Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

The Engagement of Digital Technology and Social Media at Promise Land Church Following COVID-19

A Thesis Project Submitted to

the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

By

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

The Engagement of Digital Technology and Social Media at Promise Land Church following COVID-19
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Liberty University - John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2021
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This research project aims to explore the full integration of digital technology and social media at a local church following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic formed a global perspective, consisting of so-called "new rules" of churchgoing resulting from different social engagement expectations, cleanliness, and protecting vulnerable populations. During and following the pandemic, the world awaited sheltering-in-place and social distancing to return to some semblance of normalcy. Considering these changes, most churches struggled to understand how to maintain and proliferate the gospel. The focus of this study is based on a local non-denominational church that failed to predict expository preaching and teaching transition to digital platforms. However, we live in a world where digital technology and platforms such as the Internet are increasingly intersecting with our spiritual lives. The Internet also serves as a mechanism in the way Christians conduct church. Within a digital construct, the church can maintain preaching and teaching for its regular audience while engaging a vast unseen social media user sector. The study project includes results from a survey, an interview questionnaire, and a focus group from the church membership and those who affiliate with the church on social media. The results were used to provide the basis for process improvement initiatives aimed at achieving full integration of digital technology and social media to maintain and proliferate the gospel following the pandemic.

Abstract length: 225 words

Keywords: digital technology, social media, expository preaching, and teaching
Dedication

To the only wise God, be glory forever through Jesus Christ. If it had not been for His gentle whisper all those years ago that culminated with a persuasive shout, I would not have reached this major milestone in my spiritual walk. I will always lean on His everlasting arms.

To my family: Shauna, Kevin, Leonard, Jr., Xavier, and Riomi. You have watched me burn the midnight oil to complete assignments all the while working a full-time job and managing a household. Thank you for your prayers, patience, and persistence that I finish this race.

To my local church, especially Dr. James E. King, Sr. You always said that “ignorance is out of style.” Thank you for keeping that motto front and center before me during these past few years. Thanks to Pastor Robert Lee and Minister Kym Brown. You inspired me to explore my full potential in the teaching and administrative ministry. Thanks to my seniors’ group who allowed me to take time away from them to fulfill this educational goal. Thanks to all who inspired and pushed me throughout this journey.
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Abbreviations

DMIN   Doctor of Ministry
LUSOD  Liberty University School of Divinity
PLC    Promise Land Church
Chapter 1

Introduction

Myron Pierce asserts that the world, as we knew it, is gone forever.¹ The writer is alluding to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) reality and its impact on Christian churches. Thom Ranier reiterated this point, indicating that historians will record COVID-19 from several perspectives. In this sense, they will look at the tragedy of widespread death and other health issues. They will reflect on hospitals' urgency, nursing homes, and the shortage of supplies and equipment. They will recall ongoing updates on television and other media, and they will ponder reports of possible vaccines and recoveries.² The history books will reflect the economic downfall resulting from closed companies and stores, the shortage of everyday items such as toilet paper and cleaning products, record unemployment and government assistance, and stock market fluctuations. There will be stories about political feuding, riots and social unrest, and a presidential election that threatened another civil war.

If the tide has turned and the nation is faced with a new reality, what does that mean for churches? It may mean that churches must change the way they minister. In this sense, the dismal reality of COVID-19 may not be a cause of despair, but a time to discern what God is saying to the church. The flip side of COVID-19 could result in a recollection of how churches sustained their ministries, maintained membership, experienced significant growth, which may result in a proliferation of the gospel during and after the pandemic.


During the pandemic and the post-quarantine period, the primary concern within Promise Land Church (PLC)\(^3\) was diminished attendance and financial resources. PLC, like most other churches, depended on financial support from its members and supporters. With no in-person worship services, there were reduced tithes and offerings. As a result, funds were limited to sustaining the facility (i.e., electricity, heat, etc.). Subsequently, the church's main goals, evangelism, and discipleship would suffer substantial decline without ingenuity and creativity.

At the start of the pandemic, few church leaders considered its longevity. Subsequently, they did little to determine how churches would operate regarding social distancing and an extended quarantine period. From March 2020, most churches began working virtually with online services on social media networks such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*. Other churches' shutdown operations were awaiting the end of a seeming catastrophe.

Heidi Campbell, the author of a book on the digital culture, indicates that we live in a world where digital technology and platforms such as the Internet are increasingly intersecting with our spiritual lives.\(^4\) This point is not limited to individuals desiring to discuss their religious beliefs or theological theories on digital public platforms. The Internet also serves as a mechanism in the way the Christians conduct church. Subsequently, digital technology and social media are viable means to facilitate connection and relationship between real people meaning those who desire more control in how and when they engage with others. Within a digital construct, the church can maintain preaching and teaching for its regular audience while engaging a vast unseen social media user sector.

\(^3\) To protect the church's identity, the pseudonym "Promise Land Church" will be used throughout the project.

This research project aimed to explore the full integration of digital technology and social media at a local church. The study included various themes and topics to exploit the need to employ digital technology and social media. The introductory chapter will discuss the ministry context, the purpose, problem, and the thesis statement. Additionally, assumptions, definitions, limitations, and delimitations are presented.

Ministry Context

The subject of this research study involved a local church, Promise Land Church (PLC). PLC is a non-denominational church. However, its doctrines and practices reflect mostly Baptist ecclesiology. From a national perspective, PLC resides in what is referred to as "the Bible Belt," described as the area that runs from Virginia down to northern Florida and west to parts of the United States' western region. The Bible Belt is characterized as an area where evangelical Protestantism plays a substantial role in society and politics. People in the Bible Belt tend to be socially conservative and view Christianity as a way of life marked by church attendance.

PLC, established in the mid-90s in Spotsylvania County, is a part of the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. This area is considered one of Virginia's fastest-growing populations due to its location along Interstate 95 and is the midway point between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia. Locally, PLC resides in the heart of multiple communities comprised of racially and ethnically diverse middle-class families. This composition is the result of Spotsylvania's proximity to federal employers in the Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C.,

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area. However, the church membership does not reflect a mixed racial and ethnic composition as most members are African American and are native to the area.

The church's vision is based on the mandate of Matthew 28:19 to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit…"
The mandate is expressed as "Devote, Disciple, and Deploy," with a mission of guiding others to God by loving God, loving others, and serving the world. These concepts are apparent in the various ministries and community outreach events and activities. PLC is marketed as "Real people, with Real issues, serving a Real God."7 This brand is exemplified in how the pastor and other church leaders embrace those who have been marginalized or excluded from different churches or faith-based organizations. This point is further emphasized in how the church seeks to move out of so-called “safety zones” to engage its members in mission at the margins.8 PLC demonstrates its mission effort with its robust engagement with the community. As a result, the congregation is comprised of members of the community who often express that they experience a sense of warmness and acceptance when attending services or interacting with others in the church.

The church membership is approximately 100-150 active members. A person becomes a member after attending discipleship training and is presented before the congregation in a consecration service. In previous years, church membership grew to approximately 200+; however, there was a substantial decrease about six years ago that continued downward. This trend was evidenced not only at PLC but other churches in the area. A PLC member's longevity

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7 Promise Land Church, church theme, 2010.

is not yet determined, but a small number of members have been with the church since its beginning over twenty years ago.

Concerning demographics, PLC has a blend of age groups, with the largest percentage of 45-54 years. Members over 60 are the second largest group in the church. PLC has a modest measure of youth (12 years and under) and teens (13-18 years). There are various ministries and small groups focused on these age groups. Both married and single persons comprise the church membership. Of those who are single, there are several previously married or those who are divorced. Families are a significant component of PLC as both married and single members have children. Church activities and events are generally geared toward family involvement.

Those who attend PLC sometimes refer to the church as a place that represents and welcomes “real people.” This label has a unique connotation that inadvertantly aligns the church with current cultural context. James White, a theologian, and writer, asserts the universal church has and continues to tackle everything from the Holy Spirit to revelation, forcing the current generation to examine and elucidate the doctrine of humanity in ways that confront and challenge changing morals and new technology frontiers.\(^9\) In this sense, PLC proposes and practices inclusion of all people groups as well as those who are not readily acceptable in other ecumenical or church establishments.

During and since lifting the quarantine, PLC played a significant role in community relations. One such example is the church became a food distribution hub. These efforts invited and encouraged volunteers from neighboring communities, fraternities, sororities, teachers, and medical professionals. Each of these entities joined the church membership in distributing food

boxes to the community. PLC also promoted other events and activities to encourage community interaction, such as the annual Trunk or Treat, a drive-thru event due to social distancing measures.

Before the quarantine, church attendance at PLC involved weekly Sunday services, mid-week Bible studies, small group studies, various ministry meetings, and seasonal events. From the perspective of sacraments and other religious practices, PLC conducted baptism, partaking of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, as well as events associated with major religious and national holidays. These events were generally met with mostly full participation from the members, with Easter and Christmas being the most attended.

When the government imposed a quarantine in March 2020, PLC went to streaming live Sunday services on social media. Church delivery became more hybrid described as having a balance of video teaching and live teaching. During that time, only a few members and support staff attended. Since lifting the quarantine, some changes have been made concerning physical gatherings at churches that expanded on the hybrid-participation model. Under that construct, church leadership allowed a limited number of members and guests to attend services while maintaining social media engagement. The process proved beneficial for those members and guests who desired to engage in the service without compromising their health and safety.

The study facilitator’s association with PLC spanning over 8 years involves several ministerial duties and personal involvement. These responsibilities allowed the facilitator/researcher to serve as a participant-observer. The role enabled the research project and supported the premise that digital technology and social media would provide PLC with more

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tools and opportunities to promote and maintain evangelism and discipleship with expository preaching and teaching.

**Problem Presented**

The problem was that PLC failed to predict expository preaching and teaching transition to digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting quarantine posed a challenge to PLC in expanding expository preaching and teaching. Church leadership sought ways to maintain a semblance of normalcy; however, the quarantine and social distancing measures greatly hindered the effort.

The pandemic formed a global perspective, consisting of so-called "new rules" of churchgoing resulting from different social engagement expectations, cleanliness, and protecting vulnerable populations. These "new rules" encompassed many changes that span a broad scope of requirements to adhere to governmental guidelines and allaying concerns regarding the spread of the virus. In this sense, the fellowship concept related to churches before COVID was previously expressed by physical gathering and interaction. However, due to the "new rules," personal engagement, such as touching, hugging, and handshakes, would be curtailed or eliminated based on social distancing measures.

The effect of constrained social interaction would be evidenced in various sectors of the church’s population and activities. In this sense, pandemics generally heighten health and safety awareness across various sectors of the church. There were concerns regarding children's interaction and their propensity to spreading germs quickly. Subsequently, children's ministry limitations resulted in higher expectations for cleaner environments or deferring these programs

until there was less threat of spreading the virus. Junior high and high school groups became hybrid, with no physical interaction. Church events for youth and teens ceased or were consigned to online forums. The offering plate and in-person giving mostly disappeared, giving way to online giving. Sanitizing, disinfecting, and an over-abundance of keeping things clean became a mainstay. The church's practice of observing sacraments such as the Lord's Supper would be done online with symbolic representation. Baptisms were placed on hold pending sanitation protocols. Lastly, though viewed as an obvious germ-spreader, church singing was different as choirs transitioned to praise teams with less than ten members. Members attending church services were restricted from singing due to the use of face masks.

PLC held regular services as well as discipleship studies and small groups in the building before the quarantine. Attendance at regular services, though considerably smaller in number from years prior, were consistent. However, discipleship studies and small group attendance had already started waning before the quarantine. The decrease was a concern, but church leaders and members desired in-person services and meetings. Subsequently, the pandemic and quarantine forced digital platforms as an alternative to in-person attendance. As online platforms became the mainstay, PLC discovered a lack of digital technology, including digital platforms, social media, equipment, and technical expertise.

Though most members preferred in-person services and meetings, it was challenging to support full attendance in light of social distancing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During the quarantine, members participated in live streaming services on social media (Facebook, YouTube). Once the quarantine was lifted, PLC utilized a hybrid-participation model by inviting a specified number of members and guests to adhere to social distancing measures. The composition of these groups was comprised of a mix of various age groups. Though seniors
were invited to attend services, they remained at home to view services virtually through social media. In a cursory poll, seniors indicated their concerns regarding returning to in-person services because of possible exposure to COVID-19.

The inability to reinstitute full in-person attendance also resulted in a decline in youth and teen participation. Youth and teen ministry leaders in the church sought various means and methods to engage youth and teen groups during the pandemic and post-quarantine. A cursory poll conducted by youth and teen leaders revealed one reason for decreased engagement was that youth and teens were already burdened with virtual school studies, and a virtual church service or classroom was viewed as an additional requirement.

PLC is representative of churches across the nation stemming from the effects of the pandemic. The faith communities were all experiencing the effect of restrictions on large gatherings. Such challenges as financial decline, the loss of members, and the threat of the gospel's proliferation were pressing concerns among the Christian community. Bob Whitesel, a well-known Christian writer, asserted that some churches would thrive during these times, but others would struggle.12 Another Christian writer, Thom Ranier, considered that it is too early to assess the pandemic's full impact on churches but asserted that many church leaders adapted well due to the streaming of worship services.13 In this sense, many church leaders and church members discovered that the church was still the church, even without its facilities.14

Subsequently, the faith community may never return to its “glory days” with large in-person attendance. The pandemic has possibly instilled an ominous reminder in the minds of

12 Whitesel, Growing the Post-Pandemic Church: A Leadership Church Guide, Kindle 128 of 1055.
13 Ranier, The Post-Quarantine Church, 26.
14 Ibid., 17.
many of the fragility of one’s health and safety. However, as the Internet becomes increasingly more integrated into everyday life, it is a viable conduit for promoting the gospel and biblical teaching despite pandemics that force social distancing and other safety measures. This study sought to research the benefits of the full integration of digital technology and social media at PLC.

**Purpose Statement**

This Doctor of Ministry study aimed to create a program or platform for PLC to incorporate expository preaching and teaching in a digital platform. PLC needed a viable digital deployment plan and social media platform to promote the gospel and encourage maximum participation for its members and guests in expository preaching and teaching to advance evangelism and discipleship.

Christian churches are generally accustomed to people coming to a building; however, due to the spread of COVID-19, most people were no longer coming into buildings for worship. Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had advised since March 2020 that people stay home to prevent the spread of the disease.15 The quarantine lifting in several states, cities, and counties allowed gradual reentry to churches and other public buildings. However, economic, political, and social issues had taken precedence leaving church pews empty and church budgets dwindling for lack of finances.

Before the pandemic and resulting quarantine, PLC held in-person Sunday services, small groups, and other biblical studies in the church building. Participation in these studies usually started with several participants, but participation usually declined after 3-4 meetings. It is

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necessary to note online sessions had previously been offered at PLC, especially for small groups and biblical studies, but participation was minimal. The problem of attendance and engagement was likely not solely a result of the pandemic or the resulting quarantine, but rather the need to determine what and how participants wanted to engage in church services and activities.

A report on church growth indicated that as of February 2019, more than 350,000 churches were registered in the United States, and two out of every three were declining or plateauing in attendance. One study indicated the following:

- The average Christian Church in America has seventy-five members.
- In America, 80 to 85 percent of all churches have either reached a plateau or have declined.
- America is the fourth most unchurched nation on earth.

The 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) produced by Eastern Illinois University found that more people now identify as “no religious affiliation” (23.1 percent) than evangelical Christian (22.6 percent) or Catholic (23 percent). Additionally, studies have shown that as more churches are becoming the “fastest-growing churches in America,” more and more cities are becoming less and less “churched.” Subsequently, more churches have more service options regarding timing and location, but there is less overall attendance.

There are various reasons why church attendance has dwindled, most of which reflect a post-Christian culture or a worldview that is devoid of godly morals and principles. There is also

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the rise of Islam across the continent, and other non-Christian religions were infiltrating emerging countries and nations. Another major crisis is the radical redefinition of marriage and family. However, what is more disturbing is functional atheism or the current culture of not only rejecting God's idea but merely ignoring him. This point is evidenced by the rise of the so-called “Nones” described as having no religious affiliation. James White, a pastor, and author asserts the Nones are the largest religious group in the United States. He further indicates that as the numbers of Nones grow, the number of professing Christians is shrinking.

Change is occurring at a rapid pace outside the church, and the faith community risks becoming irrelevant if it cannot keep up. Due to the interconnectedness of the Internet, society is experiencing a proliferation of information, some of which are life-altering. Statistics reveal that as of 2020, about 2 billion Facebook accounts indicated that approximately one in every seven people on earth had a Facebook account. Additionally, Instagram had about 1 billion users, and the average person spent at least 4 hours daily on their mobile devices.

The impact of digital technology and social media has a profound effect on society. The modes and means of communication have changed every aspect of life. Banking or sending money to someone was once accomplished by going into a bank or a teller over the counter to

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21 Ibid., 22.

22 Ibid.


25 Ibid.
make that transaction happen. Today you can send money with just a few clicks from your phone. There have also been changes in how we communicate in education. In today's world, you can obtain a full-fledged university degree without leaving the comfort of your home. Relationships and the way people meet has also been a part of the technological revolution as online dating sites once considered clandestine have become mainstream. One author notes that if you doubt social media's influential nature in the world we live in today, you are living under a rock or in denial.

With such challenges to Christianity, it is evident that cultural trends, patterns, and movements impact the local church. Conversely, it is plausible that the rapid growth of non-Christian ideologies and movements gained momentum from the Internet that engages individuals to a myriad of religions and ideologies. However, communication is vital in the Matthew 28 charge. The earlier churches accepted this reality, and proactive faith-based communities can use technology to reach more people and accomplish the Great Commission. In this sense, there was a need for PLC to fully engage a digital voice and exploit technology and social media to disseminate the gospel message.

This research project explored the decline of participation and attendance at PLC before and following the COVID-19 pandemic to create a program or platform to incorporate digital engagement through the Internet and social media. In doing this, PLC could promote and maintain evangelism and discipleship despite physically constrained environments.

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27 Ibid., 7.
Basic Assumptions

From a methodological standpoint, it is assumed various methods of inductive and deductive analysis are employed to reach logical conclusions. In this sense, interviews, questionnaires, and surveys were based on general knowledge of what already existed and what the participants provided to complete the research study.

The primary way of collecting information is by asking people questions and their answers constitute the data to be analyzed. In this sense, it was assumed that participants would respond to interviews, questionnaires, and surveys truthfully and without bias or predisposition. The assumption was made to ensure participants, given instruction, could be trusted in contributing to the study. Open-ended interview questions helped guide the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires but did not limit participants' ability to provide truthful and realistic responses.

There was the assumption that only data about the topics presented were addressed. In this sense, the study focused only on issues, problems, and matters about church attendance and participation related to the use or disuse of digital technology and social media.

There was the assumption that errors associated with the research methods used in the study were considered for determining how they influenced the results. In this sense, one fundamental premise of the survey process is that by describing the sample of participants who respond, one can describe the target population. However, should the sample population fail to reflect the target population, the data would be reassessed to determine its validity.

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29 Ibid., 11.
There was the assumption that empirical verification and sound logic were considered and valued. In that sense, observation and experimentation were used as a means of gathering data.

**Definitions**

For this research project, the following terms require explanation:

*Adaptive Change* occurs in situations where a living system faces the challenge of finding a new reality. These challenges come from two possible sources: a situation of (1) significant threat or (2) compelling opportunity.\(^{30}\)

*Adaptive Leadership* develops learning organizations and manages to help the organization transition into different forms of expression where agility, responsiveness, innovation, and entrepreneurship are needed.\(^{31}\)

*Attractional Church* is a concept working from the assumption that to bring people to Jesus; we need to get them to church.\(^{32}\)

*Best Practices* a term used for methods or techniques with a proven track record of working better than other methods or techniques.\(^{33}\)

*Broadcast media* exists primarily to deliver a message to an audience. It is a communication style that is one-way or passively consumed by individuals through watching, listening, or reading.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., 311.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 312.


\(^{34}\) Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 37.
*Cultural Distance* is a concept to help in assessing how far a people group is from a meaningful engagement with the gospel.\(^{35}\)

*Digital Reformation* describes cultural changes associated with new digital social media practices driven by economic, environmental, political, and intellectual issues.\(^{36}\)

*Discipleship* is the process of a more mature, disciplined person leading a less experienced person to help them achieve the spiritual goals they have set for themselves.\(^{37}\)

*Early Church* is the period of church history spanning the New Testament church's formation up to Constantine's time in AD 312.\(^{38}\)

*Functional atheism* is described as one who not only rejects the idea of God but simply ignores him.\(^{39}\)

*Hybri* \(^{12}\) *ddity* is a communication model with a balance of video and live teaching.\(^{40}\)

*Individualism* is an aspect of the human experience emphasizing individual preferences and personalities regarding technology such as online profiles, devices, etc.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{37}\) Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 23.


\(^{41}\) Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*, 15.
**Missional Church** is defined as organizing itself around its real purpose as an agent of God’s mission to the world.\(^{42}\)

**Post-Christian** is defined as the loss of the Christian worldview’s preeminence or importance in places where Christianity previously flourished.\(^{43}\)

**Pluralization** is the process by which individuals are confronted with a staggering number of ideologies and faith options competing for their attention.\(^{44}\)

**Secularization** is the process by which something becomes secular; sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.\(^{45}\)

**Social media** is a form of electronic communication to connect people to foster a sense of community through conversation and engagement.\(^{46}\)

**The “Nones”** is the label given to a group of people who are religiously unaffiliated.\(^{47}\)

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**Limitations**

Generalization is a known limitation of qualitative research studies. In this sense, the study focused primarily on a select, measured number of participants. Those participants were comprised of church members who work in the media ministry, including audio, video, website, and social media. However, because of the close association the participants had with the

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\(^{43}\) Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 5.


\(^{46}\) Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 37.

problems identified, there was the possibility of biased responses or one-sided opinions. However, the group represented a reasonable sample of the larger church population that adequately reflected such responses and opinions.

As the facilitator of the study, there was a limitation connected to the role of the researcher as a co-participant. In this sense, the researcher became a co-participant with church members and social media groups in the process of gathering and interpreting data to enable new and transformative modes of action.

There was a connection between the researcher as a church member and a ministry team lead to participants in the study. In this sense, the researcher's relationships with participants could pose limitations in gaining information as the facilitator could be viewed as a friend. Tim Sensing, a writer on research methodology, suggested that a story, an explanation, or response told to a researcher differs from what is said to friends.48 The apparent risk is that the data’s integrity due to personalization could malign information. However, this limitation was viewed as an asset in that familiarity can create trust.

The researcher bias is another source of limitation. Researcher bias may manifest through misconceptions of words and gestures from participants. Other preferences may display due to shared opinions or views concerning the topic. In this sense, the facilitator considered data that supported preconceived hypotheses or arguments. The facilitator examined how the situation was stated and determined if the data-gathering process was carried out appropriately to avoid the problem.

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Other limitations considered were time constraints in the data-gathering process, such as organizing and conducting interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. There were also concerns related to scheduling conflicts that would prevent adequate research. Subsequently, constraints that would negatively impact the study would be deferred to future studies.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations from this study included restricting the scope of the project to PLC. However, data related to the problem was gathered from various sources outside the church. The extent of analysis from those sources was reviewed for applicability and used solely for PLC. In this sense, those who performed management and execution of audio, video, website, and social media were the study's primary participants. Their involvement was to establish a baseline for capability and to solicit ideas for improvement. There were also surveys and questionnaires developed for a larger group from the membership to determine preferences, partialities, or indifferences towards digital media. This sub-group was representative of a cross-section of the demographic composition of PLC.

The study examined how digital technology and social media impact promoting and sustaining expository preaching and teaching at PLC. Other sources outside PLC were used to establish benchmarks and develop performance metrics to create viable solutions to this problem. These sources will come mainly from published materials where digital technology and social media were studied.
The question posed for this research study explored the possibility of PLC’s leadership fully integrating and promoting digital platforms. The supposition asserted that the reach of expository preaching and teaching would be expanded to all members and guests and unseen audiences such as those on social media. Subsequently, digital platforms and the Internet's use to promulgate the gospel message through expository preaching and teaching would no longer be considered a luxury or an alternative but an integral part of the mission of spreading the gospel.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting quarantine threatened to shut-off communication within the church. Though Sunday services continued through Facebook Live, Bible studies, small groups, and ministry meetings struggled to maintain consistency. Subsequently, concerns grew over whether the membership would wane and become dysfunctional without communication and consistency.

The charge of evangelism was viewed as mostly unachievable as church doors were closed or attendance was limited. Face-to-face engagements though possible with face masks and social distancing, were risky and uncertain. There was also a concern about church members' spiritual health regarding engagement in biblical studies and the practice of Christian living in the face of an immoral culture and competing non-Christian religions and beliefs. Though the local church is a repository of Christian teaching, failure to engage and maintain interest among those who attend could result in decreased membership and a collapse in discipleship. Without discipleship, the body of Christ cannot grow and thrive.

Digital technology and social media are proven communication instruments that provide the church with enhanced opportunities to reach more people with the gospel, thereby positively influencing evangelism and discipleship. David Bourgeois cited a former Silicon Valley
executive, Walt Wilson, indicating the profound utility of fully engaging in the digital world. Wilson asserts that we are the first generation in all of human history to hold within our hands the technology to reach every man, woman, and child on the earth by 2020.\(^{49}\) As the world has crossed over into another year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the time is ripe to fully utilize all the tools we have been given to engage in the battle for human souls all across the world.\(^{50}\)

Subsequently, if Promise Land Church developed a well-defined deployment plan for digital engagement through technology and social media, it would be prepared to effectively engage in the mission of evangelism and discipleship. The charge of Matthew 28:19 would be executed with the continuation of expository preaching and teaching despite physical restrictions such as social distancing and prolonged quarantine.


\(^{50}\) Ibid.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Social media and the Internet are not uncommon to the church community as digital technology started evolving in the 1950s.\(^1\) However, it is only in the late 80s and 90s that the Internet-enabled online media gave birth to an online audience who uses the Internet to consume information.\(^2\) Throughout this evolvement, churches varied in both concept and practice to the use of social media platforms and digital communication. It was not until the recent COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on limiting physical gatherings that digital tools for ministry become a critical part of promoting the gospel message. Subsequently, churches were faced with the need to integrate and promote digital technology and social media fully.

The sources reviewed are relatively recent as in the last ten years of which reflect the rapid and, as implied by some, steep growth of digital platforms. Due to the practical application of digital media, the literature on the topic is mainly tertiarily consisting of compilations of primary and secondary sources. The writings reviewed ranged from how-to handbooks to digital commentaries to academic books and papers.

The issue of fully integrating and promoting digital platforms within the church community across various biblical authors and theologians resulted in theories and concepts across four major themes: ecclesiological implications, the cultural landscape and digital reformation, pre-modern and modern communication, and advantages and disadvantages of digital platforms.


\(^2\) Ibid.
Literature Review

Ecclesiological Implications

A study of ecclesiological implications reveals that the church community has mildly embraced the concept of fully integrating and promoting digital platforms to promote the Gospel message. According to the sources reviewed, church autonomy is a factor in the reluctance to embrace technological advances. In this regard, Anita L. Cloete suggests that religion online implies that religious and theological information can come from various sources, thereby bypassing the church as the primary source for such information. Myron Pierce reiterates this point with rebuke indicating that the current pandemic reveals the church has lost its vision, evidenced by overwhelming concern about church autonomy and precedence in its members' lives. Timothy Hutchings indicates that Christianity has traditionally emphasized the commitment to a single local church community.

The concern involving content on the Internet is shared among theologians as E. M. Kaye notes that pastors are concerned that some of the content on the Internet that may appear to be Christian in context may not be biblical or closely align with the Bible. This assertion also alludes to the implication that information derived from the Internet often lacks respect for traditional authority and leadership models.


4 Pierce, Digital Ministry, 12.

5 Timothy Hutchings, “The Internet and the Church: An Introduction,” Expository Times, 122(1), November 19, 2010, accessed August 1, 2020, Liberty University Online Library.

Eyitope Lala indicates that pastors and church leaders in Nigeria are viewed with disdain and distrust because some individuals have been able to leverage digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to push their ideologies and gain disciples by raising questions confronting existing paradigms and doctrines. The author considers church leaders' reluctance to confront these issues through digital platforms and social media resulted in the proliferation of wrong ideologies and concepts.

Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner allude to the same concerns previously mentioned as they indicate that some argue that media technology values are antithetical to religious matters. This observation describes how Christian scholars responded to television's impact in the 1980s, asserting that entertainment was a medium that discouraged critical thinking and promoted anti-Christian values. Campbell and Garner also cite Quentin Schultze, who warns that the Internet enables a technological culture that runs counter to Christian values of community, truthfulness, and reciprocity.

Highlights regarding ecclesiological implications, church authority, and the perceived lack of content credibility on the Internet were examined, but there are also opinions about technology's viability and practicality. Subsequently, Cloete suggests the church holds three theological views on technology, with the first being that technology is a liberator. In this regard, Cloete states this opinion as being optimistic because technology can contribute to

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9 Ibid., 2119 Kindle.

overcoming the world’s most significant challenges, such as hunger and poverty, that serve to improve the human condition. From this view, digital technology provides the church with more tools and opportunities to reach more people with the gospel, thereby positively influencing church activities and institutional structures.

Alan Hirsch considers metaphors and how they are powerful descriptors providing perceived information regarding the church. In this sense, if the church is referred to as a religious institution, the metaphor carries the associated imagery of buildings, stability, stalwart solidity, budgets, programs, policies, staffing and volunteers, and a hierarchical organization. The author considers that changing the metaphor to church as a movement ushers in a new way of seeing that same reality. Subsequently, in viewing the church as a movement, there is a greater propensity towards considering technology as a tool of the movement.

Meredith Gould and Justin Wise focused on social media's relational aspect regarding how social media tools cultivate community. Gould indicated that digital platforms tend to connect rather than isolate users. Wise echoed the assertion that social media can use technology to facilitate connections and relationships between real people. In this sense, both

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12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
authors assert that the use of digital technology not only provides information for its users but creates and enhances relationships.

Cloete’s second theological view on technology could be viewed as counter to the previous as the author suggests technology is an oppressor from the perspective of information overload.\(^\text{17}\) Kaye's assumption on the Internet's over-abundance of information aligns somewhat with the concept of oppression. In this sense, the Internet can prove distracting, overwhelming, and lack meaningful content to motivate users to think and achieve spiritual wisdom.\(^\text{18}\) Cloete’s third and final theological view on technology asserts digital platforms and social media as instruments representing a middle-ground between theological benefits and the negative aspect of digital platforms and social media.\(^\text{19}\) The theory is explained in terms of the ambiguous power of digital media being seen as value-neutral with positive or negative results.

P. R. Meadow's comments on the basic principle of convergence concerning theological benefits and negative implications are not opposed to Cloete's assertion. However, Meadows suggested that relationships and community expressed through digital media reshape how everyday activities such as the way children are educated, shopping preferences, political thoughts, and attitudes are affected by digital engagement.\(^\text{20}\) From the perspective of convergence, engagement in a virtual dimension of life, such as that of the digital world, is a means for augmenting and personifying discipleship and does not seek to replace its theological foundation.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{17}\) Cloete, “Living in a Digital Culture,” 3.


\(^{19}\) Cloete, “Living in a Digital Culture,” 3.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 176.
The Cultural Landscape and Digital Reformation

According to Nielsen's Total Audience Report conducted in 2015, well over 80 percent of consumers use smartphones, and of those using these devices, they are checking their phones almost 150 times a day.\(^{22}\) The report measured total audience participation across platforms by using standard metrics. Subsequently, the data revealed certain aspects of digital usage across age groups, races, ethnicities, and medium types. Mark Forrester cites data from the report to support the premise that social media amplifies the church's voice, reaching more people than ever before in history.\(^{23}\) Before the Nielsen report, Douglas Estes related that in 2007, the number of Internet users passed one billion, less than 20 percent of the world's population.\(^{24}\) The author points out that more than 20 percent of the world's population is in direct communication at no other time in history.

Lazarus alluded to modern society being in the age of the headphone generation that uses gadgets and devices to update continually, comment, post, snap, and interact with the world electronically.\(^{25}\) Meadows indicates that computing technologies are becoming universal as people frequently connect to the Internet and other virtual networks for a wide range of information sharing and social relations.\(^{26}\) The common theme is the resounding declaration that

\(^{22}\) Mark Forrester, Trending Up: Social Media Strategies for Today’s Church, (Salubris Resources, 2017), 22.

\(^{23}\) Meadows, Mission Studies, 24.

\(^{24}\) Douglas Estes, SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 18.

\(^{25}\) Lazarus, The Connected Church, 25.

\(^{26}\) Meadows, Mission Studies, 166.
the cultural landscape is forever changed, and the digital reformation takes precedence in communication.

Alan Hirsch refers to the phrase cultural distance to assess how far a people group is from meaningful engagement with the gospel. The concept is put into a continuum indicating significant cultural barriers inclusive of language, religion, history, race, and culture. Subsequently, the more barriers identified the higher the cultural distance score. In this sense, Hirsch gives the example of how the Crusades damaged Muslim people's capacity to apprehend Christ, thereby placing the mission to Islamic people in a higher cultural distance measure. However, digital technology has tied cultures more closely as various sectors of the world that were once isolated or remote are now participants on the "main stage," allowing greater capacity for gospel engagement.

Tim Challies describes the concept of "experience rich, theory poor" to indicate the abundance of experience with technology while lacking the theoretical or theological tools to process the consequences of its use. Subsequently, there is a need to understand the overlap between theory, theology, and experience for the church to execute its mission. Bernard Spooner explained that technology changes how the brain processes information whereby the Internet generation acquires learning by accident rather than sequential. Digital reformation, unlike earlier church reform, is predicated on such accidental digital engagements as it is not driven or

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28 Ibid.


motivated by theologies, dogmas, and politics. Consequently, today’s cultural environment allows ordinary believers access to all manner of religious knowledge previously available only to clergy, scholars, and other religious specialists.

Pre-Modern and Modern Communication

Justin Wise, the author of *The Social Church*, proposed that people of faith have been at the forefront of every significant communication shift. This point demonstrates the evolution of Christian communication from Martin Luther and the printing press, Aimee Semple McPherson, and the radio broadcast, to Billy Graham and televangelist crusades. Within each communication period, people of faith seized the opportunity to use the latest communication methods to promote the Gospel message.

Lazarus alludes to ministry at the time of Jesus when the means of communication were mostly face-to-face. This communication mode involved a live audience where all ministry types happened, and the gospel spread across the world. Regarding the former perspective, David Bourgeois indicates that in Matthew 24, when Jesus' disciples asked what it would be like upon his return, the response was the gospel would be preached in the whole world, and then the end would come. The author suggests that digital technology might answer the "how" of preaching to the whole world. The concept is explained as the next step in the evolution of communication-based on present-day technologies.

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Eyitope Lala asserts that most churches are focused on sharing deep theological principles and concepts but fail to link these ideologies to everyday life. In this sense, Christianity is viewed as a “spiritual” and intangible experience people to which there is no connection. In Lala’s book on the topic of church social media engagement, the author applies Matthew 13:47-48 in the use of a concept referred to as “Know-Like-Trust” or KLT. In the model illustrated below, three aspects of content objectives are described:

Figure 1. “Know-Like-Trust”

![Know-Like-Trust Diagram](Image)


Lala asserts Matthew 13:47-48 indicates “the fishnet brings in ALL kinds/types of fish.” From this perspective, social media pages of a church website need increased visibility to enable increased awareness to reach all kinds of people. The question created from this kind of content is, “What can you share that will catch the attention of people who fit your avatar description?” Examples of “Know” content are lead magnets, short videos, and helpful blog posts. Using social

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35 Lala, Social Media Engagement for Churches: A Practical Guide for Churches and Individuals in Ministry to Maximize Social Media, 41.

36 Ibid., 42.
media advertising gives opportunity to reach people outside of the church’s normal followers on social media.

Verse 48a progresses from becoming visible to a target audience to brand recognition. Brand recognition enables developing a relationship between those in the audience to the church. Lala offers suggestion to share an eBook on a specific topic as a means of engaging the audience.

Verse 48b corresponds to creating trust with church social media followers and facilitate conversions. Conversion is described as turning someone who is just getting exposed to the church content at the beginning of the content journey into someone who is now a church brand ambassador.37

Elizabeth Drescher offers examples from the Apostle Paul's ministry, whom the author refers to as a "proto-blogger" on the concept of content.38 This semblance to Paul as a prototype for modern-day blogging equates to the Apostle's unique style of linguistic, formal, and poetic resources directed to specific Christian communities. Paul’s letter-writing ministry served to encourage spiritual health within the early Christian Church. Paul and the Christian communities' spiritual reciprocity is based on how the letters were transmitted and shared through both written and face-to-face engagement. Such engagement foreshadows today's digital practice by sharing news, opinions, offering compassion and encouragement, celebrating life transitions, and gathering for brainstorming or problem-solving in an online format.39

37 Lala, Social Media Engagement for Churches: A Practical Guide for Churches and Individuals in Ministry to Maximize Social Media, 44.

38 Drescher, Tweet If You Love Jesus, 1363 Kindle.

39 Ibid., 1449 Kindle
Douglas Estes introduced a virtual church concept as an evolution from what is referred to as the real world. The author describes the church as entirely online, of which there are locations already established. The advent of the virtual church was created in 1985 before the Internet when an unnamed pioneering group of believers worshipped together through a text-only interface. Estes contends since that time, and other pioneers have slowly planted churches amid an ever-changing virtual world.

The evolution of communication has resulted in practical concepts the church can fully exploit. Subsequently, Heidi Campbell explains the idea of networked theology as the engagement of Internet functions, social interactions online, and the infrastructure supporting an information-based society, resulting in access to communicative ventures with information that changes from static, controlled structures to dynamic, adaptive connections.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Digital Platforms

The literature reviewed thoroughly supported the advantages of fully engaging digital platforms. E. M. Kaye contends that in today's image-saturated culture, the concrete life-stories of Jesus Christ gain momentum. Subsequently, digital tools enhance the Great Commission's opportunity to engage Christians across the street or the world. Estes contends the virtual world is perhaps the largest mission field in which the virtual church may prevail as the most popular.

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41 Ibid.


Eyitope Lala asserts the cost value of social media over traditional media methods. Consequently, social media is considered less expensive than conventional methods. This point is not proven in the analysis of costs but referenced only in theory. However, the author recommended a systematic and intentional approach to using social media. The author suggests a five-step strategic approach that addresses various goals of social media. Highlights of the approach include evangelism, discipleship, help, and promotions. In the same writing, the author asserts measuring to determine the effectiveness of social media in ministry.

One benefit of most social media networks is native measurement tools that capture data. Such data as age, gender distribution, and followers' location enable the church to understand its target audience. David T. Bourgeois agrees with the concept of strategy regarding websites. The author indicates that an excellent digital strategy encompasses more than just technology and people involved in the online ministry and the processes that must be present to ensure tasks are completed.45

Hutchings comments on Facebook and other social networks to connect more closely with members and interested onlookers as opportunities for Christian churches.46 Statistics revealed in 2020, there are approximately 2 billion Facebook accounts.47 Consequently, approximately one in every seven people on the earth has a Facebook account. Instagram has recently hit 1 billion users.48 It is suggested these statistics lend credence to the theory that social media is a mission field.


46 Hutchings, “The Internet and the Church, An Introduction,” 16.


48 Ibid.
Hutchings notes that the Internet plays a significant role in evangelism through engagement with those seeking to start conversations and building relationships in a low-pressure environment. Lazarus lists ways the teaching ministry is enabled by social media that focuses on consistent delivery, interactivity, everyday context, and empowerment to share.\textsuperscript{49}

Disadvantages were also expressed across the sources examined. Church leaders are fearful that technology makes it easier for members to leave. Tim Challies asserts that technology, like everything else in the world, is subject to the curse of sin.\textsuperscript{50} The author also contends that though the devices created are amoral, digital devices and social media are propensities to become idols.

Elizabeth Drescher indicates that during the so-called broadcast age, so labeled by increased access to religious programming through television, revivals, religious education, and news programs, and there was a phenomenon of "believing without belonging."\textsuperscript{51} Drescher implies that Gracie Davie coined the phrase to reflect on belief in broad religious principles or spiritual ideologies and continued nominal identification with a particular denomination.\textsuperscript{52} Subsequently, Davie maintained that television presented “the extreme case of belief without belonging, for it seems to permit, encourage even, a rather self-indulgent form of armchair religiosity.”\textsuperscript{53} In this sense, digital technology could disable the role of spiritual accountability as viewers are allowed to engage online without commitment or responsibility.

\textsuperscript{49} Lazarus, \textit{The Connected Church}, 71-73.

\textsuperscript{50} Challies, \textit{The Next Story: Life and Faith After the Digital Explosion}, 233 Kindle.

\textsuperscript{51} Drescher, \textit{Tweet If You Love Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation}, Kindle 1158 of 2981.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
A literature review on social networks reveals fallacies about reviews of organizations, businesses, products, vendors, and more. Study-based social media can be a mixed bag because people generally only post reviews to share strong opinions one way or another.\textsuperscript{54} In this sense, people who feel neutral about a product, service, or organization are less likely to post a review. E. M. Kaye suggests churches become proactive by checking how much traffic is on their website, updating church information regularly, tracking what people are saying, and respond to comments.\textsuperscript{55}

**Theological Foundations**

The biblical mandate commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 validates the cause of employing digital methods to further the Gospel message. Eyitope Lala, author of *Social Media Engagement for Churches*, explains that scriptural instruction is split into two parts. The first is to go and make disciples. In this sense, the instruction implies leaving where we are and advancing to where they are. The second part of the instruction shows us where we are to go; into all nations. This principle is interpreted as going beyond geographical boundaries to individuals who are related by specific unique characteristics. In this light, *Facebook, Instagram*, and *Twitter* are virtual platforms or communities where those who are like-minded and have similar interests congregate regularly. Such digital communities can be invaded with the preaching and teaching the gospel of the kingdom to align with Jesus' command.

Myron Pierce alludes to "the tide turning" to indicate the church's need to feel the heart of God for people across the world.\textsuperscript{56} The author suggests a scene in the Gospels where thousands

\textsuperscript{54} Kaye, *The Christian Church in the Digital Age*, 2478 Kindle.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 2489 Kindle.

\textsuperscript{56} Pierce, *Digital Ministry: Pastoring in a Pandemic*, 6.
of people follow Jesus out into the desert. He indicates that Jesus did not invite them, and they had been with Him for several days. As the people were starting to get hungry, Jesus instructed His disciples, "You give them something to eat!" (Matt 14:16). Subsequently, he was less concerned about how many people showed up to His three-day revival and more concerned with how He would take care of their needs. In this sense, the tide has turned because people's needs are increasing, and Christians need to go to where they are to meet those needs. As the world is the epicenter of digital engagement, the best place to find people is on the Internet.

When the church identifies people's needs, it becomes a "social investigator" who can help build a future that resembles what God wants to do in the world through His Church. Subsequently, the local church can become a conduit to link a vast online population to God. This concept is much like that of the early church as they learned to adapt to the changes that were going on in their world.

It is interesting to note that in AD 100 there were as few as 25,000 Christians. The number grew to 20,000,000 in AD 310 that begs the question as to how the movement grew from such a modest number to the most significant force in the Roman Empire in two centuries? Historians have pointed to various factors to account for Christianity's success that reflects divine providence and human or natural circumstances. In this sense, external conditions at the beginning of Christianity were favorable: (1) the spread of Judaism provided a base of operations for Christian preaching through the Roman world, (2) the Hellenizing of the eastern

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57 Pierce, Digital Ministry: Pastoring in a Pandemic, 6.

58 Ibid., 7.


Mediterranean provided a common language and ideas, and (3) the political unity under Rome provided peace, stability, and possibilities for travel.\(^6^1\)

In contrast, Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, suggests a list of factors that address the difficulties associated with the growth of Christianity:\(^6^2\)

- They were members of an illegal religion throughout this period of growth.
- They did not have church buildings as we know them.
- They did not have the Scriptures as we now have them.
- They did not have a formal institution, or the professional type of leadership generally associated with it.
- They did not have seeker-sensitive services, youth groups, worship bands, seminaries, commentaries, and other biblical help.
- They made it difficult to join the church.

It is imperative to note how Christianity advanced under the rule of Constantine I. As one of Rome's most pivotal rulers, Constantine the Great was emperor of Rome, from 306 A.D. until he died in 337 A.D. He leveraged his political power to impose Christianity across the Roman empire as a predominant religion under his rule. It is purported that Constantine had a “religious experience” that promoted his awareness of a divine mission and the promise of divine help.\(^6^3\) Subsequently, Constantine adopted the Chi-Rho monogram (the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek) as his troops' emblem.\(^6^4\) His army won the battle of Milvian Bridge, defeating Maxentius's army, who was the rival to this throne, successively giving Constantine control of Rome.


\(^{63}\) Ferguson, *Church History*, 182.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
Before Constantine's rule, rulers of the Roman Empire fiercely opposed Christians. Persecution against Christians had lasted three centuries, during which time they were subjected to Roman edicts that resulted in varying degrees of oppression. However, Constantine's desire for unity and harmony was envisioned within the scope of a union of church and state. Constantine entered into an agreement in AD 313 with Licinius, emperor of Rome, between AD 308-324, with the "Edict of Milan." The edict extended free exercise of religion to "Christians and all others." Constantine and Licinius differed in their approach towards religion as Licinius were more inclined to pagan monotheism and Constantine towards Christianity. Constantine defeated Licinius in AD 324, becoming the sole ruler of the whole Roman world. After that, Constantine increased his support for Christianity, though later criticized for an apparent cacophony of pagan and Christian practices and policies. Despite these objections, the removal of religious persecution allowed the proliferation of Christianity across continents.

Alan Hirsch contends the example of the early Christian movement being viewed as something of a freak occurrence. However, the author cites another example somewhat akin to modern times: the underground Church in China. Under the government of Mao-Tse-tung, the ruler initiated a systematic purge of religion from society in China formed by Western missionaries. As a part of systematic persecution, Mao removed all foreign missionaries and ministers, nationalized all church properties, killed most of the senior church leaders, either killed or imprisoned second and third-level leaders, banned all public meetings of Christians under the threat of death or torture, and proceeded to perpetrate one of the cruelest persecutions

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65 Ferguson, *Church History*, 183.

of Christians on the historical record. The regime's Cultural Revolution aimed to eliminate Christianity and all religions from China. When the regime ended in the late 1970s, and the subsequent lifting of the so-called Bamboo Curtain in the early 1980s, foreign missionaries, and church officials were allowed back into China, however, under strict supervision. Despite the ravages of religious persecution, Christianity had flourished with estimates of about 60 million+ Christians in China. This number continued to grow to around 120 million in the second edition of Hirsh's book (2016). A comparison is made to that of the early church regarding the Chinese movement. There were few Bibles, no professional clergy, no official leadership structures, no central organization, and no mass meetings.

Christianity’s current rate of growth reveals the continual decline of church attendance and membership in stark contrast. Surveys by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and Trinity College's "American Religious Identification Survey" (ARIS) have shown a continuing decline in religious identification over the past decade, with the steepest losses occurring mainline Protestant denominations.

According to LifeWay Research of February 2019, more than 350,000 churches are registered in the United States, and two out of every three are declining or plateauing in attendance. In 2018, General Social Survey (GSS) produced by Eastern Illinois University found that more people now identify as "no religious affiliation." Nona Jones asserts that we

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68 Ibid., 6.
69 Ibid.
70 Drescher, Tweet If You Love Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation, Kindle 284 of 2981.
71 “Becoming Five Multiplication Study: Research Report.”
live in a post-Christian society – defined as the loss of preeminence or the Christian worldview's primacy in places where Christianity previously flourished.\textsuperscript{73} Subsequently, the current state of Christianity in the Western world, where it once flourished, is under scrutiny for the lack of engagement of those professing its faith.

In light of churches' current state, the literature sources reviewed substantiate the cause and effect of the church's lack of engaging digital platforms to promote the gospel message fully. The theological argument for and against such engagement ranges from church autonomy to the complexity of digital platforms and social media to the inability to recognize that a change is needed.

Alan Hirsch asserts the twenty-first century is engaged in a highly complex phenomenon where terrorism, disruptive technological innovation, environmental crisis, rampant consumerism, discontinuous change, and perilous ideologies confront us at every point.\textsuperscript{74} As a result, some church leaders feel it is becoming more difficult for their communities to negotiate the increasing complexities of their social environments. Despite the challenges, it is imperative that the preceding generation equip the new one with the knowledge of God. Josh. 2:10 confirms this claim as the biblical writer alludes to the demise of a generation who suffered the lack of knowledge. One author indicates that young people today live amid the greatest communication shift in the last 500 years. If it is the preceding generation's responsibility to equip this generation, it is critical to learn the language of this generation to communicate effectively. The Apostle Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23 his desire to share with those who are weak to

\textsuperscript{73} Jones, \textit{From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship}, 5.

\textsuperscript{74} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements}, 2.
spread the Good News. Subsequently, the "weak" of the world are those who do not know Christ, and it is the responsibility of Christians to infect the world with the knowledge of salvation.

Success in the context of the church is gospel-anchored engagement that is transmitted from one generation to the next. In this sense, cultural implications such as age serve to enhance achieving the Great Commission's goals. The biblical writer James warns of the complications of jealousy and self-ambition and begs that they give way to wisdom from above that is full of mercy and goodness (Jas 3:16-17). Subsequently, digital means of communication are tools that can be suited to meet the needs of the multi-generational church as the wisdom from older members merge with that of bringing younger members to the Gospel.

The success of evangelism and discipleship is not rooted in the size of the crowds or congregation, the amounts of the budgets, or the influence of voting blocs. Church engagement or growth is also not solely founded in the so-called attractional church that seeks to draw people to the Gospel by simply getting them to church. Ironically, all those things can be maintained without the Spirit's presence or the power of the gospel. Subsequently, the concept of the church is subject to evolve from the perspective of “going to church” to “being the church.” The concept of “being the church” though often quoted by Christian preachers and teachers, does not always lend itself to novel ideas on how this can be interpreted or practiced. However, it is important to note that the writer of Hebrews wanted to encourage and motivate church members through the concept of meeting together. In this sense, it should not be assumed that Hebrews 10:25 mandates going to church.

James Haldane, a nineteenth-century theologian, suggests that due to the violent prejudices of the Jews against the doctrines of Christ, and the affliction and persecution to which believers were exposed in Judea, some Christians resorted to more private worship.\textsuperscript{76} Such conduct could serve to prevent progress of the Gospel which could be likened to putting the light under a bushel and improperly endeavoring to shun the reproach of the Cross.\textsuperscript{77} Subsequently, the Hebrews writer sought to encourage assembling together as a means of observing the ordinances as well as encouraging the continuation of gathering despite persecution. Christians were also urged to assemble together to exhort one another through the sharing of spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:10).

The concept of “being the church” resides in identifying the community of believers without regard to a physical structure. In this sense, when Jesus spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:18, the implication was the building of a congregation of believers or what would become Christian assembly. One of the most common metaphors used to refer to the church is the “body of Christ.”\textsuperscript{78} With Jesus as the head of the church, and his followers as members serving specific functions, the church is postured to extend beyond physical walls enabling preaching and teaching the Gospel in innovative, groundbreaking settings.

The New Testament church was dynamic as the growth of Christianity was never confined to buildings. Church meetings were held not only in buildings such as the temple or a synagogue, but also in public places such as the street, beside the sea, and often in homes.

\textsuperscript{76} James Haldane, \textit{An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews}, (Bradley S. Cobb, 2016), Kindle location 3048 of 4248.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 3044.

\textsuperscript{78} Luis Angel Diaz-Pabon, “What is the Church? It’s Role and Purpose According to the Bible,” \textit{Bible Study Tools}, (October 21, 2019), accessed March 4, 2021, \url{https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-church-according-to-the-bible.html}
Acts 2:46-47 reflects the meeting of believers who shared and fellowshipped in homes thereby adding to the number of those who were being saved. An article written by Luis Angel Diaz-Pabon on the early church, indicates that the full scope of church activity consisting of worship, communion, prayer, working in mutual edification, giving testimony of Christ, and taking care of the needs of the poor were incorporated into everyday life without regard to a formal assembly. Subsequently, those who observed the believers’ way of life called them the people of “the Way” due to their constant action, their defined doctrine, and because they could always be seen going from one place to another. Such demonstration of everyday church life supports the concept of a dynamic methods and modes of sharing the Gospel without regard to static settings such as those that are so prevalent in the modern church.

Bob Whitesel, a coach on church health and growth, indicates that church influencers of the future will not be those who stand before massive crowds, but those who create a relatable environment of candor, comfortableness and connecting with God. Subsequently, the post-pandemic church and society in general will have a new appreciation for the so-called fireside chat which alleviates some of the apprehension of the big building with many people. However, Whitesel admits that some will complain citing the virtual church as lacking unity saying, “Unless we worship together, we won’t be one.” To this point, the New Testament


80 Ibid.

81 Whitesel, Growing the Post-Pandemic Church: A Leadership Church Guide, Kindle 409 of 1055.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.
reflects on the differences between how Gentiles and Jewish-Christians worshipped (Acts 15:1-21). Subsequently, the Council of Jerusalem did not stress the importance of worshipping together, but rather that they worshipped in holiness and respect (Acts 15:24-29). Whitesel continued in his analysis to stress the importance of worship that is true and genuine versus that of worship styles and preferences citing Acts 15:24-29 and John 4:23-24.

The Christian world cannot find solace or resolve in merely surviving. Survival in this sense could be considered as promoting the same practices and policies as those before the pandemic. Such practices and policies most likely have contributed to the decline of church attendance and overall, Christian engagement. Subsequently, church leaders should consider learning organizations geared towards helping the church transition into different forms of expression. Alan Hirsch refers to this shift as adaptive leadership, where church leaders help the organization transition into other forms of expression where agility, responsiveness, innovation, and entrepreneurship are needed.84

Innovation and agility are desperately needed as the world, particularly our nation, is experiencing a pandemic that prohibits physical interaction evidenced by social distancing, limiting groups of people, and other restrictive measures. Though beneficial in one sense, these measures have given birth to conflict, confusion, and calamity of which the church and the mission of evangelism and discipleship are deeply affected.

The future of the church was established in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations …” In Nona Jones’ book on the engagement of social media to social ministry, the author indicates that when Jesus gave the disciples the edict to “go and make disciples,” the plan was not to have Christians stand and wait for people to come to a church

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The author’s point could be founded in Ephesians 3:10 when Paul declared that the church would be used to unveil the manifold wisdom of God to rulers and authorities in the heavens. As if the writing of Jones’ book in 2020, more than 360,000 people search social media mediums like Google for the phrase “church online.” The author indicates if we break that number down to across four Sundays, 7,500 people would search “church online” every week. Consequently, if 7,500 people decided to come to a local church on Sunday, would the pastoral team be prepared to care for the needs of another thirty thousand people every month? Jones adds that if 30,000 people are actively searching for Jesus online every month, how many more need him, but aren’t looking? The author’s suppositions allude to the church fulfilling the Great Commission to people who need the hope of Jesus. In this sense, the church can become more intentional in “going and making disciples” by extending its reach beyond physical walls and allowing technology to advance its means. In doing this, the church is not bound by political polarization, economic imbalance, or the hope of vaccines but rather a spiritual revolutionary undertaking that can ensure the promulgation of Matthew 28:19.

**Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical aspect of church leadership promoting digital platforms to encourage evangelism and employ discipleship is tied to theological and experiential foundations. In this sense, the literature sources reviewed amplify the need for understanding how technology is

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86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.
used, how the technology operates, and how God expects the church to use technology. If technology is pervasive and foreboding, as some indicate, church leaders may opt to avoid it. However, in attempting to prevent its use, the church inherently fails to employ God’s good gift. Conversely, if the technology is the newest communication frontier, church leaders should promote its use to accomplish their goals. In this sense, the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) came with instruction, but those instructions did not hinder the "how." Subsequently, the “how” may be the use of digital technology and social media.

One author asserts that the Internet is the greatest communication tool ever invented by humans. Social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Google contend for the interest of an unsurmountable virtual populace. The following statistics attest to the current popularity of social media.

1. There are over 3.21 billion people actively using Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Messenger each month, and according to Facebook, they are considered Family Monthly Active People (MAP).
2. Worldwide, there are over 2.74 billion monthly active users (MAUs) as of October 29, 2020.
3. 1.82 billion people log onto Facebook daily and are considered daily active users for September 2020.
4. Family Daily Active People (DAP) was 2.54 billion in September 2020 and 2.36 billion on average for March 2020, and an increase of 15 percent year-over-year.
5. According to eMarketer, Facebook’s growth is happening in developing countries where they claim Facebook will gain more than 250 million users between 2019 and 2023.
6. Facebook is the third-most visited website outranked by Google and YouTube.
7. Over 1.4 billion people now use Facebook Groups every month, and there are over 10M+ groups on Facebook.

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The Internet is the next step in the evolution of communication technologies that have taken place since Christ's time. However, to fully employ digital technology and social media to communicate the gospel message, it is necessary to determine best practices to measure Internet ministry implementation and maintenance.

David Bourgeois purports his research reveals that the digital ministry framework embodies three aspects of implementing an Internet ministry: technology, people, and processes. The technology component of Internet ministry involves selecting digital platforms or software applications and the decisions about what features should go on a church website and how the Church is marketed to the digital audience. Bourgeois contends that many organizations looking to start an online ministry immediately focus on the technology and completely ignore the aspects of people involved in the processes undertaken to implement and maintain the ministry. Subsequently, the people component incorporates all the individuals who are a part of the associated ministries and how they are used in digital technology. The process component involves defining the organization's steps to implement and maintain its digital technology ministry.

Studies cited indicate that one of the most significant advantages of social media over traditional media is defining and targeting a specific group of people with certain characteristics. Studies involving demographics revealed that most organizations were classified as small ministries with little resources to devote to digital technology. Subsequently,

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93 Ibid., 123.
94 Ibid.
95 Lala, *Social Media Engagement for Churches*, 27.
the following results reflect representatives from 344 organizations during the period from November 2007 to April 2008:96

- 68 percent were churches; the other 32 percent were broken down between organizations focused on discipleship, evangelism, and education.
- 77 percent had twenty-five or fewer people on staff.
- 53 percent spent less than $1,000 per year on their web ministry.
- 69 percent spent less than ten hours per week, working on their website.

The study cited had several questions directed towards understanding if the members of the organization considered their Internet ministry successful.97 Based on an algorithm assigning a “success score” the following answers were revealed:98

- Only 36 percent of the respondents thought their Internet ministry was successful.
- For churches only, the answer dropped to 33 percent that considered their digital ministry a success.
- Organization size did not seem to affect the success score, as organization with only one staff member had a higher average success (47 percent) than larger organizations, though not as high as those with over twenty-five on staff (49 percent success):
  - 47 percent of organizations with a staff size of one reported success.
  - 34 percent of organizations with a staff size of two to five reported success.
  - 29 percent of organizations with a staff size of six to twenty-five reported success.
  - 49 percent of organizations with a staff size of more than twenty-five reported success.

The study revealed that money did play a role in the success of Internet ministry. However, a large majority of organizations taking the survey had budgets under $1,000.99 The following data was revealed:


97 Ibid., 125.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.
• 25 percent of organizations with an annual budget less than $500 reported success.
• 30 percent of organizations with an annual budget of $500 to $1,000 reported success.
• 36 percent of organizations with an annual budget of $1,000 to $10,000 reported success.
• 64 percent of organizations with an annual budget more than $10,000 reported success.

The amount of time spent on Internet sites did play a role as well with higher success scores as the amount of time spent on the site increased. The study revealed that 69 percent of the organizations reported spending less than ten hours per week on the Internet. The following data was revealed:

• 24 percent of organizations that spent less than ten hours per week reported success.
• 57 percent of organizations that spent ten to twenty hours per week reported success.
• 71 percent of organizations that spent twenty to forty hours per week reported success.
• 73 percent of organizations that spent more than forty hours per week reported success.

The data reveals that having more money and spending more time on Internet ministry results in a higher success rate. However, despite time and money constraints, many smaller organizations were able to implement successful web ministries. Bourgeois asserts such successes could be the result of the decisions surrounding what features should go on the website (podcasts, blogs, videos, etc.), how much to integrate the ministry with existing sites (such as networks, blogs, and photo sharing), data collection and search engine optimization. To address concerns related to these areas that revealed the following data:


101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.
• Those that indicated they purchased their software from an outside organization instead of building it internally reported a success rate of 36 percent of the time.
• Those that indicated they built internal systems reported success 41 percent of the time.
• Those that included more interactive features (such as blogs and videos) reported greater success than those that did not.
• Organizations that included a calendar had a success rate 4 percent higher than those that did not.
• Organizations that included blogs had a success rate 19 percent higher than those that did not.
• Organizations that included podcasts had a success rate 15 percent higher than those that did not.
• Organizations that included videos had a success rate 22 percent higher than those that did not.

Success rates regarding Internet use can also be associated with the integration of websites. Organizations that included integration with social media sites reported much greater success than those that did not. The following data resulted from Bourgeois’ study:¹⁰³

• Organizations that integrated with blog sites reported slightly higher success rates than those that did not (Blogger: 1 percent higher, WordPress: 5 percent higher).
• Organizations that integrated with photo-sharing sites reported much higher success rates than those that did not (Photobucket: 15 percent higher; Flicker: 45 percent higher)
• Organizations that integrated with video-sharing sites reported much higher success rates than those that did not (YouTube: 25 percent higher; GodTube: 23 percent higher).
• Organizations that integrated with social networking sites reported much higher success rates than those that did not (Facebook: 24 percent higher; MySpace: 22 percent higher).
• Organizations that collected data about their sites (via tools such as Google Analytics) were much more successful than those that did not. Bourgeois contends that this finding is one of the largest differences between those who reported successes and those who did not.
  o Organizations collecting data about their site reported success 51 percent of the time.
  o Organizations not collecting data about their site reported success 16 percent of the time.
  o Organizations that had done some form of search engine optimization (SEO) were more successful than those that did not.

- Organizations that did SEO reported success 51 percent of the time.
- Organizations that did not report SEO reported success 25 percent of the time.

Another aspect of evaluation regarding the implementation of Internet ministry is the component of how people are used as part of the Internet presence being developed. In this sense, who is ultimately responsible for the website – and is it in their job description? Who will update the website and who sets for the direction for the website? Who is going to build the website, and should this be done in-house or employ the use of an outside consultant?

Bourgeois’ research revealed the following data:104

- Forty-nine percent of organizations who had one person responsible for the site reported success, compared to 22 percent of those who did not have one responsible person.
- Fifty-two percent of organizations who had a team to set direction for the website reported success compared to 31 percent of those who did not have a team.
- Organizations that had leadership give input into the features on the website reported success 6 percent more often than those that did not.
- Organizations that had outside consultant give input into the features on the website reported success 10 percent more often than those that did not.
- Organizations that had volunteers build the website reported success 16 percent less often than those that did not.
- Organizations that licensed their website from a vendor/provider reported success 3 percent more often than those that did not.
- Organizations that used outside consultants to build their website reported success 6 percent more often than those that did not.
- Organizations that utilized their internal IT staff to build their website reported success 9 percent more often than those that did not.

In comparison to Bourgeois’ evaluation of Internet and social media use, Eyitope Lala, asserts the effectiveness of social media can be assessed by determining critical areas of ministry and assigning specific goals. Lala prescribes four social media areas: evangelism, discipleship,
help, and promotions. In assessing these areas, specific goals are assigned and monitored to determine the return on investment (time and other resources).

An interesting approach to the use of technology and social media in the church can be focused on the concept of a missional church. Alan Hirsch purports that a missional church is one that defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose as an agent of God’s mission to the world. The author further describes that the church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission. In this sense, the church takes on a new form of ecclesia that lends itself to the outgoing thrust of mission-focused movements. These movements can take on the form or mode of doing something different such as technology and social media that serves to enhance the mission.

With the popularity of digital technology and social media comes the illusion of simplicity or ease of use. However, various factors affect the success of online platforms. Digital technology is ever-changing and evolving constantly. Users must contend with changing logos, colors, and updates. Aside from the technology, user expectations demand access and social sites on every device (e.g., mobile devices, desktops, tablets, etc.).

The studies examined revealed a considerable measure of success with digital technology based on the implementation of best practices. Though social media is relatively new, its use has been tested enough in sectors whose concerns are like those within the world of the church and faith (e.g., education, healthcare).

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105 Lala, *Social Media Engagement for Churches*, 24-25.
107 Ibid.
The increasing mobility of computing devices inclusive of lightweight laptops, electronic tablets, and smartphones indicate that digital engagement is integrated into the fabric of everyday life. Elizabeth Drescher wrote on this subject who indicates there is a blurring of the lines between digital and physical reality in both the world and religious life. The writer cites examples of churches giving MP3 players to children attending worship services with their parents so the kids can “hear the gospel in their own child language.” Though these practices could be viewed as superficially social or trite innovative ways to engage technology to the church, it cannot be totally ignored. Drescher contends there is a treasure trove of academic theology that is now available, mostly at no cost, to seekers, believers, and critics around the globe through Google Books and other online scholarly websites. Subsequently, the sheer volume of opportunities to connect others of similar religious affiliation or inclination and the range of material of religious interest available in digital format that can be accessed by the Internet seemingly points to a resurgence in religious practice across almost all faith groups. A 2004 report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project showed a 94 percent increase over two years in the number of Internet users seeking religious information online. Though no survey data is currently available to update these earlier findings, it is reasonable to assume the increased usage of Facebook has proportionately increased among those seeking religious information online.

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109 Drescher, Tweet If You Love Jesus, 249 of 2981 Kindle.

110 Ibid., 239 of 2981 Kindle.

111 Ibid., 240 of 2981 Kindle.

112 Ibid., 268 of 2981 Kindle.

113 Ibid., 277 of 2981 Kindle.

114 Ibid., 317 of 2981 Kindle.
These studies also lend credence to the use of technology to contend with social distancing and quarantine measures. Ultimately, the studies support the need to adopt digital technology and social media to promote evangelism and discipleship to a broader audience than that within conventional church walls.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter provides an instructional perspective on how the researcher conducted the study. Within this chapter, the purpose of selecting the method is presented, along with how the methodology supports the research study.

The research study intends to develop a plan to implement digital technology and social media to ensure evangelism and discipleship ministry regardless of physical limitations. Digital technology and social media provide the church with more tools and opportunities to reach more people with the gospel, thereby positively influencing the church’s goals and objectives. A viable digital deployment plan and social media platform are needed to promote the gospel and encourage maximum participation in expository preaching and discipleship studies.

Adaptive leadership is also needed to ensure the church develops a plan to help the organization transition into other forms of expression where agility, responsiveness, innovation, and entrepreneurship are needed. Subsequently, if Promise Land Church developed a well-defined deployment plan for digital engagement, it would be prepared to ensure the continuation of expository preaching and teaching despite physical restrictions such as social distancing and prolonged quarantine.

Contextual Consideration for Intervention Design

The intervention plan encompassed actions inclusive of processes and procedures involving the church’s Media Ministry. The Media Ministry has responsibility for managing the church's digital engagement through audio/visual capability, website management, and social media. The Media Ministry is administered and executed through written procedures and on-the-job training allowing new tools and concepts to be implemented. This process was important
during the study as it will enable rapid and thorough implementation of process improvement initiatives.

The study was conducted during the pandemic when social distancing and quarantining were still in effect and following the relaxation of COVID safety measures. Subsequently, virtual engagement proved beneficial to gather qualitative data to assess the issues and development remedies. Virtual engagement included church members and social networking participants who represent other churches or faith-based groups and organizations. Virtual engagement also lent credibility to the research study premise of the suitability and viability of deploying digital technology to ensure the proliferation of expository preaching and teaching.

Role of the Researcher

The intervention was not developed, executed, and evaluated solely by the researcher. Before the study, concerns related to the church's lack of digital and social media engagement were often discussed by the church leadership and the Media Ministry Team member. These discussions usually followed the unexpected use of digital engagement through Facebook Live due to inclement weather. Subsequently, an intervention would lead to changes to positively influence and implement digital engagement and social media to promote the gospel.

The role of the researcher was to lead project-related tasks. These tasks included but were not limited to communicating with church leadership on the specific tasks associated with the project, designing, and executing project research, evaluating results, and work with the Media Ministry Team to develop and implement solutions derived from the project.

The researcher was a co-participant with the Media Ministry Team and other church members in gathering and interpreting data to enable new and transformative modes of action. In
this sense, the researcher is a member of the church and involved in various ministries to which
the purpose and goals of the study will benefit.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board

Before starting the research work, a draft proposal that included a participant recruitment
letter and consent form and the research instruments were submitted to the thesis mentor for
approval by the IRB. A formal application accompanied the submission in February 2021. The
IRB reviewed the application and determined that the study did not classify as human subjects’
research (Appendix A). This determination was based on the project consisting of quality
improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable
knowledge,” according to 45 CFR 46.102(1).

On February 15, 2021, the IRB gave approval via email to begin research with the data
safeguarding methods outlined in the initial IRB application. As allowed by the IRB, the
researcher used the recruitment and consent templates provided but replaced the word research
with the word project on those documents.

The Intervention Design

A multi-method qualitative approach included various perspectives to engage participants
in a critical dialogue to lead to several rich data sets. In this sense, qualitative research enlists
characteristics that enable the examination of issues in the context of social experiences. The
researcher focused on how participants engage digital technology and social media within
ministry settings. These settings included digital engagement by members and others who used
social media to participate in Sunday services, Bible studies, small groups, and church meetings.
Purposive sampling was used to obtain varying perspectives. In this sense, select people participated in the research. These individuals were aware of the problem and served to provide technical and social views that related directly to "how" the problem could be resolved and evaluate the effect of solutions and remedies properly. Maximum variation sampling was also used to select from the congregation involving a broad range of perspectives based on demographics (age, gender, ethnic origin, marital status, number of children, education level, employment status, length of membership, use of social media, etc.).

The intervention was cyclic in nature and involved four main areas: communication, design, research, and evaluation. Each aspect of these areas is described in the sections that follow. Figure 2. depicts the overall cyclic intervention process of which each of the main areas is a part.1

![Figure 2: An Action Project Cycle](image)


1 Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 64.
Communication

As explained in contextual experience, a viable digital deployment plan and social media platform are needed to promote the gospel and encourage maximum participation in expository preaching and discipleship studies at PLC. This issue was prevalent even before COVID-19; however, the pandemic forced consideration of establishing and maintaining digital technology and social media to continue the church's mission and operation.

The researcher started communication with the senior pastor to inform him of the proposed study project and explain the problem and purpose. This initial communication was verbal but was followed with an online participant recruitment letter (Appendix B). The senior pastor acknowledged and verbally approved the study in March 2021. Subsequent communication involved an informal discussion with the Media Ministry Team Lead, the primary liaison between the researcher and members of that ministry. The Media Minister Team Lead expressed interest in the study agreeing with its problem and purpose. Subsequently, the Team was solicited to become participants in the study through the online participant recruitment letter (Appendix B) and participant consent form (Appendix C).

Communication encompassed engagement between the researcher and various members of the congregation who were considered stakeholders. Engagement was gathering data, communicating findings and results, and establishing ongoing processes and procedures to maintain and support project goals.

Design

By design, the participants had to meet the following criteria to be considered for the study; must be a member or affiliate of PLC or a member or affiliate of a faith-based group or organization. The researcher employed methodological triangulation as a multi-purpose data
collection process to enable objective comparisons based on observational data. Subsequently, to study the project problem, the researcher used various data research methods and quantitative tools inclusive of the following:

- A pre-interview survey (Appendix D) was used to determine the eligibility of participants to provide data for the project. The survey consisted of questions to focus on demographics regarding the population of the participant pool. The questions were primarily identity facts such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, employment status, educational level, length of membership or affiliation with PLC, and whether the participant used social media.

- Based on participants’ responses to the pre-interview survey, a project study questionnaire (Appendix E) was deployed that contained a series of questions and prompted to gather information directly related to the project problem and purpose. The questions included multiple-choice options and allowed text response for further explanation. All the questions were related to the participants' use of social media regarding the choice of websites or applications, frequency of use, the device used, reasons for the benefit of social media, quality of social media and website venues, and opinions on the viability of social media to promulgate the gospel message.

- A focus group was formed comprised of members of the Media Ministry Team to share insight into the problems or issues involved with digital deployment and social media engagement within the church. Each member was encouraged to communicate openly and honestly to provide feedback to improve digital delivery in the church and on social media. A questionnaire (Appendix F) was developed
and used to gather input from the Media Ministry Team. The questions were open and closed-ended but focused on soliciting ideas to improve digital deployment and social media engagement. The group met with the facilitator online via Zoom.

- A Leadership Questionnaire was developed to assess various facets of the church organization to determine the viability of a proposed intervention to address digital engagement and social media. The questionnaire was given orally in the church administrative office with the senior executive officer, who was operating in the capacity of the pastor. This participant has been a member of the church for 25+ years and has worked in various roles in the church. The participant’s viability as a source to address the questions was considered credible as a means of understanding how the intervention would affect the proposed goal. The questions were primarily open-ended and geared towards the pastor and the administrative staff of the church. The questionnaire outlined four areas of interest described as follows:
  
  o Leadership/Authority focus – the role of the pastor regarding overall authority to affect change.
  
  o Theological/Ecclesiological focus – Beliefs, dogmas, and views present in the church and how they might affect change.
  
  o Cultural Implications focus – general demographics of the congregation (i.e., race, ethnicity, age, gender, and social mores) and how they might affect change.
  
  o Budget/Resources focus – does the church have the necessary resources to effectively launch and maintain digital deployment?
**Project Timeframe**

The project timeframe was submitted in February 2021. Data collection began in the weeks following IRB approval. The project timeframe is displayed in Table 3.1 below.

### Table 3.1 Implementation Tasks and Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase/Activity</th>
<th>Timeline/Duration</th>
<th>Desired Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Phase</strong></td>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
<td>Overall communication strategy to initiate intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate communication to present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem and purpose of project study</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>to church leadership, Media Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Lead, and other participants</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Initial communication with the senior pastor to inform him of the problem and proposed implementation plan.**
   - Communication format:
     - Verbal discussion
   - No later than two weeks following IRB approval
   - Approval to proceed with project study and use of the Media Ministry Team, members of the congregation, and targeted ministries for research

2. **Initial meeting with Media Ministry Team Lead to discuss the problem and proposed implementation plan.**
   - Communication format:
     - Verbal discussion – in-person
   - Within one week of discussion with the senior pastor
   - Concurrence on Intervention Plan

3. **Identify and set up initial engagement with research participants (i.e., church participants)**
   - Communication format:
     - Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix B) – sent via email with a link to Microsoft Forms
     - Pre-Interview Survey to determine participant eligibility (Appendix D) – sent via email with a link to Microsoft Forms
   - Within two weeks of discussion with the senior pastor
   - To determine participant eligibility.
4. Gain written consent from an eligible participant(s) for research study

**Communication format:**
- Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) – sent via email with a link to Microsoft Forms

Within one week following receipt of the Pre-Interview Survey

**Participant(s) consent to participate in the research study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Phase</th>
<th>6-8 weeks</th>
<th>Tools and activities that support the purpose and objective(s) of the research study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The researcher conducts research using tools and techniques for qualitative research</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed collection methods and tools:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Project Study Interview Questionnaire (Appendix E) – sent via email with a link to Microsoft Forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Focus Group Questions (Appendix F) – held interview online via Zoom</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leadership Questionnaire (Appendix G) – held in-person in the church admin office</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Phase</th>
<th>8-10 weeks</th>
<th>Concrete assessment of data results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The researcher will use the concept of triangulation to compare observational data with interview data.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (Outsider) We will use a former member of the church who previously worked with the Media Ministry Team to determine if the data's interpretations are accurate and appropriate.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (Insider) The use of church participants plays a role in determining if the data's interpretations are accurate and appropriate.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | | Identify and group themes, slippages, and silences in the data. |
- (Researcher) Employ expertise as a minister and active participant to filter data.

Perform data content analysis – grouping responses by themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Implementation and Reassessment Phase</strong></th>
<th>Ongoing from the onset of proposed options</th>
<th>Develop practices, policies, and procedures that support the goals and objectives based on the research project's purpose.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform senior pastor, Media Ministry Team Lead of the results and proposed actions</td>
<td>Within two weeks of closing the study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication format: Written summary/report</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement recommendations from results</td>
<td>Following a report to Senior Pastor and Media Ministry Team Lead</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication format: Implementation Plan of Action and Milestones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-evaluate results to determine if they meet goals and objectives based on the purpose of the study</td>
<td>No later than six months following the execution of recommendations</td>
<td>No later than one year from execution of recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication format: Cyclical performance report</td>
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</table>

**Research**

As explained previously, all quantitative data collection tools were produced for online deployment. Microsoft Outlook email server was used to deploy the pre-interview and project study questionnaires via Microsoft Forms. The focus group data were collected manually via in-
person interviews. The pre-interview survey used to evaluate the participant’s usefulness in the study preceded the project study questionnaire.

Data derived from the project study questionnaire provided a basis for further data collection to determine a course of action to effect process improvement. Information from the questionnaire was provided to the focus study group in graphs, charts, and written reports.

Evaluation

The criteria to be used for evaluating the data derived from the research study will consist of the analytical framework of the data described as follows:²

- Processes – analyzing the processes, procedures, and tasks involved in the Media Team Ministry and other church functions that support digital communication.
- Issues – assessing the key reasons participants either support or do not support digital technology and social media within the church.
- Questions – assessing and organizing responses from interviews and questionnaires that reveal perceived strengths and weaknesses of current processes, procedures, and tasks.
- Sensitizing Concepts – determining themes based on participants' responses or how they perceive the issues.

To assess the effects of the research project based on defined goals, the researcher used multiple data collection techniques, more commonly referred to as triangulation, to evaluate and assess findings.

To appropriately apply the theory of triangulation, it is necessary to describe its implication in a qualitative data assessment fully. Triangulation is described as cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the integrity of individual accounts by gathering data from several informants and several sources and comparing and contrasting one account with

another to produce a complete and balanced study.\textsuperscript{3} Subsequently, gathering data from various sources, such as what was acquired from surveys and questionnaires, revealed similarities and differences regarding the use of social media and digital technology.

The researcher considered the use of four basic types of triangulations to evaluate both qualitative and quantitative data:\textsuperscript{4}

1. Data triangulation – the use of various data sources in a study based on observation, documents or official records, and interviews.

2. Investigator triangulation – the use of several different evaluators or social scientists who are investigating the same problem.

3. Theory triangulation – the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data.

4. Methodological triangulation – the use of multiple methods. To study a single problem or program, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents.

Methodological triangulation resulted in the best method executed by using three angles or perspectives of interpretation: outsider, insider, and researcher. The outsider perspective was a former member of the church who previously worked with the Media Ministry Team. The member remained as an affiliate of the church, often participating in worship services via Facebook Live. The member also connected with the church through the church’s social media applications (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and the website).

\textsuperscript{3} Sensing, \textit{Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses}, 72.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 73.
The insider perspective was accomplished using church participants. These participants were selected based on responses to the pre-interview survey. The research employed expertise as a minister and active participant to filter data.

The integration of three perspectives serves as a viable means of gaining broader and more objective perceptions of a problem and possible solutions. The Venn diagram below illustrates this concept.

Figure 3. Data Triangulation from Distinct Perspectives

From the perspective of systematically assessing or evaluating the data, the process began from the first responses received from the survey and questionnaires. In this sense, the facilitator began to consider the context in which the respondent was addressing the question. With the facilitator being a member of the church, there was considerable effort to evaluate the answers objectively; however, the use of an outsider participant and others helped in this effort.

The survey and questionnaires contained different items, including open-ended items, yes-no items, and multiple-choice items. To analyze open-ended items, the facilitator reviewed responses to determine themes or similarities. These themes were categorized, and responses were assigned and counted by theme. Frequency distribution lists were developed for each theme or category. A sample list is illustrated below:
In analyzing yes-no items, the data was organized in frequency distribution and calculated to determine the percentage of responses for each of the two response options. A sample chart is illustrated below:

**Figure 5. Sample Frequency Distribution List (yes/no response)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you attend in-person services?</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analyzing multiple-choice items that only allowed 1 response, the data was organized in a frequency distribution, and percentages were calculated for each response option. A sample chart is illustrated below:
The data collection tools employed in this study, coupled with the above criteria, should reveal data to significantly prove the necessity of establishing and maintaining digital engagement using technology and social media. Subsequently, the successful outcome of the intervention should develop and maintain a culture of digital awareness, development, and practice that promotes a continuation of preaching and teaching despite physically constrained environments. In this sense, the new approach of communicating the gospel message on digital platforms and social media will engage a broader audience, thereby fully exploiting the mandate of Matthew 28:19.
Chapter 4

Results

Analysis of the data derived from interviews, questionnaires, and surveys reveals that the results support the thesis statement. Charts and graphs were used to illustrate these results and outline themes that can lead to measures and practices to effect process improvement in digital deployment and social media.

The first area of the evaluation was determining the number of participants polled with those who responded. The project study focused on responses from a sample set of participants representing a cross-section of the church demographics. The pre-interview survey was sent to the sample population and used as a screening measure to determine the usefulness of the participant to address project goals. Upon selection from the pre-interview survey, the project study group consists of participants to the project study interview questionnaire.

As mentioned previously, the pre-interview survey and project study interview questionnaire were both deployed via email invitation. Participants were asked to click a link in the email to access the survey or questionnaire. The researcher sent 36 email invitations for the pre-interview survey. Based on a 77% response rate and participant eligibility, 28 invitations were sent for participation in the subsequent project study interview questionnaire. The table below outlines response rates for both data collection tools.
Table 4.1 Data Collection Tools Response Participant Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Tool</th>
<th>Number Sent</th>
<th>Number Responded</th>
<th>Percentage of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Interview Survey</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Study Interview Questionnaire</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-response to the pre-interview survey can be attributed to the use of email. Though email invitation generally yields a higher response rate, the mechanism is subject to individuals accessing email. In this sense, some respondents from the sample group reported that they did not see the email invitation, and others admitted to seeing the email but still failed to complete the survey. The researcher did follow-up phone calls to encourage participation; however, that effort did not yield a higher response rate.

The project study interview questionnaire resulted in a response rate of 92%. The high response rate from this data collection tool is attributed to the researcher giving verbal reminders to participants to complete the questionnaire. These reminders were mainly communicated following worship services as well as phone calls.

Results from Pre-Interview Survey

Data derived from the pre-interview survey is displayed in the tables below. Information from the survey was primarily demographic and designed to screen potential participants for eligibility to progress to the project study interview questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire is found in Appendix D of this project study.
Table 4.2 Gender Response to Pre-Interview Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Age Group of Pre-Interview Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Marital Status of Pre-Interview Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 Education Level of Pre-Interview Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 Employment Status of Pre-Interview Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 of the 28 participants from the pre-interview survey progressed and completed the project study interview questionnaire.

Results from Project Study Questionnaire

The data collected from the project study questionnaire served to support the thesis statement that proposes that if Promise Land Church developed a well-defined deployment plan for digital engagement through technology and social media, it would be prepared to effectively engage in the mission of evangelism and discipleship in that the charge of Matthew 28:19 would be executed with the continuation of expository preaching and teaching despite physical restrictions such as social distancing and prolonged quarantine. A copy of the questionnaire is found in Appendix E of this project study.
The project study questionnaire consists of different items, including open-ended items, yes-no items, and multiple-choice items. The following frequency charts display actual data based on results from the questionnaire.

**Figure 7. Use of Digital Platforms (social networking sites and websites)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Digital Platforms and Social Media Accounts</th>
<th>f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkedin</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that most of those who participated in the project study questionnaire used Facebook more frequently than any other social media application. However, most responded that they used more than one social media platform. There was no substantial margin of Facebook usage regarding males and females; it was approximately a 55:45 ratio. The use of Instagram and Linkedin followed closely behind Facebook; however, neither were indicated as being used to access worship services or Bible studies.

The data revealed that most participants accessed their preferred social media application daily with a duration of 1-2 hrs. The duration of usage among participants is higher than the average of 20 minutes per day reported by Brandwatch, a marketing data collection organization.¹ The margin of difference between the data collected from the study and

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Brandwatch can be attributed to a survey anomaly that did not allow for an answer of less than 1-2 hours of usage.

Cell phones or other mobile devices were identified as the "go-to" device. It is interesting to note that senior church members used personal computers more often than cell phones or mobile tablets. In subsequent conversations with senior members regarding using computers over cell phones, they indicated trouble with seeing images on smaller screens such as those on their cell phones or mobile tablets. Using computers over mobile devices may hinder accessibility, especially when attempting to engage on social media applications when away from home or where their computers are located. However, as COVID-19 is still a health threat, most senior members have not returned to physical gatherings and continue to engage through digital platforms from their homes. Figure 8 below outlines the frequency of social media platform usage.

![Figure 8. Frequency of Social Media Platform Usage](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Social Media Usage</th>
<th>f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every other day</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two days</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that the average number of friends or contacts (such as those on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) is 600. The number of friends and contacts is significant in the analysis of this data because if the 26 participants had at least half of the average number of 600
friends or contacts, there is a possibility that 7,800 people (300 x 26) could have contact or exposure to Promise Land Church. However, the potential of exposure to PLC ministries is greatly affected by the purpose of which members engage on social media platforms. Based on the data from the questionnaire, most members engage on social media platforms for non-church-related purposes. In subsequent conversations with those members who participated in the project study, they expressed that they might initially engage on social media platforms for non-church-related purposes but often use those opportunities to communicate church-related events and activities. Some of those members said that they often share church-related flyers and announcements on social media platforms.

One of the most valuable tools of social media platforms is that of the church website. During 2019-2020, as a part of the church administrative staff, the researcher worked with a web designer and members of the church on redesigning the church website. It became apparent even before the pandemic that the church website was outdated and largely irrelevant as it failed to display or broadcast those elements that could promote the church and the gospel message. As a result of the pandemic and subsequent quarantine, it became apparent that the website is more relevant and useful. A professional web designer was hired, and after six months in 2020, the new website became active. However, the project study questionnaire revealed that though the website's design was appealing and engaging, it was still largely irrelevant, especially when compared to websites from other churches. In subsequent conversations with members, the researcher learned that the website failed to be interactive as it did not allow for live chat, fillable forms, and other shared communicative options.

In response to whether social media is a viable option for communicating the gospel, all 26 participants agreed; however, most responded that social media should only be used in times
of a pandemic. The latter response aligned with the majority response that in-person worship is the preferred mode of participation for worship services.

Outsider Perspective Response

A previous member of PLC and who was a part of the Media Ministry Team offered comments on various aspects of that ministry. The member was not given a questionnaire or even an interview guide but offered comments based on experience and knowledge of the expertise and resources required for church media engagement. The former member expressed that the church is an integral part of its surrounding neighborhoods and communities but that it can also expand the reach of the gospel message to a larger audience by fully exploiting the internet communities. The member cited resources and training as the main two elements needed to promote digital engagement in the church. The member implied that the church had come a long way from before the pandemic regarding digital engagement. The point was illustrated in that substantial progress had been made regarding the purchase and use of equipment to support digital engagement. The member concluded that subsequent training is required to ensure the proper use of equipment and recruitment of those who have information technology expertise and media engagement.

Media Ministry Focus Group Response

The Media Ministry Focus Group participated in the project study as questionnaire participants and an open and guided conversation. The conversation was held on Thursday, August 12, 2021, via Zoom. The conversation was recorded to compile notes for the researcher's project study. As a former member of the church and the administrative staff, the researcher participated as a participant-observer.
The conversation opened with the researcher explaining the problem, purpose, and thesis statements. The group was told that their identities would not be revealed in either a written or oral format. The researcher asked a series of questions, including how long the participant has been a member of the church and their role and responsibility in the Media Ministry. Each member was also asked what services and products could improve Media Ministry outputs and felt training would be beneficial. Each of the participants explained that their roles and responsibilities began with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, most of the members had no or other ministry assignments in the church. From the researcher's perspective, the Team was formed as a "just-in-time" effort to address digital engagement and continuation of the church considering the pandemic and subsequent quarantine. However, the group remained through the time of the pandemic and even as quarantine restrictions were lifted. One of the team members was identified as the team lead of which the member indicated was communicated in both verbal and written format. The latter format was an actual position description outlining the roles and responsibilities of the team lead with supporting the Team.

Each member contended that the ministry and overall support to the church would be more effective with additional resources and training. Resources were described as money needed for equipment and having a trained professional to train the team members. Some of the team members questioned if the culture and mentality of church leadership were conducive to supporting resources needed to enhance digital engagement. This point was further explained as the need for a mental shift in leadership’s understanding of significantly improving digital capability. One member expressed the desire to establish a definition for media services and products. In this sense, it is considered that media is mainly described as visual and audio support. However, it was suggested that the definition be expanded to emphasize all aspects of
media, inclusive of social media and websites. One other comment was developing an action plan to plan, schedule, and manage media tasks. This point was based on making the best use of ideas and suggestions offered in meetings. Appendix H, which is a plan of actions and milestones, was developed to address the concern. Other comments supported the concept of training for the Media Ministry Team and other ministries in the church who received or benefitted from media services and products. The training was included as a part of actions and milestones in Appendix H.

Leadership Questionnaire Response

The researcher employed a Leadership Questionnaire (Appendix G) to assess various facets of the church organization to determine the viability of a proposed intervention to address digital engagement and social media. The questionnaire was given orally in the church administrative office with the senior executive officer, who was operating in the capacity of the pastor. The participant has been a member of the church for 25+ years and has worked in various roles, and held responsibilities in the church. The participant's viability as a source to address the questions was considered credible as a means of understanding how the intervention would affect the proposed goal. The questions were primarily open-ended and geared towards the pastor and the administrative staff of the church.

The first question focused on the role of the pastor or church leadership as the authority for change management and directing the message or theme of the church. The member responded that church leadership is the primary agent for managing change in the church. In this sense, the pastor defines themes, topics, and ideas used to generate interest and participation in church ministries that promote the gospel message's overarching theme. Such themes are then promulgated to the congregation through preaching, teaching, and training with the intent of
gaining enthusiasm and participation. The member indicated that the same themes are extended to the virtual audience, focusing on building membership and enabling disciple-making.

The next question focused on beliefs, dogmas, and views present in the church that might enable or disable digital engagement. The member responded that church membership consisted of various demographics that contribute to certain beliefs, dogmas, and views regarding digital engagement as a primary source of preaching, evangelism, and discipleship. In this sense, the member expressed that most members prefer in-person engagement, which was indicated by the results of the project study questionnaire. The member further revealed that due to COVID-19 and the subsequent quarantine, it was necessary to explore and exploit other means of engagement as in-person attendance did not adhere to safety requirements put forth by the Centers for Disease Control. The member indicated that digital engagement through Facebook Live, YouTube, and the church website did allow for a wider audience of which the church gained members. The member supports the concept of interpreting Matthew 28:18-20 as a mandate to expand the gospel message beyond the church walls of which digital technology and social media serve to support.

The following questions focused on cultural implications regarding whether digital technology and social media could be geared towards specific groups within the church. The member indicated an opportunity with digital technology and social media to target particular groups inside and outside the church. In this sense, the church website could create blog corners or pages that cater to different age groups, male and female ministry groups, and other affinity groups. The member indicated that these specialized digital engagement areas could generate more interest in the church and subsequently expand evangelism and discipleship.
The next few and final questions focused on the budget and resources needed for enhanced digital engagement and social media interaction. When asked if church leadership would support increasing the budget to improve equipment and training, the member agreed that resources are needed. However, it was mentioned that during COVID-19 and the subsequent quarantine, members' giving and other contributions through steady could only support the present state of media engagement. The member suggested that the Media Ministry Team explore opportunities to utilize the existing equipment and technology fully. In addition, it was explained that plans are in place to supplement the budget to enhance technology, but it would take time.

Research Conclusion

Upon completing the Leadership Questionnaire, the researcher concluded the research of the project study. A review of the data collected from the various research tools: the project study questionnaire, Media Team Focus Group, outsider perspective, and the leadership questionnaire, noted there is considerable interest in the use of digital technology and social media at PLC to promote the gospel message. The church has experienced modest growth due to digital engagement, and enhancements to equipment and training should increase.

The project study did reveal that though there is considerable interest in using digital technology and social media to promote the gospel message, there are those who do not fully utilize the Internet for purely spiritual purposes. However, despite one's impetus for clicking on a social media website, it often results in finding oneself migrating to spiritual blogs and issues. Some of these issues are presented as arguments based on one belief versus another. It is pertinent to note that people who engage in the digital space environment fight about religious
matters all the time.² The comment boxes of religious and atheist sites are visited more frequently and have the most heated discussions. Robert Barron notes that around 90 percent of posted reactions to his spiritual blogs were sharply negative, arising from people who hated God and religion.³ Based on the increase of interest, rather negative or positive, towards religion and associated topics, it is safe to assume that there is a great deal of activity and energy around these matters. Such dynamism can be the catalyst for increased engagement in the digital environment. PLC, though a small local church in the heart of the Bible Belt and what was once a Confederate stronghold, can become an online ecclesiastical beacon to cultivate rational speech around religious and other matters that impact the everyday lives of others.


³ Ibid.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

When you allow yourself to imagine a spiritual environment without limits, it is then that you can engage in boundless opportunities that lead to endless possibilities based on communicating with one another. Communication is the foundation of connectivity in any relationship, organization, and even in our families.\(^1\) It is implied that the more we communicate, the better our chances are staying connected.\(^2\) This point is especially true for the church in that extending the reach of communication ensures that members (both inside and outside the church) remain connected. Natchi Lazarus asserts that much like how the secular world uses text and visuals as a means of communicating, the church can use that same context to keep the Body of Christ connected.\(^3\) The author indicates that God placed great importance on keeping channels open between Him and man, as illustrated in God's initial interaction with Adam in the Garden of Eden. Once communicating was disrupted due to Adam’s sin, Jesus came and restored our communications with God. Subsequently, God enabled man’s ability to have meaningful communication with each other too.

The purpose of this project study proposed that PLC look beyond the physical walls of the church to the vast communities of the Internet as a medium to communicate the message of the Scriptures through evangelism and discipleship. In this sense, the Christian faith is employed to engage the minds of those who connect via the Internet. This point is significant as Christianity is a religion that emphasizes the importance of teaching. Many other faith systems

\(^{1}\) Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 80.

\(^{2}\) Ibid.

\(^{3}\) Ibid.
and worldviews downplay teaching in favor of rituals, stating that doctrine is less important than performance. However, Jesus' example of teaching is the measure He requires of His followers. His standard requires that Christians use God-given renewed minds to determine what is true and reject false (Colossians 1:9-10). Subsequently, the Internet, digital technology, and social media are daunting communication frontiers. The Christian community can choose to ignore it or embrace its possibilities. But, with "renewed minds," the church can extract what is beneficial from these mediums and discard what is not.

Developing a Digital Communication Platform

Digital technology and social media effectively maintain communication during such times as the pandemic and subsequent quarantine. PLC relied heavily on digital engagement and social media during that time and continued using such mediums as Facebook, YouTube, and the church website to continue the proliferation of the gospel message. Because communication has proven vital both during the pandemic and since there is a need for a communication platform to enable and exploit digital technology and social media entirely, the following criteria must be considered for a successful communication platform:

- Help members of the church search, find, and locate one another when required.
- Help members stay connected on-demand whenever a member needs another member.
- Give the flexibility to choose the depth in the connection, such as connecting closely with some while simply staying in touch with others.
- Help each member express their unique gifts, talents, and calling to one another.
- Help each member express their God-given knowledge, expertise, thoughts, and plans to build up one another.
- Help members learn from one another
- Help members to pray for one another
- Help members communicate without being limited by distance, location, and space.

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5 Lazarus, The Connected Church, 81-82.
• Help communication without being limited by the number of people the platform can hold
• Help communication by not being limited by cost and economic factors

Social media can fulfill practically all the criteria outlined above. It can be a tool that meets two essential needs of today's church: 1) the need for a platform to communicate and minister to each other within the church, and 2) the need for a platform to communicate, serve, and minister to people who need help and are yet to hear the gospel message outside the church.\(^6\)

The Internet has enabled churches to experience barrier-free communication capability that can be further enhanced with innovative technology. An essential aspect of social media is that most people are already on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter. These platforms share a commonplace on the Internet. The gospel message can be integrated and expedited in various households and gathering places with nearly billion-plus monthly active users.

The Connected Church Communications Model

To effectively enable digital technology and the use of social media as a means of promoting the gospel message, connected church communication is recommended. The Connected Church Communications Model\(^6\) is an actionable strategy consisting of four components:\(^7\)

1. The Core
2. The Community
3. The Content

\(^6\) Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 82-83.

\(^7\) Ibid., 86.
The first two components of the model determine the direction of the church social media ministry, and the following two components assess the effectiveness of the church social media ministry.\(^8\)

Component 1 or the Core is the WHY of the church’s social media ministry. The Core is the central piece and is the reason for planning what you do on social media. To appropriately assess the WHY of the church’s social media should be based on the following points:\(^9\)

- What is the purpose of the church’s social media ministry?
- Is the purpose aligned with the church’s purpose or calling? If so, how?
- How will social media improve how the church ministers to its intended audience?
- How does integrating social media into the church impact current plans? Future plans?
- Is social media where God wants the church to focus on or become a priority?
- After one year of social media efforts, what is the anticipated change the church expects to see in ministry? What about in three years and five years?

Component 2 is the community or the WHO of the church’s social media ministry. The following points should be considered:\(^10\)

- Create a list of people, groups, organizations, and other entities who will benefit from what the church is doing on social media.
- Use analytics from social media sites to determine who is accessing the church site to enable identifying the WHO of the church social media ministry.
- Consider the appropriate frequency of the church’s social media posts.
- Determine how to design visual elements to attract and retain users’ attention.
- Determine the tone and type of language to use on social media sites.
- Determine the preferences of the church’s social media users – identify the affinity or shared interest groups (geographic location, demographics, faith affiliation, lifestyles, spending patterns, etc.).

\(^8\) Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 86.
\(^9\) Ibid., 86-87.
\(^10\) Ibid., 89-91.
Component 3 is the WHAT or Content of the church’s social media ministry. Content is how the church message is expressed or conveyed to the community of users. The following describes the various forms of content.\footnote{Lazarus, \textit{The Connected Church}, 92.}

- Spoken Content – created in church services, seminars, conferences, events, studio recordings, radio shows, podcasts, etc.
- Written Content – created for books, blogs, research papers, magazines, etc.
- Graphical visual content – created as images, designs, memes, infographics, slides, videos, animations, etc.

When considering the content of the church’s social media ministry, the following points should also be considered:\footnote{Ibid., 93.}

- What type of content is preferred – the church should consider types of content based on various factors. There can also be more than one type of content that can be prioritized.
- What type of content will help fulfill the church’s purpose – refer to the church’s purpose statement for creating a social media ministry. Align the chosen content with the church’s purpose.
- What type of content is preferred by the church's community of users – consider the community you serve and think about what they might choose.

Component 4 is the HOW or Channel of the church’s social media ministry. The channel is the type of social media the church will use. The most effective communication channel for a church is the one where the audience spends the most time.\footnote{Ibid., 94.} Based on results from the project study questionnaire, Facebook is the preferred channel of communication. Subsequently, Facebook is where the focus of content should reside. It is important to note that channels may change over time, so it is necessary to monitor modes of communication to meet the audience's needs. The following points should be considered:\footnote{Ibid., 95.}
• What is the social media channel(s) the church’s audience uses the most?
• How does the community consume their daily news? TV, radio, social media, etc.?
• What channels are most suited for the content types the church plans to use to reach the community?
• Currently, where is the church’s online traffic coming from? Which social media channels give the maximum return on investment for the effort, time, and money at present?

Implementing the Communication Model

A structured approach is needed to implement the recommended communication model. The following framework contains six steps to be implemented by a team. The Media Ministry Team, along with members whose ministries are supported by the Team, should address each step. The steps are notated as follows:15

1. Structuring consists of building a structure of the church's goals relevant to the social media audience.

2. Packaging determines which form of content to use – written, audio, video, or visual. It should be determined how each of the forms of content impacts the church's social media ministry.

3. Integrating is determining how to incorporate social media into every part of the church's ministry. It is important to note that social media is not a standalone entity. It should become a part of every aspect of the church. This point can be evidenced in regular ministry church activities, intercessory prayer, biblical studies, special events, and more.

4. Releasing addresses how to publish or circulate social media content. Random social posts will not produce the desired results and may compromise the church’s brand or focus. A strategy is required for every piece of content posted.

15 Lazarus, The Connected Church, 100-103.
5. Igniting relates to how the content posted on social media can be incited to ensure the post reaches the right audience. This point is significant since social media posts get crowded with millions of blogs, videos, and other content.

6. Tracking focuses on practical ways to track and measure social media activities. This part of the process helps the church understand what works and what does not so changes can be made where and when necessary.

The following statistical data elements might define measurable goals that can be used in tracking:\(^\text{16}\)

Table 5.7 Measurement of Goals Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of hits</td>
<td>How popular is the website?</td>
<td>To increase awareness of church ministries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of specific clicks or</td>
<td>How popular are particular pages on the website?</td>
<td>To increase awareness of specific church ministries and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most popular pages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of views</td>
<td>Who connects via social media sites?</td>
<td>To increase viewership – reach a larger population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounce rate</td>
<td>Who visits the website once without doing anything?</td>
<td>To establish digital relationships with viewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of downloads</td>
<td>Who and what are viewers downloading to mobile</td>
<td>To engage viewers from various digital devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>devices, etc.?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search engine ranking</td>
<td>Where does the church website rank with other</td>
<td>To increase viewership – reach a larger population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>similar websites?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of comments</td>
<td>Are viewers seriously engaged with the website,</td>
<td>To determine how people are taking the church content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>video, or blog?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number/amount of donations</td>
<td>Are viewers donating to the church/ministries?</td>
<td>To determine the level of commitment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

It’s A New Season -The Way Ahead

When we look back at how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world, it should be considered how this dismal and depressing period changed the body of Christ, allowing churches to enter a new season. The new season is excitement over the new possibilities involving communication empowered by digital technology, connectivity, and social media.

History books will reflect on various occurrences and incidences that may remind the world of its vulnerability and the need for rapid and advanced medical technology to cope with future viruses. However, Christians should reflect on how physical distancing and quarantine enabled churches to expand their walls to reach the entire world with a single click to a website or other social media channel.

Though we are uncertain when Jesus Christ makes His triumphant return to gather believers, we are fully aware that we are in the end times. This knowledge is revealed in the decline of morality and overall rejection of God and all He stands for. During these times, we may see destructive technologies, gadgets, ideas, teachings, distractions, attractions, and innovations geared towards drawing people away from the truth into eternal demise. However, it is a time when the Word of God can prevail and turn people to the truth of eternal communion with God.

What is the response of the universal church in this season? Should it be that of feeling overwhelmed because the task seems unattainable and distant? Will believers decide to give up and wait for the current demise to come to an end? Or will the church rise to the challenge at hand much like ancient Christians during the time of oppression and persecution? Interestingly, some churches have resigned their congregants to waiting with no recourse for continuing the gospel mission. One can only imagine what it would have been like if Christianity ceased to expand during the time of oppressive Roman rule. The church must recognize that the same God
who has been with his people throughout the ages will continue to lead and guide for the sake of restoring a relationship with all who seek Him.

Lazarus contends that God continues to raise 'Digital Moses’es’ who will lead people out of slavery and bondage to sin by proclaiming the gospel's truth online, thereby creating valuable content and building businesses with Kingdom values. Perhaps, this is the opportunity God has allowed several ‘Digital Moses’es’ within a local church to broaden the reach of communication from right where they are. In this sense, the challenge for Promise Land Church was to contend with factors that prevented or hindered physical gatherings in light of the need to continue the church's ministry. Though PLC struggled initially, the drive to fulfill Matthew 28:19 was ever-present, and the church sought ways to employ technology to meet the mandate. The efforts of church leadership coupled with a dedicated Media Ministry Team revealed a project to improve the way ahead to fully engage and utilize digital technology and social media to promulgate and promote the gospel message.

Subsequently, the data gained from this project study, along with the Communications Model and implementation plan, are not intended solely for PLC but for any local church that strives to expand its reach beyond the church walls. By employing digital technology and social media within the church, the Apostle Paul's words, 'I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Cor. 9:19), might be demonstrated on a common communications platform.

---

Lazarus, The Connected Church, 211.
Bibliography


February 15, 2021

Rowevina Herring
Kenneth Hood


Dear Rowevina Herring and Kenneth Hood,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
June 1, 2021

Dear Project Study Participant,

As a student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to create a program or platform to fully incorporate expository preaching and teaching in a digital environment, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a member or affiliate of a church, faith-based group or other church organization. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a pre-interview survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The pre-interview survey will be sent to you via email, or it can be mailed if you prefer. If you meet the required criteria for participant selection, you will receive a research interview questionnaire. The research interview questionnaire will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent form is also provided as a link on the email with the recruitment letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign and save the consent document for your records and return a copy to the email or mailing address below. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is used throughout the project.
APPENDIX C.
Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Engagement of Digital Technology and Social Media at Promise Land Church (PLC) Following COVID-19

Principal Investigator: Rowevina G. Herring, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation to be Part of a Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are invited to participate in a project study. In order to participate, you must be one of the following: (1) a member or guest of Promise Land Church or (2) a member or affiliate of a faith-based organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking part in this project study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. See the section on withdrawing from the study.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this project study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about and why is it being done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the study is to create a program or platform for PLC to incorporate expository preaching and teaching in a digital platform fully. A viable digital deployment plan and social media platform are needed to promote the gospel and encourage maximum participation in expository preaching and teaching to advance evangelism and discipleship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will happen if you take part in this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Complete a pre-interview survey. The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey can be downloaded as a fillable pdf document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. If it is determined that you meet the criteria for participant selection, you will be notified by email or phone call within one week of your submittal. You will be asked to complete a Project Study Interview Questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How could you or others benefit from this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to the interview questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the congregation by expanding the delivery of preaching and teaching to a wider audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What risks might you experience from being in this study?

There are no known risks associated with this interview questionnaire. However, it is possible that you might feel distress while taking the questionnaire or during any subsequent conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

How will personal information be protected?

Your name will be kept confidential in all the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to recordings.

Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- When I write the ethnography or a written account of what I observe, I will use pseudonyms – made up names – for participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- There is a possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to protect your anonymity.
- Data from your interviews will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- I plan to use what I learn from this study with the Senior Pastor and Media Ministry Team Lead. The recordings from interviews, if used, will be maintained for the duration of the study. The recordings will be erased once the data is incorporated to the written study. I will be the only person who has access to the recordings.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu
Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the project study, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is being used throughout the project.
APPENDIX D.
Pre-Interview Survey

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and respond by circling the response that
 describes your personal reaction to the statement. Please be completely open and honest in your
 responses to make the information useful for the purpose of the study. This questionnaire will
take approximately 5-10 minutes. Thank-you.

Name ______________________

Date ______________________

1. Gender:
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. Age Group:
   a. 12-17
   b. 18-24
   c. 25-34
   d. 35-44
   e. 45-54
   f. 55-64
   g. 65 and over

3. Ethnic Origin:
   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native American
   e. Asian/Pacific Islander
   f. Other (please specify____________________)

4. Marital Status:
   a. Single, never married
   b. Married
   c. Widowed
   d. Divorced
   e. Separated
5. Number of Children
   a. None
   b. 1-3
   c. 4-5
   d. 5 or more

6. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
   a. No schooling completed
   b. Some high school, no diploma
   c. High school graduate or the equivalent – GED
   d. Some college credit, no degree
   e. Trade/technical/vocational training
   f. Associate degree
   g. Bachelor’s degree
   h. Master’s degree
   i. Professional degree
   j. Doctorate degree

7. Employment Status
   a. Employed or wages
   b. Self-employed
   c. Homemaker
   d. Student
   e. Military
   f. Retired
   g. Unable to work

8. Are you a member of Promise Land Church?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. If you answered yes to Question 8 how long have you been a member?
   a. Less than one year
   b. 1-3 years
   c. 4-6 years
   d. 7 years or more
10. If you answered no to Question 8, what is your church or faith-based affiliation?
   Name of church/organization_______________________________________

11. Are you on social media? (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, church website)
   a. Yes
   b. No

12. If you answered yes to Question 11 how often do you access these platforms?
   a. Several times a day
   b. Several times a week
   c. Several times a month
   d. Seldom access

13. If you answered no to Question 11, state your reason (limit to a few sentences)
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is used throughout the project.
Appendix E
Project Study Interview Questionnaire

If you are participating in this questionnaire, you have been selected as either a member of Promise Land Church (PLC) or a member or affiliate of another church or faith-based organization. I appreciate your participation in this study.

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and respond by circling the response that describes your personal reaction to the statement. For questions requiring text, complete with short, but complete answers. Please be completely open and honest in your responses to make the information useful for the purpose of the study. This questionnaire will take approximately 20-25 minutes. Thank-you.

Name ______________________

Date ______________________

The following questions relate to digital platforms (social networking sites and websites):
1. Which of the following social media websites do you currently have an account with?
   a. Facebook
   b. Twitter
   c. Instagram
   d. Linkedin
   e. Other (please specify ______________________)

2. How often do you check-in to your social media accounts in any given week?
   a. Daily
   b. Every other day
   c. Every two days
   d. Once a week
   e. Every hour

3. On an average how much time do you spend on social media?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. An hour
   c. 1-2 hours
   d. 3-4 hours
   e. More than 4 hours
4. In a week, which of the following social media websites do you visit most frequently?
   a. LinkedIn
   b. Facebook
   c. Twitter
   d. Instagram
   e. Other (please specify______________________)

5. What is your go-to device to access your social media feed?
   a. Mobile (phone)
   b. Tablet
   c. Laptop
   d. Desktop

6. How many friends do you have on social media (approximate numbers are allowed)?
   ________________

7. When you access social media and websites what is your reason or purpose?
   a. To engage with others – online socializing – non-church related
   b. To gain information about upcoming events and activities – non-church related
   c. To hear or engage in church-related events and activities
   d. Other (explain)

8. If you access social media and websites for church-related events and activities, what is your reason or purpose? You may choose more than one option.
   a. To view online services via Facebook Live or the website
   b. To gain information about upcoming events and activities – church-related
   c. To participate in Bible studies or small groups
   d. Other (explain)

9. On a regular day how many times do you post pictures, comments, etc. on your social media accounts?
   a. Extremely often
   b. Very often
   c. Moderately often
   d. Slightly often
   e. Not often at all
The following questions relate to online content and design of the PLC website and social media platforms (if you are not a member or affiliate of PLC or viewed the website or Facebook page, you may skip questions 10-15):

10. How would you best describe the quality of your experience when visiting the PLC website?
   (1) Excellent, (2) Very Good, (3) Good, (4) Fair, (5) Poor, (6) Very Poor

11. In relation to other church websites, how would rate PLC website?
   (1) Excellent, (2) Very Good, (3) Good, (4) Fair, (5) Poor, (6) Very Poor

12. Do you agree that the information found on the website is relevant and useful?
   (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

13. Do you agree that the information and blogs on the PLC Facebook page are relevant and timely?
   (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

14. Do you agree that the design and format of the PLC website is appealing and engaging?
   (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

15. Rate the functionality of the website (finding information and use of links and buttons)
   (1) Very easy to use, (2) Easy to use, (3) Somewhat easy to use, (4) Difficult

The following questions relate to your overall experience regarding digital platforms and social media in their relationship to preaching and teaching.

16. Do you agree that social media and websites are viable options to communicate the gospel message?
   (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

17. Explain your response to Question 16.
18. Do you agree that social media and websites be used to communicate the gospel only in times of social distancing such as the present pandemic?

(1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

19. Explain your response to Question 18.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

20. What is your preferred mode of participation for worship services?

a. In-person (in the church building or with others)
b. At home (viewing on social media or the website)
c. Other (please specify: _____________________________)

21. Do you feel that a social media platform can fully support the following aspects of the church’s worship service? (you can select more than one)

a. Communion
b. Baptisms
c. Consecration of new members
d. Installment services
e. Praise & Worship (singing)
f. Tithes & Offerings
g. Other (please specify: _________________)

22. What are your feelings regarding church services online instead of in-person (with others).

Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

23. Explain your response to Question 22. _____________________________

24. What are your feelings regarding online Bible studies and small groups instead of in-person?

Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, (4) Strongly Disagree

25. Explain your response to Question 24. _____________________________

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is used throughout the project.
APPENDIX F
Focus Group Questions

General Instructions:
This is a participative interview where all are invited and encouraged to contribute. Your input will greatly enhance this study. I request that you are mindful of respecting the opinions of others as we are not here to place judgement, but rather engage in meaningful discussion.

You have already signed a consent form giving your permission for me to annotate your responses. Your input will remain anonymous outside of this group. You have the option to refrain from answering any questions.

Thanks again for your participation in this group.

1. How long have you been a member of the Media Ministry?

2. Briefly describe your role and responsibilities in the Media Ministry?

3. Describe the way your role and responsibilities were given (ex: verbally, written, other)

4. As a member of the Media Ministry, do you feel your opinions or suggestions are acknowledged or accepted as meaningful input?

5. In what ways do you feel we could improve the services and products that Media provides?

6. Would you like training in your area of Media? If your answer is yes, explain what type of training you feel would be beneficial.

7. Any additional comments you would like to share?

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is used throughout the project.
APPENDIX G
Leadership Questionnaire

Leadership/Authority focus:

1. How do you view your role as pastor regarding authority?
   a. Do you have the authority to institute and maintain changes such as full integration of
digital technology and social media for the church?
   b. What do you perceive as the message or theme of the church?
   c. How does the church want to be regarded by those who do not sit in the building?
      (virtual audience)?

Theological/Ecclesiological focus:

2. What beliefs, dogmas, and views are present in the church?
   a. How might those views affect the full integration of digital technology and social
      media for the church?
   b. Will social media focus on church advertisement to expand or grow the congregation
      or promote the gospel through evangelism and discipleship?
   c. Should the command of Matthew 28:18-20 be interpreted as going beyond the church
      walls with digital technology and social media?
   d. Is there opportunity to replace the traditional model of in-person attendance with
digital churches?

Cultural Implications focus:

3. What are the demographics of the congregation regarding race, ethnicity, age, gender, and
   social mores?

4. How will the church deploy digital technology and social media to address the various
groups’ specifics and peculiarities?

5. Will digital devices and social media become a substitute for fellowship or physical
   gatherings?

6. Will lack of physical engagement affect the mission of the church?
**Budget/Resources focus:**

7. Does the church have the technological expertise to launch and maintain digital deployment effectively?

8. Is there sufficient budget to invest in equipment, technology, and online enhancements to create a virtual environment that promotes and supports evangelism and discipleship?

9. Should there be a comparison between the cost of in-person gatherings instead of digital audiences, and should cost be a factor in determining one mode of communication over the other?

10. What suggestions do you have regarding the development, deployment, and maintenance of digital technology for PLC?

*Note: To protect the identity of the church being studied, the pseudonym “Promise Land Church” is used throughout the project.*
## APPENDIX H
Implementation Plan of Action and Milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Completion Date (target date)</th>
<th>Responsible persons or entities</th>
<th>Status (provide notes if needed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milestone 1. Development of Communication Platform</td>
<td>Identify WHY the church should employ social media as a means of promoting the gospel message? Establish a purpose statement – this should align with the church’s overall mission and goals.</td>
<td>September 1, 2021</td>
<td>October 31, 2021</td>
<td>Media Ministry Team/Representatives from supported ministries/Leadership representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify WHO is the church’s social media audience.</td>
<td>September 1, 2021</td>
<td>October 31, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify WHAT is the content of the church’s social media ministry. (Spoken, Written, or Visual/Video content)</td>
<td>September 1, 2021</td>
<td>October 31, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determine the HOW of the church’s social media ministry. Which social media channel to use (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, website, etc.) Note: you may choose more than one but prioritize.</td>
<td>September 1, 2021</td>
<td>October 31, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>Completion Date (target date)</td>
<td>Responsible persons or entities</td>
<td>Status (provide notes if needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milestone 1. (continued)</td>
<td>Develop a prioritized budget consistent with the purpose statement and each of the goals.</td>
<td>November 1, 2021</td>
<td>November 15, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get approval for budget. Consult leadership.</td>
<td>November 16, 2021</td>
<td>November 30, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Milestone 2. Implementation of Approved Plan | | | Media Ministry/Team/Representatives from supported ministries/Leadership representative |
|---------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Structure the church’s goal, making them relevant to the social media audience. | November 16, 2021 | November 30, 2021 |
| Determine which form of content to use (written, audio, video or visual). | November 16, 2021 | November 30, 2021 |
| Determine how to incorporate social media to every area of the church (Sunday services, intercessory prayer, biblical studies, special events, etc.) | November 16, 2021 | November 30, 2021 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Completion Date (target date)</th>
<th>Responsible persons or entities</th>
<th>Status (provide notes if needed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Milestone 2. (continued)</strong></td>
<td>Determine how to publish or circulate social media content. Avoid random posts; every post should align with the church’s brand or focus.</td>
<td>November 16, 2021</td>
<td>November 30, 2021</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determine how to generate interest with the social media audience. Make every social engagement relevant for the intended audience.</td>
<td>November 16, 2021</td>
<td>November 30, 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>Completion Date (target date)</td>
<td>Responsible persons or entities</td>
<td>Status (provide notes if needed)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Milestone 3. Monitoring the Plan</strong></td>
<td>Collect analytics from social media channels to measure social media engagement (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Media Ministry Team – select at least (2) members of the Team to monitor and interpret results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement changes as needed based on data from social media usage.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide reports on data collected and make recommendations to Leadership on progress and subsequent plans.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other requirements</strong></td>
<td>Conduct training on the use of equipment and technology</td>
<td>October 1, 2021</td>
<td>Ongoing (as needed)</td>
<td>Training for: Media Ministry Team members / Representatives from supported ministries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>