend erring subscribers from posting but permit READ only access. This is a major drawback on WhatsApp in managing the excesses of some subscribers who relentlessly flout rules governing a group.

f) Administrators can PIN important post to the top. This makes it visible for as long as desired. On WhatsApp, important messages are lost in the thread and subscribers will need to scroll up the thread to find it.

g) You can do almost everything you can do with Facebook posts on Telegram.

h) And many more ... .including BOLD/ITALICS of text font just like MS Word. Simply highlight and click on the three dots on the top right corner to reveal menu ("Some Advantages of Telegram over WhatsApp." For more advantages of Telegram over WhatsApp, see T. Sutikno, et al., 2016).

For a respondent, his use of Telegram Messenger is for training and teaching (Joseph O. Afolabi, personal communication, June 1, 2021). As pointed out by another respondent, "One disadvantage of Telegram is that a new group member can have access to previous information that one may not want the new member to know" (Samuel AK Olaleye, personal communication, June 2, 2021). This may be a disadvantage, especially for mediative dialogue, but to a respondent, it is an advantage because it serves the purpose of recording past events and sessions in the mediative dialogue process (Victor Badaru, personal communication, May 28, 2021). More features of Telegram Messenger in relation to promoting peaceful coexistence and mediative dialogue are highlighted by this researcher in a recently published book (see Afolaranmi, 2023).

The Viable Framework

To underscore the importance of social media to the ministries of a pastor in general, a pastor rhetorically asked: "What would have happened to the church and pastoral ministries in this contemporary age, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown, if there are no social media?" (Samuel AK Olaleye, personal communication, June 2, 2021). Animante, Akussah, & Darko-Adjei (2021) succinctly corroborated this by asserting that "…social media platforms have become invaluable tools for churches to survive in this technological age." Almost all the pastors interviewed agreed that social media are veritable tools to be deployed in mediative dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts and promoting the peaceful coexistence of church members and other people. It is against this backdrop that made Haans (2021) advise church leaders to "teach and train [their church members] to be actively involved in [in doing God's works] by utilizing social media."

However, as observed by two respondents, the nature of the church and the personality of each pastor will determine the aspects of social media they would have an interest in exploring (Mary A. Ayodele, personal communication, May 10, 2021, and Rachel A. Lateju, personal communication, June 7, 2021). In the words of a pastor, "If I discover that people are using any aspect of social media more than other aspects, or one aspect of social media is becoming more popular among people, I will learn how to use such aspect and start using it to reach out to the people" (John O. Odejayi, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Therefore, based on most of the discussions above, there is a viable framework that church pastors of the Nigerian Baptist Convention can adopt. This framework encourages the deployment of social media in mediative dialogue and peacebuilding. This is against the backdrop that the world has metamorphosed into a digital one where social media is making tremendous impacts on the way people communicate with one another (Appel, et al., 2020). Thus, every pastor should be ready to explore and use as many aspects of social media as possible depending on which of the social media are common to their church members in their pastoral ministries to promote the peaceful coexistence of their church members and other people in the society and resolve conflicts (especially through mediative dialogue) among them. The interrelation of the three themes is depicted in Figure 4 below. This will likely promote sustainable peace in churches specifically and the society at large. It will likely make Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations – promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development – more achievable before 2030.

Figure 4: Interrelation of Social Media Usage with Pastoral Ministries and Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Coexistence

Source: Researcher's Construct 2021

Recommendations

Based on this study, and against the backdrop that the Internet and social media have metamorphosed the world into a digital world,

1. Pastors should be well-versed in the use of the Internet and social media.
2. Pastors should start using social media in their ministries, especially in promoting peaceful coexistence in the society.
3. Pastors should not only be reactive to the evolution of social media, they should be proactive so that social media emerging trends will not be meeting them unprepared or unaware.
4. Pastors should encourage their church members to be using social media positively so that the members will not be left behind in social media emerging trends.
5. The government should encourage people to use social media positively by creating and implementing encouraging policies on the use of social media.
6. Electric supply should be more constant and Internet connectivity should be stronger to motivate people who want to use social media.

Areas of Further Research

Some areas of further research were discovered in the course of this study. These areas are:

1. There is a need to research how other categories of social media (apart from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp Messenger and Telegram Messenger) can promote sustainable peace and resolve conflicts through mediative dialogue and other means of conflict resolution. Other categories of social media relevant to the promotion of sustainable peace and conflict resolution as identified in this study are Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, MySpace, Vimeo, Ning, Wikipedia, Pinterest.com, and some indigenous social media platforms in Nigeria such as Nairaland, allAfrica, NAIJA.com, OnlineNigeria, YNaija.com, Amverified.ng as online social network sites. Other identified instant messaging apps in relation to the promotion of sustainable peace and conflict resolution are Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, Imo Messenger, and Viber.
2. There is a need to research the extent cyberbully, fake (and unverified or unauthorised) news (or information), and other vices of social media are negatively affecting the use of social media in promoting sustainable peace and resolving conflicts.

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