

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN THE ATLANTA METROPOLITAN AREA

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Patricia Maria Rankin

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. For this study, social media was defined as any social media networking platform used to share the Gospel. The research was guided by the mathematical theory of communication (Shannon, 2001; Weaver, 1953) developed by Shannon, Weaver, Schramm, and Berlo. The communication model effectively understands and explores the literature gap regarding God and how He communicates with His people. The study started with purposeful sampling and recruitment of participants, who then voluntarily completed the survey and took part in a Zoom interview. The study yielded twelve volunteers who took part in all rounds. The study's findings revealed that Facebook was the most extensively used social media channel for sharing the gospel, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Social media was widely used in these Baptist churches. The findings revealed that social media is essential for spreading the gospel online. The findings also revealed that participant church leaders used social media platforms in various methods to spread the gospel.

Keywords: social media, presence, churches, Baptist, Gospel, discipleship.

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Dedication

The Scripture reads, “Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (Psalms 150: 1-2 & 6, *King James Version, 1611/1987*). To God be the glory. To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His strength and unconditional love. To the Holy Spirit, my friend, comforter, and confidant. To our children, thank you for your support and patience, and finally, to my husband, I could not have done this without your love and support. You make my heart swell with your extravagant love.

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List of Abbreviations

Christian Leadership in Education Program (CLED)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Old Testament (OT)

New Testament (NT)

Research Questions (RQ)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Traditional church attendance is declining, according to a Barna Group (2015) study that was conducted. Moreover, church membership has diminished by roughly twenty percent over the last two decades, according to a Gallup poll (2019). While meeting in person was already declining before the pandemic, it occurred that there is a need for a virtual church or “e-church.” According to Crumpton (2018), “Where it was once thought that the decline of traditional churchgoers into a brick-and-mortar edifice meant that America was becoming less “faith-based,” the ever-increasing number of online worshippers indicates otherwise” (para. 1). Furthermore, “Due to the rapidly shifting culture toward an online worship experience, the traditional church must re-evaluate and reform their processes to include this new wave of Christianity” (Crumpton, 2018, para.1).

Living in the “age of technology” and the changes of time, social media can significantly spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Social media can be another avenue to increase church membership, spiritual growth, and development and increase the opportunity for salvation while sharing the gospel with people who may never enter the church building but are using social media to search for answers.

In the Gospel of John 14:12, Jesus says, “greater works than these shall he do ” (*King James Version, 1611/1987*). Furthermore, in Mark 16:15, Jesus says, “Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Moreover, Matthew 28:19 says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” This is the age of technology, and technology can spread the gospel faster than when Jesus was on the earth; therefore, technology can benefit the church. Lines (2020) suggested that

“social media usage can be an effective tool to quell church decline, foster authenticity within a community, lead to church growth, and share the Good News of God’s radically transformative love” (p. iv). Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have the potential to shape the way the world communicates (McKinney, 2014). According to McKinney (2014), many churches have even begun utilizing social media in their ministry efforts. Moreover, they publicize, pray, encourage, and promote events using social media (McKinney, 2014).

The qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted to explore and seek answers while utilizing the purposely selected interview process to discover the phenomenon in Southern Baptist churches and social media usage in these Southern Baptist churches. Chapter One commenced with the Background of the Problem, followed by the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose Statement, the Research Questions, Assumptions and Delimitations, and Delimitations of the Research Design. It continued with the Definition of Terms, Significance of the Study and concluded with the Summary of the Design.

Background to the Problem

The information age or the social media outlet has altered how society communicates. With the use of the internet, information can now spread faster. “A glance into the writings of the New Testament indicates that the first-century disciples used the medium that was available to them to achieve their purpose... however, now modern technology has brought in its wake enormous resources to facilitate discipleship” (Onyiah, 2017 pp.225-26). Social media is a tool that can be used to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers and believers alike. Social media is an excellent tool that can be used for discipleship (Onyiah, 2017). Social media has the ability to transform non-believers into believers and transform believers into disciples. Social

media should be embraced by all churches regardless of membership size. The different social media platforms can be used for the benefit of the church (Onyinah, 2017). Social media is prevalent, but some churches lack the basics, such as having an internet website. Social media accounts such as a Facebook page, Google Images, Instagram, Twitter account, Yelp, and Google reviews are not visible or present online (Lines, 2020).

Additionally, any online presence is absent from these churches. The absence and the mention of where these churches are located are nowhere to be found online (Lines, 2020). Moreover, the service times are not displayed on the church buildings or billboards (Lines, 2020). The omission of printed information on the building doors declaring service days and times are lacking and hurting the chance to share the Gospel with believers and unbelievers (Lines, 2020). The expectation is the people who want to attend service will magically walk in on Sunday mornings as they did before the “digital age” is unrealistic (Lines, 2020). This type of thinking is detrimental and unreal, according to Lines (2020). The unwillingness to change is causing stagnation and killing these churches. The future belongs to those who are open to positive change. Social media is a positive change, a tool that can be used to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers, believers, and the world. Social media is a tool that should be embraced by all churches regardless of the size of their membership.

Research has shown a positive relationship between the money spent on marketing and the support given by church members (White & Simas, 2007; McKinney, 2014). To meet the needs of various markets, churches must remain faithful to doctrine and theology but accept the rapid changes that are required to advance society and the environment (Wrenn, Shawchuck, Kotler, & Rath, 1995; McKinney, 2014). Social media now allows churches to market themselves at no cost. Mc Kinney (2014) cited Julian Saunders (2009), stating that “social media

has supercharged the ‘for free’ revolution engendered by the web. He argued that marketers started by seeing the Internet as a sales response medium. Now all marketing functions have migrated to the Internet.” So, “the real marketing investment is not in buying space and time but in the energy, culture, and imagination of the company” (Saunders, 2009; McKinney, 2014).

Social media platforms are great for non-profit organizations and churches. Churches can effectively use social media by connecting with other pastors, churches, and the congregation, reaching out to people outside the assembly, and increasing the church's visibility and its programs (McKinney, 2014). Weisgerber (2013) suggested inspirational pictures that answer the question, “Where did you see God today?” Churches can post scripture, create Facebook cover photos for events, and upload videos that allow the church to tell its story (Weisgerber, 2013). In his book “Digital Jesus,” Howard (2011) argued, “The idea that sharing knowledge generates a community is at least as old as the Christian idea of ‘church’ itself. Individual Christians are members of distinct communities based on their shared knowledge” (McKinney, 2014).

There are traditions of self-expression within the church that are often referred to as ‘witnessing’ or ‘sharing testimonies’ with one another. McKinney (2014) eloquently defined “witnessing” as when believers share with others either in front of the church or when gathered with other Christ-followers to share what God has done for them. These similar testimonies can also be shared via social media. As a result, beliefs form a virtual church when these testimonies are shared. Howard (2011) stated that the initially shared testimony starts with the individual managing the site. Once they post a deposition or even ask followers or friends to post a testimony, it is in the hands of the readers to reply with their response (McKinney, 2014). In doing so, readers will see that others are struggling with the same issues they have struggled with and will comment on the posts. When this happens, the church has effectively established an

effective social media networking tool, a platform where the gospel can be shared online. This phenomenological study explored the phenomenon behind the Southern Baptist churches using social media to share the Gospel and explored the lived experience of using social media for ministry.

Theological

For this study, theology was defined as “thinking about God” (Badham,1996, p.101). Moreover, it means “in practice studying the source of Christian belief” (Badham,1996, p.101). It is also “faith-seeking understanding” (Badham,1996, p.101). The Bible was used as the primary source since the Bible is the infallible Word of God. Erickson (2013) argued, “Theology in a Christian context is a discipline of study that seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding of reality” (p. 3). Theology is the study of biblical doctrines. The aspects of theology were categorized into five key components: (1) biblical, (2) systematic, (3) historical, (4) contemporary, and (5) practical (Erickson, 2013). For this study, the contemporary concept of theology in relationship to social media concerning how God communicates with His people was addressed. Erickson (2013) argued that theology must be contemporary. Theology is timeless; therefore, language, concepts, and relatable thoughts must be addressed in the present time (Erickson, 2013). Contemporary issues, such as using social media to share the Gospel, can be intertwined with biblical materials to convey the different ways God speaks.

Historical

Jesus declared in the book of Matthew that God is present when two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:20, *NIV*). The church always was and has remained an assembly of believers (McKinney, 2014). The church was not considered a building until at least two

centuries after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Today, people gather online, and social media has provided a means for sharing faith as well as modeling Christian life beyond the building commonly called the church (Gould, 2013; McKinney, 2014).

This study sought to examine the usage of different social media platforms in Southern Baptist churches and how social media is utilized to share the Gospel.

Statement of the Problem

In-person church attendance has been declining for the past few years (Barna Group, 2012; Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007; Lipka, 2013; Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pimpton, 2009; Whitesel, 2013; Grayson, 2017). Additionally, Pew Research indicated that in-person church attendance has decreased (Lipka, 2013, p. 1; Grayson, 2017). Online church attendance has increased as society leans toward technology (Cho, 2001; Lytle, 2009; Grayson, 2017). Social media garners massive participation and impacts communal life, contributing to a person's worldview structure. Social media engagement (significantly since Web 2.0) has transformed and will continue to change people's daily practices, including how they relate to and share knowledge (Gorrell, 2016).

Pew Research (2021) noted, "Today around seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves" (para.1). This number grew tremendously in 2005 only 5 % of American adults were using a form of social media platform by 2011 the number was 50%. In 2021, that number jumped to 72%. Young adults were more likely to adapt to social media; however, the number of adults adopting and using social media has also increased. While fewer Americans use websites like Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook are the most popular online platforms. Their user bases generally reflect the population, according to Pew Research

(2021). However, millions of people use social media sites daily, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, Linked In, TikTok, and Next Door. Facebook alone has 2.8 billion users worldwide, according to Pew Research (2021).

Furthermore, Pew Research (2021) reported that 81% of Americans used YouTube to share videos and watch content, “four in ten adults use Instagram while three in ten use Pinterest (31%) and LinkedIn (28%). Approximately a quarter of adults use Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Reddit, and Next door. Facebook owns Instagram and WhatsApp” (para.3). Moreover, Pew Research (2021) noted that among U.S. adults who utilize Facebook, the percentage that visits Facebook daily is seven in ten, along with approximately half (49%) who logged into the site several times a day. However, compared to Snapchat and Instagram, about 59% of users state that they use these social media platforms daily, as well as 54% of YouTube users and 46% of Twitter users. Facebook is more prevalent among all demographic groups, but more adults are likely to use it than other social media platforms.

Pew Research (2021) also reported that “Americans 65 and older are the least likely age group to use Facebook, with half saying they do. But that still represents a 30-percentage point increase since August 2012, when just 20% reported using it” (para. 5). Facebook teen users are down from 71% to 51% more teens use Instagram based on a survey in 2018 by Pew Research. More teens use “YouTube (used by 85% of teens), Instagram (72%), and Snapchat (69%)” (para. 6). In a survey conducted in August/September 2020, 36 % of adults received their news from Facebook, 23 % from YouTube, 15 % from Twitter, and 11% from Instagram and other social media platforms among this number 65 % of women are more likely to get the news from Facebook versus 35% for men.

Social media can diversify the church evangelism outreach program, and social media can also promote the church. For example, since people use multiple social media platforms at different times and for various reasons, the church can use other social media platforms to reach different generations (Gould, 2015). We live in a media-saturated culture marked by rapid technological change and extensive social media usage (Gorrell, 2016). If pastors want the gospel to spread and for their churches to grow, they must embrace change. Technology is a form of change, ever-changing, and it is not going anywhere anytime soon.

Nonetheless, the change is reluctant. Social media is prevalent in society; however, the use of social media is firmly present in some churches while it is non-existence in others. With the lack of social media and church websites not present in some of these churches, how are the Scriptures found in John 14:12 and Mark 16:15 being manifested and applied in these churches. These churches' growth may stagnate due to a lack of presence on social media (Lines, 2020).

Practices, relationships, and shared knowledge are essential elements of Christian formation (Gorrell, 2016). However, Christian congregant understandings of the relationship between social media engagement and Christian formation have not been explicitly investigated, and insufficient attention has been paid to the role of social media in the processes of Christian formation (Gorrell, 2016). Therefore, Christians are often unable to describe (with any depth or certainty) the role of social media in contemporary Christian formation (Gorrell, 2016). The church can even incorporate all the social media platforms available to reach different age groups (Gould, 2015). For example, Facebook can be used to reach the Silent and Baby Boomers, along with blogs, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube can be dedicated to reaching the younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z; and a wide variety of platforms can be used to reach the middle generation, Generation X (Gould, 2015). Since social media is constantly emerging

and changing for the better, the church can also use social media as a financial tool to advance God's kingdom. Facebook has added structure updates. Twitter has a vine, a looping video application, and sharing service, and Pinterest can open a business account. This option is something the church can benefit from (Gould, 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. These churches were associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is an organization comprising over 47,000 Baptist churches throughout the United States and its territories. These congregations, which include a diverse range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups, are known as "cooperating churches." They have organized themselves to carry out a specific set of missions and ministry efforts, all with the goal of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone, everywhere (SBC.Net).

In this research, social media was defined as any platform that can be used to share the Gospel or any social media networking site. Social media was also designated as "applications and websites that enable social networking and the creation/sharing of digital content" (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p.12). Furthermore, social media for this study is "digital technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction" (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.5; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009).

The research theory that guided this study was the mathematical theory of communication (Shannon, 2001; Weaver, 1953) developed by Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, and David Berlo. The communication model is an effective way to understand

and explore the gap in the literature regarding God and the way He communicates with His people and to discover the concept of social media concerning sharing the Gospel in Southern Baptist churches.

Social media can be a positive, helpful tool for ministry. Yet, there is a strong presence of social media in some churches versus no social media or very little in others. This study sought to understand the nature of social media in Southern Baptist churches. It explored these churches' concepts of how they use social media and how much they share the Gospel with the world. The church's impact, sharing the Gospel, and the unique connection in presenting the gospel to the world were explored.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What type of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area using in their ministry to share the Gospel?

RQ2. How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the Gospel on a social media platform?

RQ3. What are the Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

Assumptions and Delimitations

The assumptions comprised of possible preferences of the researcher. Typically, delimitations affect the sample size with the rational phenomenological research design.

Research Assumptions

The research's underlying premise was that churches with a high social media presence would have more phenomenal church growth. The survey examined online activity utilizing well-known platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media networking sites. It was assumed that, based on internet usage patterns on church websites

and social media platforms, more individuals are spreading the gospel and making progress in their spiritual, personal, or social lives. Another presumption was that research techniques like qualitative interviews—assumed to be used by all participants—would help explain why social media is so prevalent in participants' churches and how it relates to discipleship and church growth. Stating the biases, this researcher assessed the impact on the scrutiny of the conclusion. The opened-ended questions for the qualitative study were answered and filled the research gap.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The delimitation of this study is as follows:

1. This study was delimited to church leaders who are decision-makers in using media in their churches. This study did not include leaders who do not serve in church leadership or those who do not supervise the media ministry or department.
2. This study was delimited to Southern Baptist churches. All other Protestant or religious denominations were not the focus of this study.
3. This study was delimited to churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. Churches outside the Atlanta Metropolitan Area and the state of Georgia were not included in this study.
4. The study was delimited to churches that have 50 or more active members. Churches with less than 50 active members were not included in this study.
5. The research was delimited to leaders that are 18 years old or older. Minors or children younger than 18 years old were included in this study.
6. This study was delimited to church leaders actively serving in leadership positions. This study did not include inactive or former leaders that previously served and no longer serve in a leadership position.
7. This study was delimited and did not differentiate based on the number of church leaders serving in their leadership positions.
8. This study was delimited to senior pastors and social media directors. This study did not include pastors who are also social media directors.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout the study. Some of these terms are interchangeable.

1. *Believers/Christians*: People who have received the gift of salvation. Have made Jesus Christ Lord and Savior over their life.
2. *Church*: Local churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area with usage of social media and are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.
3. *Congregation*: A group of people that are part of a religious organization.
4. *Decision-makers*: Leaders who decide to what extent social media is used to share the gospel.
5. *Disciple*: a scholar of Jesus Christ; One that abides by the conditions of Jesus Christ (Enns, 2014).
6. *Discipleship*: (1) Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers. Discipleship “aims to develop in the students a spiritual and moral foundation based on faith in Jesus Christ and study of the Bible. It is designed to help and encourage the participants to live a life befitting that of the disciples of Jesus Christ and to serve Him faithfully” (Oxford Reference, n.d). (2) “Discipleship to be seen as a community of transformed believers transforming societies for Christ” (Onyinah, 2017, para. 4).
7. *Communication*: the extent to which a sender can limit the receiver’s choices (Krippendorff, 2009).
8. *Gospel*: The “Good News” or the Word of God. “The record of Christ's life and teaching.... (Enns, 2014).
9. *Leader*: One who is engaged in leadership (Northouse, 2018).
10. *Leadership*: One who is “responsible for the proper employment of both “things” (management) and “people” (leadership) in accomplishing the organization’s mission (Anthony and Estep 2005, 4)” (Costin, 2008).
11. *Media Leader*: One who is engaged in leadership. One who is a lead pastor, senior pastor, or other leaders in charge of social media ministry.
12. *Pastor*: One who pastors a congregation, primarily those in charge of a church or congregation.
13. *Share Gospel*: Use social media to share, teach, talk, and preach the Gospel.
14. *Social Media*: “digital technologies emphasizing user-generated content or

interaction” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.5; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009).

15. *Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)*: SBC “is a collection of like-minded churches working in cooperation with one another to impact the whole world with the Good News of Jesus Christ” (SBC.net).
16. *Southern Baptist: A Christian Denomination, evangelical*. “Southern Baptist churches are evangelical in theory and practice, emphasizing the importance of the individual conversion experience, which is confirmed by the person receiving a believer’s baptism through complete immersion in water” (SBC.net).

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological study's significance and purpose were to understand the phenomenon behind Southern Baptist churches using social media to share the Gospel and to discover the extent and purpose. While a strong presence of social media is found in some churches, others have little or none. There is a research gap, and it is essential to solving this problem since social media and the world of technology are changing every day, and new ways of connecting with the world are being discovered every day. New Apps are being developed daily, and the world is changing rapidly. Technology is constantly advancing. It is crucial that the church promotes it for the sake of the Gospel. There are different aspects of church life, including but not limited to spiritual, social, economic, administration, evangelization, and so on (Badmos, 2014). Smith (2013) examined this social and spiritual aspect of church life. Arthur and Reinsleigh (2012) discussed evangelization as an aspect of church life. Yeong (2004) studied the administration, another part of church life. Of these and other available literature examining the impact of social media on one or more of these aspects of church life, there continued to be an insufficiency of desired research related to this topic. Therefore, the gap revealed that research such as this one is needed. Although many attempts were made using earlier literature to list the benefits of social media for church growth and the drawbacks for churches, these studies did not

explicitly focus on using social media and the practice of doing so in Southern Baptist churches to expand and spread the gospel.

Summary of the Design

This section summarizes the design that was employed to answer the study questions. It was altered as chapter three progressed.

Sampling Technique

The study explored churches using social media to share the gospel and churches with 50 or more active members. The sample for this study was twelve leaders from Southern Baptist churches in the Greater Metropolitan Atlanta area, consisting of four pastors and eight social media directors. Each leader was interviewed and recorded using the Zoom platform and a phone recording device. The sample techniques were used to collect participant meanings; focused on a single concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The sample type was purposive sampling, “that is, it entails choosing those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p.242). One stops collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated. When you have a sufficient sample, acquiring new data no longer sparks new discoveries or discloses new properties (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Charmaz, 2006). This process determined saturation.

Methodological Design

Qualitative research goals were to explore and describe what happened, interpret the meaning to the people involved in what developed, and expose the transformation that took place (Creswell, 2014). This phenomenological methodological research design utilized the eight characteristics of qualitative design discussed by Creswell (2014). (1) The natural setting- was the phone interviews of senior pastors and social media directors in their offices. (2) This

researcher was the critical instrument for this. The researcher collected the data from the result of the interview. (3) Several sources of data were collected for triangulation. (4) The inductive/deductive data analysis consisted of themes/codes from the interviews (Creswell, 2014). (5) The participants were the senior pastors and social media directors.

Additionally, researcher biases were not manifested while collecting the data. They kept an open mind before, during, and after the interview process to ensure that biases did not interfere with the data collection results. In other words, bracketing was used and practiced. Tufford and Newman (2012) stated that “Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (p.80). (6) The “emerging design” for this research was just the beginning, not an end, as stated by Creswell (2014). (7) For “reflexivity,” this researcher engaged in self-reflection to expose how the information received impacted her background when she interpreted the participants' results (Creswell, 2014). (8) For “holistic,” this researcher adopted a wholistic view or a broad view of the interpretation of these participants (Creswell, 2014). Since qualitative research asked specific process questions, issues, and phenomena were explored or described.

There are numerous “Southern Baptist” churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area; therefore, “selective purposeful” was used for the interview process and data collection. This process was selected for the purpose of time and because the selected sample was chosen to set churches using social media and those in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. This researcher's initial steps included searching, emailing, and sending 250 Participant Recruitment Letters to participants who fell within the study's parameters. Twenty-one participants responded and completed the survey; out of the twenty-one, twelve responded to the official invitation and

completed the process. All twelve participants were qualified. Therefore, the next step was initiated, and that was to schedule and conduct the interview.

There was a lot of software available for a qualitative study, including but not limited to “MAXqda, Atlas.t, and NVivo” (Creswell, 2014, p. 196). This researcher used Microsoft Word web-based online software to help organize and manage the qualitative data. This researcher examined and used the open coding process utilizing a theme of key concepts “Open Coding includes labeling concepts, defining, and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions. It is used to analyze qualitative data and part of many Qualitative Data Analysis methodologies” (Khandkar, 2009, para.2). Coding relevant information that has been stated several times and an automated coding system using thematic analysis software was used. Validity and reliability were established; therefore, triangulation for saturation was used by this researcher. Triangulation was established using the data from the interview of the pastors and the social media directors, respectively, and analyzing the social media platform content from the study churches.

Theoretical Design in Phenomenology

The purpose and use of phenomenological research were to highlight the peculiar to determine the phenomena over how they are discerned by the characters in a position (Creswell, 2018). Focusing on a single phenomenon allows the researcher to limit the study to a singular concept to be implied and examined (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) noted that this spotlight channel that the desire does not transmit disclosed variables that are two or more or does it compare two or more groups, as does quantitative research design (Creswell, 2018). However, what it does instead, accelerates it to a singular phenomenon, admitting that the study may derive toward an analysis of links or an analogy amid among opinions (Creswell, 2018). As a result, the

researcher established a phenomenon of a human experience. There are two approaches to this phenomenology, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), and they are “Hermeneutic Phenomenology... and Empirical or Transcendental/Psychological Phenomenology” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.59; Moustakas, 1994). *Transcendental or Psychological Phenomenology* “targets study the information of the participant's actions and less on the translation of the researcher” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.59; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) focused on concepts by studying Husserl’s ideas or directly bracketing their importance by which the agent puts aside their perception and looks at the phenomenon with an unbiased angle toward the phenomenon that has been examined or studied. Therefore, this researcher used transcendental phenomenological best explained by Moustakas (1994), focusing on concepts of Husserl’s ideas and bracketing to look at the phenomenon that has been examined to uncover the phenomenon behind the use of social media in the Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

Chapter Summary

This study used the phenomenological research design. Phenomenology sought to understand the “lived experience.” According to Pinzer (2017), “the phenomenological methodology is designed to include understanding the value of retroactive data from lived experience” (p. 7). The qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted to explore and seek answers utilizing the purposely selected interview process to discover the phenomenon in Southern Baptist churches and why there is social media presence in these Southern Baptist churches. The literature review provided literature that was available concerning the selected topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was created to provide both the researcher and the reader with a more profound sense of the literature reviews in the database. Although they are an overwhelming amount of literature review, this researcher spent an exhausting amount of time researching related research related to the topic. Only the literature review closely associated with this research topic was selected.

Overview

The modern church is deeply committed to preaching the gospel, and some leaders preach it by any means necessary. The literature review focused on the different modes of communication via social media that are presently available for the church to spread the gospel. Furthermore, it looked at leadership's perception of social media in sharing the gospel. This topic was further developed to examine the leadership perspective use of social media using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The literature review was divided into several sections and are (1) The Theological Framework; (2) The Theoretical Framework; (3) The Related Literature; (4) The Rationale for the Study; (5) The Gap in the Literature; and finally (6) the Profile of the Current Study.

Theological Framework for the Study

A theological framework was significantly needed for this researcher to analyze the literature review. In the Gospel of John 14:12, Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (*King James Version*, 1611/1987). What is the true revelation and meaning behind this scripture? Since we live in a technologically advanced age where using technology can help the gospel spread faster than it did when Jesus was on the earth. Since one

of the commandments is to "go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), churches should use social media. Traditional church attendance has been declining for the past few years (Barna Group, 2012; Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007; Lipka, 2013; Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pimpton, 2009; Whitesel, 2013 & Grayson, 2017). Online churches increase attendance as society leans toward technology (Cho, 2001; Lytle, 2009 & Grayson, 2017).

Additionally, Pew Research found that conventional church attendance was declining (Lipka, 2013, p. 1; Grayson, 2017). We have a media-saturated culture characterized by quick technological advancement and widespread social media use (Gorrell, 2016). Social media attracts enormous involvement and impacts everyday life, shaping a person's worldview. Social media engagement (significantly since Web 2.0) has transformed and will continue to change people's daily practices, including how they relate to and share knowledge (Gorrell, 2016). If pastors want the gospel to spread and for their churches to grow, they must embrace change.

Technology is a form of change, and it is ever-changing. Furthermore, it is not going anywhere anytime soon. Why the reluctance to change? Social media is prevalent in society; however, why is the use of social media strong in some churches while it is non-existence in others. With the lack of social media and church websites not present in some churches, how are the Scriptures found in John 14:12 and Mark 16:15 manifested and applied in these churches. These churches' growth may stagnate due to a lack of social media presence. Practices, relationships, and shared knowledge are essential elements of Christian formation (Gorrell, 2016).

God Desires Communication with Man

God desires communication with man, in which He uses different avenues or modes. God wants to communicate with the church; however, His church has not adopted this concept.

“Jesus, God’s ultimate communication, applied various modes to communicate the message directly from the Father who sent Him to the hearers (John 12:49)” (Sathyanesan, 2019, p. 60). According to Sathyanesan (2019), “All other previous modes highlighted in the Old Testament (OT) point to Christ” (p. 60). Social media is one of the modes of communication God uses to communicate with men and women to accomplish His plan on this earth. This plan is discipleship and evangelism.

Sathyanesan (2019) suggested that “An irrelevant and ineffective mode of communicating is publishing a gospel article in a local newspaper, whereas modes such as online communications enhance the great possibility and potential of outreach” (p.70). Furthermore, Sathyanesan (2019) argued, “Failure to understand the shift in culture and changing tools to the most used in that culture will ultimately inhibit soul winning. The pervasiveness of techno-culture has shaken the very foundations of Christianity in its tradition, authority, certainty, and hegemony” (p.71). In Matthew 16:15-18, Jesus asked his disciples this question,

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In this Scripture, Peter had a revelation of who God is. The Holy Spirit communicated with Peter and revealed Jesus to Peter. Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to Peter and made Jesus real to him.

Sathyanesan (2019) wrote,

God communicated about himself through the narrative as a mode of communication in the Torah. He created humans in His image and likeness (Gen 1:27), revealing His plurality (Gen. 1:26), morality, holiness, justice, sovereignty (Exod. 7-11), and majesty while indicating His role within the covenant as the One who delivers, redeems, and adopts (Exod. 19-23). (p.34)

God desires communication with man. Scriptures demonstrating this concept are found throughout the Bible. For example, Romans 5:8; John 1:10-13; John 3:16; Revelation 3:20; Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 11:6; John 14:6; 1 John 1:9; John 15:5; 1 Peter 5:6-7; John 6:40; 1 John 3:1; are some of the Scriptures that revealed this concept. God has always wanted to communicate with man; this desire will never end. Sathyanesan (2019) argued, “Since New Testament times, the method of gospel communications has progressed and impacted millions worldwide. The author of Hebrews describes the various methods God adopted to communicate” (p.14). Hebrews 1:1-2 specifically shows that God desires communication with a man stating, “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (New Living Translation, 1996/2015). Sathyanesan (2019) suggested that “The Old Testament saints experienced the voice of God through various methods, and the New Testament Church witnessed the power of communication through the incarnated Son” (p.15).

God’s Redemption Process

God had a communication plan before the foundation of the world through His son Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), God used various modes of communication. He used the “prophets, angels, priests, and Jesus Christ,” and God also employed methods such as “revelation, spoken words, signs, dreams, visions, chronicles, and letters to reveal Himself to man” (Sathyanesan, 2019, p. 15). Moreover, “all of these were comprehensible to human senses so that humankind would know His loving nature” (Sathyanesan, 2019, p. 15). As the world evolved and became more modernized and another mode of communication was created, God is still talking to humans. Social media is one of the tools God uses to communicate with humankind. God planned for continuous communication

and was redeemed by Jesus Christ after sin entered the world. Jesus Christ restored what was lost and redeemed man back to the Father and commissioned the church to communicate by spreading the Gospel message of redemption to the world. God has solved all kinds of communication barriers, such as language, geography, and culture (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15) so that the Gospel can be preached and spread freely throughout the world. Enns (2014) argued that “It was God who initiated salvation purely out of His grace, which satisfied His divine justice and brought release from sin’s bondage and a legal declaration of righteousness to the believer” (p.113). However, a conversion must take place after salvation. Conversion is the catalyst needed for transformation to take place. God does not reveal all truth about Himself at one time but revealed Himself as a “piecemeal” “little by little, small portion by small portion” to the believer and has done this throughout history (Enns, 2014). Therefore, the transformation process is a journey that never ceases. It is continuous. Conversion is about the change in individuals and communities. Processes of Christian formation through the Holy Spirit and within the Christian community cultivate conversion (Badmos, 2014). Scripture invites human beings into a journey with God that involves continual transformation (Badmos, 2014).

This salvation cannot occur unless the gospel is introduced to the lost, and social media is a great outlet to make this gift available to one who would not usually step into a church building. The churches that do not offer social media to evangelize and spread the gospel are not embracing the great commission. The great commission said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-19 KJV). The Great Commission is a commandment, not a rule or a decision. Jesus orders His followers to make disciples by going into all the world and preaching the gospel. Social media is a fantastic

tool for carrying out this particular commandment. God uses this method of communication to retain and strengthen Christians as well as to reach the lost.

Ministry

In this subtopic, this researcher examined the depth of connection of the Scripture and ministry to connect the research. Lee (2011) interconnected Scripture and internet ministry to highlight the importance of spreading the gospel. Lee (2011) noted Acts 1:8, which reads, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (NASB). Jesus, in this verse, is describing the perimeter of His ministry, starting from Jerusalem and spreading worldwide. Lee (2011) cited F.F. Bruce saying, “these geographical landmarks work as a table of contents of the Acts” (Chung-Yeong, 2004; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000, p. 33). Lee (2011) also used Chokmah Commentary to describe all the locations that are voiced in verses that displayed in the Gospel’s guidebook departing from Jerusalem (verses 1–7) to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1 to 11:18) and finally advancing all over the world (Acts 11:19 to 28:31). How can we apply these verses in our time? Currently, the Internet is the twenty-four-hour bridge connecting information to people and cultures worldwide (Chung-Yeong, 2004; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000; Lee, 2011). With the exception of a few developing countries, nearly every country has been reached and is covered by the Internet (Chung-Yeong, 2004; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000; Lee, 2011). Additionally, “cyberspace has become a strategically important location that the church ministry should not ignore further. It is the last frontier where Christians should fulfill their evangelical mission as God’s witnesses” (Lee, 2011, p.33; Chung-Yeong, 2004, p.18; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000, p.6). Furthermore, the perimeter of the internet can be imprinted back to Mark 16:15, where Jesus Himself commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to the entire world.

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation’” (Mark 16:15, NASB). Cyberspace in context has become more of “all of the world” and, therefore, leaves no hesitation or alibi in achieving the Lord’s Great Commission in “cyberspace,” according to (Acts 1:8b). “...and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1: 8 NASB). Lee (2011) insisted that

The phrase —the end of the world, which means more than the literal patch of earth at the edge of the earth, can be understood as the virtual world in our time. To anyone believing in the governance of God’s rule in every piece of land inhabited by human beings, refuting the idea of cyberspace being reached and cared for by churches and becoming the major venue of church ministry would be impossible. Churches have tried rigorously to praise God’s name offline, and this effort should be continued online. Just as God gave us his beloved Son and executed his marvelous plan of saving the whole of mankind for degenerated generations, I believe that he will not abandon cyber space and will salvage people from the internet chaos as he had done in the past. (Lee, 2011, p.33; Chung-Yeong, 2004, p.18; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000, p.6)

God’s Church and Communicating the Gospel

Since the church is not a building, the gospel can be taught and preached anywhere. The church (*Gk. Ekklesia*) means “a called-out group” (Enns, 2014, p.114). The church is a group of believers who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Enns (2014) stated that they are the complex structure of the Body of Christ, which carries on living activities by meanings of the individual believers, who are distinct in function but mutually dependent on and governed by their relation to Christ, the Head. The Church is simply the collection of all individual Christians (Badmos, 2014). The church comprises Jews and gentiles into one body (Enns, 2014). Christ has nourished his church by giving gifted leaders to the church so that it may grow to maturity and be built up as one body in Christ (Enns, 2014). How does the church grow? Hebrews 13:17 identifies leaders in the local church that cares for the spiritual welfare of the people. It reads,

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watching over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a

joy, not a burden, for that would be no benefit to you. (*New Living Translation, 1973/1978/1984/2011*)

Leaders who are after God's heart, as described in Jeremiah 3:15. While it is impossible to preach the gospel in some countries, that same country has people who have access to the internet and social media. The gospel can reach the nations and the people who are hard to minister face-to-face or are not using the traditional platform (Enns, 2014).

God's Purpose for the Church and Mission

The purpose of the church is twofold. As suggested by Enns (2014), one is to gather (Acts 4:24-26; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:15-17) and minister to the body so that the church can come to maturity through the teaching of the gospel (Acts 11:26; 15:35). The reason for the church gather is so the church will come to maturity (Enns, 2014). The other purpose is to scatter through evangelism and mission (Matt. 28:18-20) to preach the gospel to the world (Enns, 2014). Discipleship is a mandate given by Jesus. The church is to go around the world and make disciples, baptize them, and bring them back into fellowship with other believers (Enns, 2014).

Today the gospel is being preached all over the world due to technology. The church ministers to the body through teaching, fellowshiping (Rom. 12:5; 10; 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19, 15:5, 7, 14; 1 Tim 5:8; James 1:27), and worship (Acts 12:5; 12). When Jesus says in John 14:12, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father" (KJV). Jesus was referring to the digital world that was to come. Jesus was limited when he was on earth. However, the gospel through the digital platform can be preached worldwide in a split second. "There is no doubt that social media has gained wider acceptability and usability, and it is also becoming probably the most important communication tool among people" (Badmos, 2014). For congregations to grow and thrive, they must learn to embrace the digital age.

Social media is an excellent tool to use to communicate with people, both Christians and non-Christians, to promote the gospel. As church attendance continues to decline, the COVID-19 pandemic did not make it easier for the churches that were already struggling to keep membership and church attendance from falling. According to a 2019 Gallup poll, church membership has declined nearly twenty percent over the past two decades. In 1999, 69% of all Americans were members of a religious community, and now only 52% are members. Furthermore, the number of people who are not affiliated with any religion, dubbed “nones,” has continued to rise, increasing from 8% in 1999 to 19% now (Gallup poll, 2020; Lines, 2020).

Using Social Media to Communicate and Grow the Church

The popularity of social media means that some churches have started to embrace this technology to expand their church community into the virtual world. However, many religious faiths find it challenging to attract and keep members. If a church appears to be in tune with the times, this may be a way to get people to regularly attend again (Wise, 2014).

Social media has a generally favorable effect on church life. People who actively practice their beliefs have the possibility to contact with those they might not have otherwise had the opportunity to (Wise, 2014). Technology makes the world seem to be a much smaller place than it was for previous generations. We still yearn for that sense of belonging, and this is one way to find it. Church life is divided into various facets. These encompass evangelizing, administration, social, economic, and spiritual aspects. A venue for peacemaking can be found on social media. (Wise, 2014).

It can be used to bring people back to Christ. Second Corinthians 5:18-19 reads,

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (*King James Version, 1611/1987*)

The printing press was an evangelistic tool in the early century, and because of this technology, the Bible could be printed and distributed around the globe. We are in the twenty-first century, and the church has something more significant: social media (Wise, 2014). Social media sites like Facebook are only a small part of a church's internet influence (Wise, 2014). Because of the vast number of interactions social media can provide, churches can securely move in that direction if the gospel message is delivered along the relational line (Wise, 2014).

After all, 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (KJV). Businesses, nonprofits, and individuals are all using social media to grow their online communities to share information and sell products. More churches should do as well to spread the Gospel (Dooling, 2018). Relying on social media may have been a trend, but it is no longer. It is now a necessity (Dooling, 2018). There are few studies on the motivations driving users to select social network sites for religious purposes (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Moss, 2020). The authors Brubaker and Haigh (2017) did a study finding that Facebook users who choose the networking site for religious purposes do so to motivate and minister to the users (Moss, 2020).

The study also found other motivating factors for the user, including but not limited to religious information, spiritual enlightenment, and relaxing entertainment (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Moss, 2020). Also, Facebook users are motivated by the personal benefits of sharing information about themselves and building relationships with others; Facebook is one of the most popular sites, and a majority of adult Americans use the platform; however, 78% of Millennials use Snapchat; 71% of Millennials used Instagram while 45% in the age group used Twitter (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Moss 2020); moreover, several intersections exist across

several sites, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and LinkedIn (Smith & Anderson; Moss, 2020).

Barna Group (2020) published a research survey. The result suggested that many Christians articulated that they have found that technology and digital interactions have made evangelism easier for them to share their faith. The Barna Group discovered that “three in ten (28%) share their faith via social media, and almost six in ten (58%) non-Christians say someone has shared their faith with them through Facebook” (para.6).

The typical American uses three sites, and 73% use more than one of the eight social media platforms (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Moss, 2020). The pastors and other church leaders who use technology to communicate pastoral care and Christian education communication aspire to fulfill users’ temporal and spiritual concerns regarding faith affirmation and motivation (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Moss, 2020). Social media users can share faith values while simultaneously motivating others who are seeking inspiration (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Moss, 2020). Social media technology can also be used to aid churches in improving customer relationships through increased video usage, expansion of live streaming, increased mobile-ready content, and increased participation in branding (Dooling, 2018). Like any tool, social media can be used for positive or negative purposes; however, social media is also an excellent, effective ministry tool; with over 42% of the world’s population using social media, it is a communication method that church leaders can’t afford to ignore (Ike, 2020). Dooling (2018) from *Church Tech Today* shared the importance of video and live streaming, stating that they are the backbones of social media content sharing and the focal point of user interest.

Marketers are aware that communicating vital messages using video significantly boosts viewer retention compared to text-only messaging, according to Moss (2020), who referenced

Dooling (2018). This is especially true for grabbing Generation Z and young consumers' attention who use “augmented reality on social media.” The internet is for people of all ages. There is something for everyone, and the church can cater to its website to accommodate everyone. It is a benefit to the church, not a disadvantage, to embrace social media to produce quality programs that will enhance the lives of their members and non-members. It is also an excellent evangelistic tool because it welcomes those who visit church via the internet and not in person. It allows the church to extend the love of Jesus to all and not just a few. After all, Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30,

Then Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.’ (NLT)

Jesus desires a relationship with all humankind. He longs for all to be saved and not perish but to come to repentance (2 Peter 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:4).

Summary of Theological Framework

Since Christians are called to go around the world and make disciples, as stated in Matthew 28:19, therefore, Christians are to encourage, educate, teach, and preach the gospel and not remain stagnant in their faith. The ministry of evangelism is not to be carried by a select few but by all ordinary believers (Enns, 2014). The main message the early church preached was Christ. The Cross and this message were taken beyond the Jewish boundaries, crossing over “rigid cultural barriers, and the results were that many people became believers (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 8:12; 10:48; 11:24; 13:48; 14:1; 21)” (Enns, 2014, p. 382). Social media is a platform that can be used as a tool to spread the gospel to the world. A single click or a swipe can transform an unholy space or screen into something holy in a matter of seconds (Hagenbuch, 2020). As technology advances, everything imaginable will become real (Gorrell, 2016;

Hagenbuch, 2020). The advancement of the internet, which includes websites and social media outlets, will increase tremendously, and the pandemic will be one of the reasons for it. Therefore, gone are the days when churches could only meet in a brick-and-mortar setting (Gorrell, 2016; Hagenbuch, 2020; Lines, 2020). The pandemic has opened the eyes of many to God, giving His church a new way to look at the church (Hagenbuch 2020). The church of Jesus Christ is not a building; individuals make up the church. Additionally, “God is showing us through technology how the church can be the church, the assembly, in these roaring twenties” (Hagenbuch, 2020, p.7).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

A theoretical framework was necessary for this researcher to analyze the literature review properly. Creswell (2003) says a framework is needed to guide the study's facets, assess the Southern philosophical ideas behind the inquiry, detail data collection and analysis procedure, and situate plans in arguments well-grounded in literature. Therefore, this section was divided into five sections. The first section is a historical perspective and background. The second section is about digital communication and its history. The third section is a model of communication and theories, and this section covers the work of Shannon and Weaver, Wilbur Schramm's theory, and David Berlo's theory. The fourth section is the social media theory. The conclusion is the chapter summary. These sections are part of a whole. Each section was needed to form a robust and solid foundation of the theoretical model to analyze the topic of this *Phenomenological Study of Social Media Usage in Southern Baptist Churches In the Atlanta Metropolitan Area*.

Social media currently represent the most outstanding social innovation or revolution in the history of communication (Kent & Li, 2020). They are dozens if not hundreds, of theories

and concepts, including dialogue, engagement, identification, social presence, uses and gratifications, conversational human voice, and many others inform social media that have formed due to this innovation (Kent & Li, 2020). The practice of advertising, public relations, journalism, business, and other well-known methods, such as education, has drastically changed thanks to social media (Kent & Li, 2020). Ultimately and fundamentally, it has changed how society communicates. This researcher focused on the following theories: Shannon and Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, and Berlo's, and concluded the theoretical framework with the social media theory.

Historical Perspective and Background

The communication system aimed to provide reliable information transmission to the user. This foundation was established in 1948 by Claude Shannon, who is credited as the father of information theory. His development eventually led to the discovery of digital communication (Ha, 2010). As analog communication becomes extinct, the dominance of digital communication has arrived, and new perimeters are being established every decade (Ha, 2010). According to Ha (2010), the bit rates of cellular systems, wireless LAN, and MAN are increasing for pervasive mobile applications (Ha, 2010). There appears to be an excellent opportunity to use digital tools toward the goal of spiritual growth. We see that the influence of recent digital trends on churchgoers is undeniable, though perhaps not as extreme as you'd expect (Barna Group, 2020).

According to Ha (2010), users should discern the limit of digital transmission because that is vital to the design of future communication systems, particularly cellular wireless systems, where the spectrum and power are precious resources, and the design techniques can be used to manipulate these two primary resources to fit the real-world applications. Ha (2010) went to great lengths to describe this technique. He suggested that it takes more than one single

technique to cover all the requirements of a modern communication system; therefore, users must understand the intricate web details between subsystems, where each one is designed to support the other to achieve the common goal for reliable communication (Ha, 2010). Since they are various modes of communication, the church's question today is what methods of communication are available to them and how they can use what is available to them to spread the gospel faster, effectively, and efficiently (Sathyanesan, 2019).

Digital Communication

Digital communication, according to Ha (2010), “does not involve the faithful reproduction of the baseband waveform in the presence of noise and equipment imperfections. Digital communication operates instead with a finite set of continuous-time modulation waveforms for transmission over physical channel” (p. 2). Unlike analog communication, digital communication does not try to reproduce the “finite set of voltage baseband waveforms; instead, the receiver detects the energy pull of each baseband waveform, in the presence of noise and equipment imperfections, and then makes the best estimate of which transmitted symbol was received” (Ha, 2010, p.2). However, “if the signal-to-noise ratio per symbol is reasonably large, a symbol will most likely be detected correctly with high probability. If not, a symbol error may occur, which is the essence of digital communication” (Ha, 2010, p.2). Claude Shannon's work on communication provided the channel capacity for reliable transmission (Ha, 2010). Ha (2010) noted,

Shannon gave the designers of digital communication systems the freedom to choose the set of modulation waveforms that achieve either the best power or bandwidth efficiently or trade-off a combination of both...guided by the Shannon channel theorem (Main theorem), the designer can further integrate error-correction codes with modulation techniques to lower the signal-to-noise ratio per symbol to achieve a specified error rate. (pp 2-3)

Additionally, Shannon's first theorem afforded the groundwork for encoding a distinct origin of a limited set of symbols to reduce "the bit rate at the source encoder output to allow the compression of the A/D (analog/digital conversion) samples of the message signal to remove redundancy and any insignificant information not perceptible by the human eye or ear" (Ha, 2020, pp 2-3). The MP3 for music, JPEG for pictures, and MPEG for video are the most familiar compression algorithms in use today.

Models of Communication and Theories

An understanding of communication systems can directly impact all facets of life. As Al-Fedaghi (2012) suggested, these communication systems can be in the form of technology or simple human interaction. In the mathematical communication theory, Shannon and Weaver (1964) explained the problems concerning the accuracy of transferred communication from the sender to the receiver.

Theory of Communication Shannon and Weaver

They are three problems that can occur explained by Shannon and Weaver (1964), and they are (1) The technical problem which deals with how accurately the symbols of communication can be transmitted; (2) The semantic problem, which deals with the precision on how the transmitted symbols can convey the desired meaning; and (3) The effectiveness problem which deals with how the received meaning affect conduct in the desired way (Shannon, 1948, p. 4; Weaver,1953).

Model of Communication

Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver developed the data transmission communication model "is the most commonly used communication model at the technical level and has been used extensively in other fields of study" (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p. 1). Computers and network

technologies have made it possible to overcome limitations that may have been imposed in the past between time and space on communication (Al-Fedaghi, 2012). Al-Fedaghi cited Thornburg (1995), stating that society is on the brink of a new era, the “Communication Age,” due to the incredible speed, larger capacity, more flexibility, and new varieties that this technology era was able to produce. Thornburg (1995) further stated that “the perceived bandwidth is becoming virtually free” (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p.1). Al-Fedaghi cited Mortensen (1972), saying that “in a communication, a model provides a framework for discussion of problems in the communication process, and a good communication model clarifies and simplifies the structure of communication and offers new insights into what can only be described” (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p.2). Shannon and Weaver’s model has been criticized regarding several aspects.

Al-Fedaghi (2012) cited Foulger (2004), saying,

The model is not a model of communication, however. It is, instead, a model of the flow of information through a medium and an incomplete and biased model [to technical media]. The model suggests that communication within a medium is frequently direct and unidirectional, but in the real world of media, communication is almost never unidirectional and is often indirect (p.3).

Consequently, Kaminski (2012) enumerated various weaknesses in the model: - Not analogous to much human communication. Only formal content does not account for static and linear content (Al-Fedaghi, 2012; Kaminski, 2012; Shannon, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1964). Shannon and Weaver’s model is a transmission model consisting of five elements: (1) an information source, which produces a message; (2) a transmitter, which encodes the message into signals; (3) a channel, to which signals are adapted for transmission; (4) a receiver, which decodes (reconstructs) the message from the signal; (5) a destination, where the message arrives (Shannon, 1948; Weaver, 1953; Shannon & Weaver, 1964). Shannon and Weaver omitted a six-element communication model because they knew including one would result in a dysfunctional

factor. In other words, they knew that any interference with the message traveling along the channel (such as static on the telephone or radio) might result in the signal received being different from that sent (Oxford Dictionary, 2020; Shannon,1948; Weaver,1953).

Except in the constrained setting of radio-telephone communication, for which it was initially conceived, Shannon and Weaver's "transmission" model of the communication process has long been acknowledged as insufficient for understanding the complicated process of human communication (Bowman & Targowski,1987). According to Shannon, the primary communication issue is "reproducing at one place, exactly or approximately a message picked at another location" (Krippendorff, 2009; Shannon & Weaver,1949, p. 3).

As meanings were unimportant to the challenge of utilizing, analyzing, and constructing mediated communication, Shannon did not want psychological issues to throw his theory off track (Krippendorff, 2009). According to Shannon's theory, communications can be distinguished from one another by being chosen from a pool of potential messages based on whatever factors are used to make the decision (Krippendorff, 2009). Seven appendices and 22 theorems comprise his theory (Krippendorff, 2009).

In the phone, for example, the channel is a wire. The signal is an electrical current, and the transmitter and receiver are the telephone handsets. The noise would include crackling from the wire. Metamorphically speaking, in a "face-to-face" conversation, a person's mouth is the transmitter, the signal is the sound waves, and the person's ear is the receiver; noise would include any distraction one might experience as they speak (Shannon and Weaver, 1964).

Shannon and Weaver's model is very linear; unlike later models, it does not include a feedback loop (Shannon, 1948; Weaver,1953; Shannon and Weaver, 1964). Shannon and Weaver were mathematicians. Claude Shannon worked for Bell Telephone Laboratories (Shannon, 1948;

Weaver, 1953). Shannon's work proved "valuable for communication engineers in dealing with such issues as the capacity of various communication channels in bits per second, thus contributing to computer science, and eventually led to very useful work on redundancy in language, and in making information measurable it gave birth to the mathematical study of information theory" (Oxford Reference, 2020; Shannon, 1948; Weaver, 1953). Consequently "it is hardly surprising that Shannon and Weaver's model is information-centered rather than meaning-centered, but this points to its limitations as a Southern model of human communication" (Oxford Reference, 2020; Shannon, 1948; Weaver, 1953).

The main issue with Shannon and Weaver's approach is that it measures communication based on the channel's effectiveness from a practical perspective (Bowman & Targowski, 1987). Subsequent scholars concentrated their attention on the communication process components, communication reaction, and semantic reaction in an effort to account for more aspects of the communication processes (Bowman & Targowski, 1987). It is necessary to develop a new communication model that incorporates both syntactic and semantic components (Bowman & Targowski, 1987).

Communication

The act of transmitting or conveying a message is referred to as communication. Until there is complete knowledge, there may be multiple iterations involved. Success can be realized only when everyone engaged has a common grasp of what is being said (Lim, 2017)—sender and receiver alternate sending and receiving messages in the two-way communication process. Schramm's Model of Communication illustrates this (Lim, 2017). The paradigm demonstrates that the communicator is the information source. Using a shared medium, the communicator

converts his thought into words, symbols, pictures, graphics, voice, tone, facial expressions, and body language (Lim, 2017). The message is then picked up and decoded by the receiver.

The decoding process is not straightforward since the receiver interprets the message based on his or her own experiences, expectations, level of comprehension, and other factors (Lim, 2017). After decoding, the feedback—also known as the final step in the communication process—becomes crucial (Lim, 2017). This shows that the sender's message has been received. The reaction type typically reveals the knowledge level (Lim, 2017). Essentially, we may say that the source, medium, receiver, and feedback are communication components (Lim, 2017).

Schramm's Model of Communication

Schramm's communication model suggested that coding and decoding are two essential processes for effective communication. He emphasized that communication is incomplete unless or until the sender receives feedback from the recipient (Croft, 2004). Schramm, one of the communication theories, began studying communication as an independent field in 1954. During this time, he developed several models, and one of the models Schramm developed and is known for is the field of experience of the sender and receiver (Croft, 2004). "This is where the sender encodes the message based upon the sender's field of experience. The user's field of experience guides decoding. If there is no commonality in the sender's and receiver's field of experience, communication does not occur" (Croft, 2004, p.4).

The Encoder or Sender, Decoder or Receiver, Interpreter, and Message are components of the Schramm communication paradigm. According to this paradigm, information travels in both directions between the sender and the recipient during communication. According to one component of this paradigm, the message is passed from the sender to the receiver, but when the receiver sends a message back to the sender, the roles are reversed. Both the transmitter and the

recipient switch roles. According to this concept, a message must be sent between two elements—the sender and the receiver—and both must encode and decode the message. This concept is essential for the message's efficacy and accurate interpretation.

Croft (2004) explained that the degree to which the signal is accurately unscrambled depends on the overlap of the two deflections of involvement. For example, a discourse on neurophysiology conveyed to an audience of sixth graders can result in limited or no connection (Croft, 2004). The instructor has a backdrop ability in chemistry and biology and, above that, very functional knowledge of biochemical mechanisms in the nervous system (Croft, 2004). The crowd would have a shortage of vocabulary, if nothing else, to generate discernment of the information. Bountiful ideas in this model should cover communication inquiry under various circumstances. Also, one of Schramm's communication models imported the notion of assessment from the receiver to the sender (Croft, 2004). According to Croft (2004), this communication model can become an ongoing process of information and reaction. This model also grants for cooperation.

Berlo Model of Communication

Berlo developed the model of the ingredients of communication in 1960 (Croft, 2004). Berlo's model focused on identifying the controlling factors for four identified elements of communication: Source, Message, Channel, and Receiver (SMCR) (Croft, 2004). In other words, the SMCR model aimed at the individual characteristics of communication and stressed the role of the relationship between the source and the receiver as an essential variable in the communication process (Croft, 2004). The more highly developed the communication skills of the original and the receiver, the more effectively the message is encoded (sender) and decoded (receiver) (Croft, 2004).

In Berlo's communication model, both synchronous and asynchronous communication methods are possible. Synchronous channels or processes are those in which the sender and receiver can be reached directly. Asynchronous communication occurs when, on the other hand, the sender and receiver are not in close proximity to one another. Asynchronous communication poses a risk because neither the sender nor the receiver will have a clear indication of how well the message has been received. Additionally, it stops the statement from being modified, making it difficult to add additional clarification.

Noise

In all communication, there is a sender (a message) and a receiver. Unfortunately, the meaning of a message can change depending on the culture the message is being transmitted (Croft, 2004). Croft (2004) means that in all communication, the sender encodes a message, the receiver decodes it, and between those three (the sender, the message, and the receiver), the noise gets in the way and complicates the process.

There is no such thing as noiseless communication because there is always some noise entering the contact for a conversation to occur (Croft, 2004). Noise is not interference in a sense, but more so physical. The noise can be psychological or cultural. The value of culture can play a part in the transmission process of communication, disrupting the flow of a standard transmission (Croft, 2004). Another example, as Croft (2004) explained, is the misunderstanding of a particular message, which can distort the meaning and form a noise. An excellent illustration is what is called the game of "Chinese Whispers," and it is where a person starts with a particular conversation, and by the time it reaches the final player, the original message has already been distorted (Croft, 2004).

Social Media

There are several definitions for social media. However, social media can be called “digital technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.5; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009). Social media is also often referred to as “channel characteristics, identifying either directionality of messages. or using specific tools like Facebook or Twitter to exemplify modes of interaction” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.5). Howard and Parks (2012) offered a more structured definition of social media consisting of three parts: (1) social media is the “information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (2) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and; (3) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.6). For clarification, social media is a valued term used to define a collection of web-based platforms, applications, and technologies that empower people to interact socially with each other online (Badmos, 2014). Examples of “Social Media Websites” (SMW) and applications include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Digg, Blogs, 2go, WhatsApp, Instagram, and other sites that have content based on user participation and “User-Generated Content” (UGC) (Badmos, 2014).

Social Media and Communication

A sparseness of research exists on social media theory in public relations or communication literature (Kent & Li, 2020). Kent and Li (2020) cited Moon, Ngai, and Tao (2015), confirmed this statement stating that after reviewing what they “call an ‘exhaustive’ list of theories that have been used in social media research, identifying nearly three dozen theories from an assortment of disciplines, but argue that no specific theories of social media yet exist” (p.1). Dijck and Powell (2013) wrote that a few scholars are trying to create a social media

theory. Kent and Li (2020) supported their argument by quoting Bignell (2013); Goodwin and Whannel (2013); Pecora, Murray, and Wartella (2006), saying that “just as media scholars have various interests depending upon the medium and their professional practices; therefore, so too are public relations scholars studying social media in a variety of unique ways relevant to their communication context...”(p.2).

The roots of social media in public relations are difficult to trace precisely and understand social media communication. One must understand the public relations of social media. They are somewhat intertwined. Public relation is the “state of the relationship between the public and a company or other organization or a famous person; the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person” (Oxford Reference, 2020). In other words, public relations are the activity of influencing public opinion in favor of a person, organization, or institution. The word “social media was first used in the public relations scholarship in 1998, but the first study of social media did not appear in the literature until 2008” (Kent & Taylor, 2016, p. 67; Kent & Li, 2020, p.3).

Additionally, “blogs were the earliest forms of social media, being first mentioned in the literature in 2003, and scholarly articles written in 2006” (Kent, 2008; Kent & Li, 2020, p.7; Hinson & Wright, 2008), while Twitter and Facebook were first mentioned in 2008, and studied in 2008/2009 respectively (p. 67). Social media was quoted as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback” (Kent, 2020, p.7). It is necessary to determine the level of church awareness of social media websites, computer literacy of members, social media policy, the primary use of each member on the social media website, time spent on social media websites, and other factors in order to understand the impact of social media on the church (Badmos, 2014).

These were performance indices to evaluate the effect of social media on the church (Badmos, 2014). Since the church is a place where people can share their thoughts and beliefs; therefore, members must participate in sharing their views and opinions with others. Additionally, communication is shifting toward indirection as our networked world gets more digital. In order to continue the religious debate, more people are communicating online via social media platforms (Badmos, 2014).

Social media can be employed, and most American churches now have websites or have thought about acquiring one. However, several churches know that their websites have not been updated since they were first created to keep up with the digital age. (Hagenbuch, 2020). Many pastors and church leaders recognize the need for inclusive websites that provide community outreach opportunities, community-centeredness, and mindfulness; however, an effort has not been made to bring these inclusive websites to fruition (Hagenbuch, 2020). Sadly, this awareness came long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Hagenbuch (2020) argued regarding the possibility of gathering online, stating those thoughts are now a reality. “Not-so-futuristic websites that can bond near and far members and non-members are a promising reality, not a pipedream. Community-based worship is now more possible when we consider sacred and secular spaces far more intertwined than ever” (Hagenbuch, 2020, p.7).

Summary of the Study

Technology has changed the way sermons are delivered. “Communication scholars need to learn about the unique features of social media and the internet, rather than assuming these tools are all the same” (Kent & Li, 2020, p.8). Social media can be a relationship-building tool rather than a marketplace, and it is unique. It can be accessed in any area of the internet, such as the home pages, Listservs and chat groups, blogs and social media, programming content sites

like YouTube, and so on (Kent & Li, 2020). Social media can lead to church growth, unlike classic media platforms like radio and television. They can form strong church relationships and communities because the internet fosters relationship building, but the question remains: how to use it (Kent & Li, 2020). Ultimately or ironically, perhaps, what we face is an image problem.

Kent and Li (2020) argued,

If we fail to imagine other possibilities or even look for them, we will be stuck with the mental schema and metaphors that we started with. As several prominent scholars in public relations have argued recently, the time has come for us to create new metaphors and new ways of thinking about our profession. (p.8)

Barna Group (2020) found out that in recent decades, “there has been increased interest in Livestream or satellite services, in which congregations, typically at mega- or multi-site church campuses, rely upon a video feed or in some cases even a hologram to hear from a speaker” (para. 2). While technology seems to be advancing some churches are not embracing these changes. New Barna data suggested these “services are still a novelty. Very few—just 2 percent of practicing Christians—say they attend a church that uses a video or Livestream sermon, with the large majority (97%) still sitting under the teaching of a live, in-person preacher” (Barna Group, 2020, para.1).

Related Literature

The purpose of this literature-related review was to help formulate the specific research problem related to the topic (Leedy, 2015). The literature review provided information to support this researcher in connecting the problem and the findings (Leedy, 2004). This literature-related review was divided into four parts, and they are (1) Role of Leadership Literature, (2) Leadership and Change Literature, (3) Church ministry, Internet, Ministry, and Social Media Literature, (4) Social Media, Mission, and Leadership Perspective of Social Media Literature. The leadership

part of this literature helped frame the research and secured the leadership role with the use of social media in Southern Baptist churches.

Role of Leadership Literature

This section used a collection of scholarly leaders who are experts in their field to help shape this literature review. The literature review allowed this researcher to examine social media's impact on many aspects of church life. Leaders can effectively disciple people in the digital age. The “digital age” offers many opportunities that were not there before. The option is limitless. Every great leader wants their congregation to grow spiritually, form disciples, and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout their community and worldwide. With the COVID-19 pandemic re-surfing, the church's challenges are real. The church needs leaders who possess incredible skills of approach. This skill takes a leader-centered perspective on leadership (Northouse, 2019). This skill focuses on the leadership characteristics approach and skills and abilities that can be learned and developed (Northouse, 2019).

The information about leaders and their exemplary knowledge models how leaders behave and lead. This section was divided into three subsections, and they are (1) Foundations of Leadership, (2) Exemplary leadership, and (3) Leadership and relationship. In this section, the literature review revealed insightful documented work that helped contribute to this section of the literature-related review.

Foundations of Leadership

In this section, this researcher searched to see how prior and current research tie together the role of leadership and its foundation. This researcher found extensive literature regarding leadership roles and the foundation of leadership. Therefore, many scholarly writers stood out; however, this researcher selected to review the work of three scholars, Marion, R. (2002), his

book on *Leadership in education: Organizational theory for the practitioner*. Steeber, R. (2008) for his dissertation on *Leadership foundation profiles of secondary principals of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills exemplary and recognized campuses*, and Wheatley, M. J. (1999), for his book on *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world*.

Steeber (2008) stated that one of the qualifications for leadership is to "Know thy self." This phrase was attributed to many Greek philosophers and is highly appropriate when a person's leadership philosophy needs to be developed (Steeber, 2008). This self-awareness development is significant for a leader because it will become paramount when the individual makes a tough decision (Steeber, 2008). Steeber (2008) cited Wheatley (1999), stating that,

Each day, the leader's concept of self will be challenged by the organizational entities that either resist the philosophical stance being made due to a difference in philosophy or are mired in the state of stagnation alluded to in the section defining epistemology. Knowing oneself and sticking to what is believed to be right will be important for the ultimate success of the leader. (p.48)

The leader governs the organization and makes the organization becomes a primary component (Steeber, 2008). Contrasting the early leaders to the modern leaders, early leaders such as Fredrick Taylor, Max Weber, and McGregor, the early leaders believed in a "plan, organize and control, control" (Marion, 2002, p.26; Steeber, 2008, p.48), whereas the modern leaders believe in a less rigid theory. The contemporary leadership theory traded stringent control for stability within the environment (Marion, 2002, Steeber, 2008). Marion (2002) eloquently explained the difference between a stable and an unstable environment. Marion (2002) argued that in a stable and predictable environment, a leader could assemble an uncomplicated organizational structure governed by simple, straightforward rules with little supervision. However, suppose the environment is unstable and unpredictable. In that case, the organizational structure must be complicated and governed by strict, complex rules and regulations that require

interpretation from hired experts; therefore, the rules must be available freely so that different people can interpret them as well (Marion, 2002; Steeber, 2002). Marion and Steeber (2002) argued,

This new information intends to keep the 50-system off-balance, alert to how it might need to change. An open organization doesn't look for information that makes it feel good, that verifies its past and validates its present. It is deliberately looking for information that might threaten its stability, knock it off balance, and open it to growth... As the organizational environment makes the shift away from the need for control and develops its sense of order, the opportunity to work with stagnant members will be available. The executive has the synergy of the organizational influence combined with the personal energy that can be supplied to help develop buy-in from these lagging members. (Marion, 2002, p. 83; Steeber, 2002, p.48)

Exemplary Leadership

In this subtopic, this researcher selected James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner's work on exemplary leadership. To drive the research home, this section helped with an in-depth understanding of the research and its components on superior leadership. Of the scholars who wrote and built several theoretical (Beck, 2020) and descriptive theological models on exemplary leadership, these leaders stood out Kouzes, Posner, and John Kotter. Kouzes and Posner wrote several books on leadership and are experts in their field, as well as John Kotter. Kouzes and Posner's (2018) book on *The Student Leadership Challenge: Five Practices for Becoming an Exemplary Leader* helped this researcher develop the exemplary leadership subsection, and John Kotter's book on *What Leaders Really Do?* Kouzes and Posner (2018) have researched leadership for more than 30 years. They have interviewed thousands of leaders, which is why this researcher selected their work for this literature review section.

Kouzes and Posner (2018) pointed out that leadership can be learned just like any other skill; however, leading in an exemplary manner requires skills. No amount of coaching or practice can make one an excellent leader unless one cares about making a difference, a change

in someone else's life, or an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). "Leadership is about transforming values and goals into action" (Kouzes & Posner, 2018, p.5).

Kotter (1999) insisted that "Just as we need more people to provide leadership in the complex organizations that dominate our world today, we also need more people to develop the cultures that will create that leadership" (p, 65). Well-led businesses need to recognize and reward the people who are successful in making leaders (Kotter, 1999). Kotter (1999) further stated, "Institutionalizing a leadership-centered culture is the ultimate act of leadership" (p.65).

Kouzes and Posner (2018) have researched leaders globally for over thirty years. They have found that leaders do not know or care about religion, age, gender, ethnicity, culture, or geographical borders because leaders reside in every city and country and can be found in every function and organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). During their exhausting research, Kouzes and Posner (2018) discovered similar practices and characteristics that exemplary leaders possess. They were able to find exemplary leaders everywhere. Once the leadership experiences were analyzed, they discovered identical behaviors and actions that made these leaders definitive. The five practices of outstanding leadership mentioned are (1) They model the way; (2) They inspire a shared vision; (3) They challenge the process; (4) They enable others to act; (5) and they encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

Model the way

1. Find your voice by clarifying your personal values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

Inspire a shared vision

3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

Challenge the process

5. Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve

6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.

Enable others to act

7. Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
8. Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.

Encourage the heart

9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Currently, the forecast is gloomy with the political tension, a distorted economy, and social upward, and just because the “clouds have obscured the view doesn’t mean there is no sun. That’s how exemplary leaders see it anyway” (Kouzes & Posner, 2004, p.125).

Leadership and Relationship.

In this subtopic, this researcher will examine the relationship process and its impact on organizational leaders using a prior literature review. Effective leadership and effective relationship go hand and hand. “People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care” (John Maxwell, 2007, p.11). Maxwell (2007) stated, “The best way to become a person that others are drawn to is to develop qualities that we are attracted to in others” (p.11). Kouzes and Posner (2004) argued, "Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow...Sometimes, it is one-to-many. Regardless of the numbers, to thrive in these disquieting times, Christian leaders must master the dynamics of the leadership relationship” (p.118).

Leadership is Credibility

The foundation of the relationship was credibility, personal service, sacrifice, and keeping hope alive (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Credibility was one of the essential foundations of leadership. Credibility is important because if people do not believe in the messenger or the

leader, they will not accept the message (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Credibility is doing what you say you will do (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Another attribute of a leadership relationship is personal. Leadership is unique because it is one on one. Kouzes and Posner (2004) say, ultimately, “it is not about them, but it is about you and me” (p.120). Kouzes and Posner (2004) insist that,

Research on employee engagement clearly supports this message. Surveys from eighty thousand managers in over four hundred companies reveal that it’s the immediate manager who has more influence on employees’ engagement with their work than any other single factor-more important, for example than, pay, benefits, or bonuses. It’s the immediate manager who has the most influence on whether a person voluntarily stays or leaves an organization. People do not quit their organization, they quit their leaders. (Kouzes & Posner, 2004, p.122; Buckingham & Coffman, 1999)

Leadership is Serving

Leadership is a service; therefore, leaders are servants. As Robert Greenleaf’s (1977) concept of servant leadership pointed out, “great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to (the leader’s) greatness. In the servant leadership concept and theory, Greenleaf noticed that the leaders who believed in service were more successful” (Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 2004).

Leadership and Traits

One thing a leader does not want to do is practice the trait approach. Leaders who have implanted social media in their churches and are doing well in this area possess a particular “trait approach.” Northouse (2019) stated,

The trait approach was one of the first systematic attempts to study leadership...leadership traits were studied to determine what made certain people great leaders. The theories that were developed were called “great man” theories because they focused on identifying the innate qualities and characteristics possessed by great social, political, and military leaders... (p. 19)

This approach was unbiblical since Jeremiah 3:15 in the NIV says, “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.” It was believed that people were born with these traits and that only the “great” people possessed them (Northouse, 2019). In the eyes of God, we are all “great,” but God selects those who are weak and humble. Since no one can call themselves great, and one can only be great after they have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they can become significant only because of what Jesus did on the cross. A great example was Moses.

Leadership is Sacrifice

Leaders are selfless. Their sacrifice demonstrates that they are not in it for themselves but that they do care, doing selfless deeds (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). These deeds show that they have others’ best interests at heart. Selfless leaders are passionate. They lead with great passion, excitement, enthusiasm, and zeal (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2004) articulate that “leaders who are most admired are those who have suffered the most, who have sacrificed the most” (p.125).

Leadership is Keeping Hope Alive

Leaders keep hope alive by demonstrating the courage of their convictions, painting positive images of the future, taking charge of change, trusting in the abilities of others, by recognizing the dedication of others as they get extraordinary things done (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2004) clarified hope as an attitude in action, and they further say that hope enables people to mobilize their healing and achieving powers. Hope transcends today's difficulty and envisions tomorrow's potential (Kouzes & Posner, 2004). Hope also “enables people to find the will and the way to aspire to greatness” (Kouzes & Posner, 2004, p.127). Hope

is a testimony to the power of the human spirit. Kouzes and Posner (2004) stated that “leadership is a struggle, and the only way to thrive as a leader is to keep hope alive” (p.127).

Leadership and Change

In this section, this researcher examined how leadership embraced change and how it directly affects the church and the use of social media. The sub-section covered the change in (1) Strategy for change. The scholar that best represents this field of work is John Kotter, and a few other well-credited authors were used for literature purposes. Leaders who embrace change are more likely to embrace the use of social media in their ministry. Hind (n.d) suggested,

The essentials of leadership are relatively stable; people still say that leadership is about trust/communication / influence and good relationships. What has changed in the leadership mix is the nature and granularity of the relationship between leaders and all those around them, in particular their direct followers. Leadership is clearly not a static concept. Social media is disrupting leadership significantly through changing social trends and expectations. Leadership thinking is continuing to evolve, and business schools must keep pace by addressing the need for enhancing self-awareness and strategic skills at all levels of leadership, supported by a sophisticated mastery of technology. (p.5)

Leadership and change and how leaders lead in the twenty-first century mostly have to do with strategy. John Kotter conducted more than fourteen formal studies and more than thousands of interviews directly observing dozens of executives in action. He compiled numerous surveys on the topic of leadership and changes in leadership. He is an expert in his field (Kotter, 1999).

Kouzes and Posner (2017) stated that when leaders want to move forward with a decision, they are often frustrated with the idea of “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” mentality; however, even when they do not feel comfortable with the decision, they still go forward with it, and they do not wait for instructions or permission from the Holy Spirit. As a result, the plan failed. After the project fails, leaders are innovative, creating impossible solutions amid confusion and dead ends and completing the desired outcome. Leaders should pray before

making decisions when the current system is not working. It is time to try something different with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Because God wants to be involved in every intrinsic detail of our lives, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance in administration is a wise way to lead successfully (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Before implementing and using social media as a tool to spread the gospel, Leaders should pray about it and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to find the best way to move forward with the vision.

Strategy for Change

Change is inevitable. People like organizations do not like change. People fear change because they see the situation differently from the leader or the organization that introduced the change. People view the change as a cost rather than a benefit resulting from the change (Kotter, 1999). Kotter (1999) stated that “one major reason people resist organizational change is that they think they will lose something of value as a result” (p.31). Another reason people resist change is “when they do not understand its implications and perceive that it might cost them much more than they will gain, and in such situations, often occur when trust is lacking between the person initiating the change and the employees” (Kotter, 1999, p.33; Argyris, 1970).

Maxwell (2003) argued, “change your thinking, change your life” (para.7). Also, they fear that they will not be able to develop the new skills that may be required to keep their position or are afraid they may not be able to exhibit the new behavior that is required of them (Kotter, 1999). Fullan (2007) suggested, “The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change, but specifically, it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change” (p.ix).

Furthermore, Maxwell (2003) stated that change comes with thinking differently. Thinking positively about a situation can have a positive effect on things. Maxwell (2003) insisted, “if you are willing to change your thinking, you can change your feelings; if you change your feelings, you can change your actions, and changing your actions-based on good thinking- can change your life” (para.8).

Kotter (1999) offered strategies that managers or leaders can use to positively make people embrace the change. Kotter’s processes involved communication, education, participation, facilitation, support, negotiation, and agreement. Kotter insisted that leaders must not use manipulation or co-optation. Furthermore, they should not treat people implicitly or force them to accept the change. They are numerous strategies offered by Kotter, and the list is rather long; therefore, this researcher only covered topics on communication and education. Kotter (1999) insisted that “one way to overcome resistance to change is to educate the people about it beforehand... communication of ideas helps people see the need for and the logic of a change” (p.37). “Education process can involve one-on-one discussions, presentations to groups or memos and reports and once persuaded people will often help with the implementation of the change” (Kotter, 1999, p.37).

Church Ministry, Social Media Ministry, and Social Media Usage

In this section, this researcher researched literature to form a connection between church ministry, social media ministry, and social media usage to dig deeper into the research study.

According to Lee (2011), “Church ministry is an unending communication between Christians designed to fill each other ‘s spiritual needs in the form of church services” (Towns, 1998, p. 30). The church is a training system assisting and teaching new and seasoned believers to devote themselves to an authentic life of discipleship (Lee, 2011). Moreover, the church serves as a tool

to equip Christians through the Word to free themselves from the bondage of sin and secular thinking (Lee, 2011). Through preaching, teaching, and applying the Word, church ministry aids "Christians in turning away from distractions and enables them to be a part of the Lord's church." (Lee, 2011, p.30). Lee (2011) argued why church ministry is needed articulating that,

Church members have various needs that arise from different situations and circumstances. Church members have different ages, and they come from different social backgrounds. Churches have to deal with many various issues. The education ministry, urban ministry, rural ministry, youth ministry, children 's ministry, senior ministry, and ministry for the disabled, addicted, and foreign workers are some examples showing the tremendous ministerial effort made by churches. (pp.30-31)

Social Media Ministry

Social media and church ministry do not exist or operate independently (Lee, 2011).

From excellent multimedia content to interactive communication, the internet ministry can grasp several ministries synchronously (Lee, 2011). Instead of focusing on one specific ministry at a time, internet ministry can interchangeably manage "five of the most essential tasks of a church ministry" (Erickson, 1991; Lee, 2011). The five essential tasks of a church ministry are evangelism, education, worship, fellowship, and service (Lee, 2011). People are coming to know Jesus. Lives are being transformed. It comes from God's power and churches' use of the internet to share, teach, and connect (Stephenson, 2010).

Social Media Ministry and Organizational Structure

The church of Jesus Christ can even be considered an organization with structure and skills. The organizational process sees that the organization has a system of analysis. Yukl (2013) stated, "Distributed leadership is less likely to be ignored in an organization-level theory because it is obvious that an organization has many designated leaders whose actions must be coordinated...in theories of organizational leadership need to integrate leading and managing is more obvious" (Yukl, 2013, p.17). The organizational process focuses on the subject such as the

“organizational structure and culture, organizational change, executive succession, and influence processes between the CEO and the top management team or board of directors” (Yukl, 2013, p.17). Leadership is a process that occurs in a large group that is divided into a subsystem (Yukl, 2013).

Burns and Stalker (1961) articulated that “the organizational structure refers to the type of framework a company uses to distinguish power and authority, roles and responsibilities, and how information flows through the organization” (para.1). An organization must choose a structure that is appropriate for its individual needs and allows for the company to react and adapt to uncertainties and changes in the internal and external environments (Burns & Stalker, 1961). A suitable organizational structure allows a company to implement proper operating procedures and decision-making processes that aid the organization in accomplishing its goals (Burns & Stalker, 1961).

People are needed for the church to strive and accomplish its goal. Small churches usually lack the people to carry out everything required; one person sometimes wears different hats. However, this should not be accused of not growing or having a social media presence. Creating a social media account does not require money, only a desire to know that one is needed. “if you built it, they would come” once that is incorporated, God will send labor to keep it going. Faith is the requirement. Once faith is ignited, God takes over and supplies the work and cost to keep the system going. In churches struggling to adopt social media as a tool to spread the gospel, the leader may want to look at adopting a mechanical organization. The book *The Management of Innovation*, written in 1961 by Burns and Stalker, stated that mechanistic organizations are often appropriate in stable environments and for routine tasks and technologies. Large companies are using this type of structure all over the world. According to

Burns and Stalker (1961), a mechanical organizational structure or machine process is one in which every component is made to do a specific task. The mechanical model is well-exemplified by businesses like McDonald's and Southern Motors, to mention a few. These businesses are large and employ a large number of people; therefore, order, structure, and discipline are required to keep them operating well. These businesses frequently have strict, hierarchical management structures. The church's leaders must be familiar with their congregation and determine what organizational competence suits them and the organization.

This organizational structure is based on a formal, centralized network.

In mechanistic organizations, authority reflects a well-defined hierarchy where top-level managers make most decisions (Burns & Stalker, 1961). This type of organizational structure is best suited in a stable environment where everyone knows their role and responsibilities, a network is maintained, and change is rarely needed. Since the climate is complex, decisions requiring multiple parties are not required. In other words, an organization where “management makes most of the decisions, information is communicated based on a chain of command, tasks are highly specialized, departments stand-alone and operate as their entity, and change is, for the most part, uncommon” (Burns & Stalker, 1961). This type of organization may work in a small church, or the leader may want to use the other organizational skills mentioned above.

Social Media Usage

In this subtopic, this researcher connected the study by looking at social media, cyber churches, and the valuable connection available for churches to reach the people who would not usually be contacted using the internet platform. Internet and social ministry have become a “thing,” and according to Barna Group (2020), “while many pastors were hesitant to take their ministry online before the pandemic, the response to COVID-19 has forced everyone into the

digital space where younger generations were already spending a lot of their time.” According to Barna Group (2020) “the typical 15- to 23-year-old spends an estimated 2,767 hours using screen media each year.” (p.1)

This presents an excellent opportunity for the church. The church can go (online) and meet groups of people already online streaming or watching videos. In the Barna Group (2020) in *The State of the Church 2020* segment, the Barna Group looked at social media and how leaders can use it effectively to keep their congregations engaged and growing. With most churches closed due to Covid-19, only a small number of churches are open with precautions in place; with small gatherings or meetings (22%) or staff (21%), just over half (52%) are open for everyday use (Barna, 2020). Barna Group (2020) conducted these online surveys among 2,694 Protestant Senior Pastors from March 20–July 26, 2020. Barna (2020) looked at data’s “showing an increase in the number of church leaders who say they don’t expect to open their building for in-person worship again until sometime next year (12% vs. 5% week 13 and 3% week 12)” (para.6).

The Barna Group (2020) shares thoughts on how pastors can properly use social media, stating,

Social media is a misnomer and is used in many wrong ways. Social media begins with the word ‘social,’ and yet we use it to essentially communicate a message from us to the masses—that’s broadcast—and it’s used for marketing and keeping people aware of who we are and what we’re doing. But the ministry side is lacking. The social ministry side is about discipleship and about helping people mature in their faith. ... Social ministry is about thinking, ‘How do I help people mature in their faith in the digital space?’ and ‘How do I connect people so that they’re growing together?’” Jones continues. “I think when you adopt that mindset, you begin to look at social technology differently. ... It’s going from content to community conversations... The social ministry side is about discipleship and about helping people mature in their faith. ... Social ministry is about thinking, ‘How do I help people mature in their faith in the digital space?’ and ‘How do I connect people so that they’re growing together?’” Jones continues. “I think when you adopt that mindset, you begin to look at social technology differently. ... It’s going from content to community conversations. (para.7)

The data indicated that half the pastors they interviewed struggled to figure out how to minister to a hybrid church model. Out of 2 694 senior pastors, (47%) say they are struggling with ministry to kids and youth (47%); (46%) are concerned with maintaining growth and momentum and figuring out a hybrid church (44%) ... and other areas of concern include digital discipleship, which was (33%) and getting their church to completely reopen (26%).. and finally, responding to needs (24%) pose a challenge (Barna Group, 2020). One of the pastors Barna group interviewed via social media shared a few tips. Barna Group (2020) interviewed Nona Jones (2020), stating that pastors do not need to feel pressured to replicate what to do in real-life versus social media scenarios. It is different. Barna Group (2020) listed a few things that this pastor suggested: Zoom Bible study, Virtual conferences, Virtual game nights, and group conversations via social media or the analog way of a chat over the phone. Livestream may not be enough; social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube can be used daily to connect with people, have fun, challenge, and encourage each other (Barna Group, 2020).

Social Media, Great Commission, and Leadership Perspective

In this section, this researcher examined previous research to discover how the gospel is interconnected with evangelism, church growth, and the correlation of church leaders in using social media to advance the gospel to the world. This researcher used Nils Smith's book, Social "Media Guide for Ministry: What It Is and How to Use It," for the selected review.

Social Media and the Great Commission

The gospel changes lives; therefore, making it accessible to all people is vital. Social media is one of the more accessible tools because creating a social media account is free to all. In the Great Commission, Jesus stressed the importance of sharing the gospel and recruiting new

followers for the task. Lines argued, “This stress on sharing Jesus’ message and recruiting new followers is something that was never a large emphasis in the Jewish tradition and shifted the focus of the budding Christian religion” (Lines, 2020, p.7). Nils Smith, a social media pastor, suggested that social media offers endless possibilities to carry out the Great Commission faster than ever before (Smith, 2013). The use of social media has been proven to increase not only church growth but evangelism as well. The gospel's power is communicated through powerful and effective technology (Smith, 2013). Nils Smith had 200,000 followers at the time this researcher was conducting research and had over 10,000 worship members worldwide each week participating in the online services. Smith’s online church offered weekly services in English and Spanish, and he responded to numerous weekly prayers online. As a result, dozens are being saved each week via a social media platform. Social media empowered the gospel to be targeted and advanced promptly and quickly.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Furthermore, the Apostle Paul spoke about the building of community; another part of the Great Commission is building a community for all groups of people regardless of denomination affiliations, diminishing barriers, and focusing on Jesus and His Word (the Gospel). The deity of God is glorified and manifested in the process. With the world changing rapidly, social media has offered a game-changer for the gospel to be preached worldwide faster (Smith, 2013).

Social media is an ever-ending conversation carried over the internet. Whenever someone posts something, it keeps the conversation going (Smith 2013). The Great Commission is about creating a life-transforming faith community worldwide while teaching, preaching, evangelizing, and discipling new believers to spread the Gospel. Jesus cannot come back until the Gospel is

preached worldwide. Matthew 24:14 reads, "And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come." Making disciples while building and spreading the dynasty of God on earth is another part of the Great Commission. Richard Lisher insisted that the attention is on "the corporate dimensions of moral guidance, cure of souls, and the formation of the congregation" (Lisher, 1987, p.164).

Social media users post and share pictures, videos, comments, updates, stories, statuses, and so on (Smith, 2013). The possibilities are endless. The church can use social media to increase foot traffic on its website and even increase church attendance by sharing a comment, an update, a status, or simply a picture. For example, when a video, an article, a church event, or any content is posted on a social media platform, this initiates a conversion. As a result, people can like, comment, share, or ignore the post (Smith, 2013). This system serves as a great advantage for churches to initiate conversations online. It is an excellent way to start communication on any given topic online. Social media is a great evangelistic tool to spread the gospel and make disciples of all nations because the internet is available worldwide, even in remote places. As stated before by Lee (2011),

The Internet in our era is the bridge connecting information, people, and cultures from various parts of the earth. Nearly every country (except a few underdeveloped countries) has been reached and covered by the Internet, and cyberspace has become a strategically important location that the church ministry should not ignore any further. It is the last frontier where Christians should fulfill their evangelical mission as God's witnesses. (Lee, 2011, p.33; Chung-Yeong, 2004, p.18; Jeong-Hyeon, 2000, p.6)

Evangelism in a Digital World

Barna Group (2020) "surveyed U.S Christian adults, asking them how they share their faith online. Sharing can be done through posting, comments, and using online profiles. Barna says that many Christians articulated that they have found that technology and digital interactions have made evangelism easier for them to share their faith. The Barna Group

discovered that “three in 10 (28%) share their faith via social media, and almost six in 10 (58%) non-Christians say someone has shared their faith with them through Facebook” (Barna Group, 2020, para.6). A survey published by Capterra (2017) written by Conard mentioned these ten statistics on churches using Social Media for evangelism and discipleship:

1. In 2017, more than half of Bible readers used the internet (55%) or a smartphone (53%) to access biblical texts, a significant increase from 2011 (37%, 18%, respectively).
2. Almost 70% of churches offer Wi-Fi for staff and guests. A 2017 LifeWay Research study found that 68% of Protestant churches offer Wi-Fi for both groups.
3. More than 70% of nonprofit communicators consider social media one of their most important communication channels.
4. Almost 85% of churches use Facebook. In 2017, 84% of Protestant pastors reported that their church uses Facebook as their primary online communication tool.
5. Only about 15% of churches are using Twitter and Instagram. In 2017, only 16% of Protestant pastors surveyed reported using Twitter. Even less (13%) were on Instagram.
6. The average click-through-rate is 115% higher for church emails that include at least one social media link.
7. Approximately 51% of churches claim that at least one staff member regularly blogs or posts on social media.
8. 54% of Christian millennials watch online videos about faith or spirituality.
9. 62% of churches use social networking to connect with individuals outside of their congregation.
10. 65% of Americans prefer an in-person preacher to a video sermon.

From these statistics, it is apparent that social media has helped the church. It is trending and will be more effective in the days to come. Instant accessibility, connectivity, and availability

build the church to be connected and engaged with one another every day, not on Sunday alone. Body of Christ (p.101).

Leadership Perception and the Benefit of Social Media

Leaders may be apprehensive about using social media in their church. However, social media is not a threat (Smith, 2013). Although leaders may feel threatened or intimidated, social media is a tool for evangelism, mission, marketing, networking, socializing, and church growth (Smith, 2013). Social media is here to stay. Church leaders may as well embrace this technology. Social media allows communication to go further and faster (Smith, 2013). Social media makes the church relevant and the gospel more relevant and gives it the potential to spread further and quicker to people one would not usually see in a brick-and-mortar church (Smith, 2013; Lee, 2011).

In other words, social media takes the gospel and makes the message relevant and more effective in reaching a greater audience (Smith, 2013). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is always appropriate. Social media has caused several churches to grow drastically because they are active in some form of social media platform (Smith, 2011; Lee, 2011). However, others are experiencing a decline in church attendance, and a presence in some form of social media may help them (Smith, 2013). Campbell (2004) “asserts that religious activities online are usually extensions of in-person religious activities” (Campbell, 2004; Gorrell, 2016, p.64). Gorrell (2016) suggested,

Studies have consistently found that Internet users conceptually and practically connect their online and offline social lives...online religious activities represent simply one part of an individual’s overall religious involvement (Campbell, 2004; Gorrell, 2016). The research of Lövheim and Campbell suggests congregants do not separate in-person and online religious experiences from one another. Instead, they are integrated. The integration of in-person and online relationships and practices is connected to and impacts Christian formation for congregants and pastors alike. (Campbell, 2004; Gorell, 2016; Lövheim, 2013)

In “Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture,” Peter Fischer Nielsen conducted an electronic survey of 1,040 pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Overall, Fischer- Nielsen discovered that “for the individual pastor, Google, Facebook, and YouTube have indeed become integrated elements of the daily working life.” (p.1) Lines (2020) wrote,

What we believe shapes how we relate to one another and interact with the world— wherever and however we relate and interact. You don’t have to make too great a leap of faith or intellect to understand that, by extension, what we believe provides a framework for using social media. (p.35)

Lines (2020) suggested that since “social media serves as an introduction to who a person is before meeting them and after meeting them, it serves as a way to deepen the relationship. Social media works the same way for faith communities” (p.51). Social media is an excellent tool that is needed in all churches regardless of the size of the church or how many members it has.

Meredith Gould (2015) wrote,

Christ has nobody
 Christ has no online presence but yours,
 No blog, no Facebook page, but yours,
 Yours are the tweets through which love touches the world
 Yours are the posts through which the gospel is shared
 Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed
 Christ has no online presence but yours,
 No blog, no Facebook page, but yours.

Social Media and Cost

Smith (2013) argued that social media is free for anyone or an organization. All that is required is to create an account. Posting and updating the report may be time-consuming; however, it is worth it. Twitter, Periscope, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, and other social media platforms do not cost (Smith, 2013) or have hidden fees. Again, they are all free. Churches can create as many social media accounts as they like (Smith, 2013). Posting content, sharing, uploading videos, recording content, live streaming, responding to comments,

retweeting, and checking the sites eight to ten times a day can be time-consuming (Smith, 2013), which can be a daunting task but well worth it. That is how to gain followers by placing an investment in them. As a result, the church grows, lives are changed, and the kingdom of God increases. Now, the church is creating followers and establishing a relationship. Social media is not just building or designing a message; it is making a relationship, community, a community for service. Building a solid relationship is time-consuming, and it takes time to establish trust from followers.

The Rationale for the Study and Gap in the Literature

The above-selected literature reviews and their purpose were to give the reader a better understanding and to take a deeper dive into this researcher's topic, "A Phenomenological Study of Social Media Usage in Southern Baptist Churches." Below, this researcher's rationale for the study and the literature gap was developed into two subtopics for further clarification.

The Rationale for the Study

The information age or the social media outlet has altered how society communicates. With the use of the internet, information can now spread faster. It has also gained a more expansive "acceptability and usability, and it is also becoming probably the most important communication tool among people" (Badmos, 2014, p.1). However, some selected churches have not embraced it well (Badmos, 2014). For clarification, the church is a group of Christian or Christian Denominations who believe in Jesus Christ. The church is not a building. It has been challenging for some pastors and church leaders to adapt to the information age and integrate technology into their organizations. According to Waters and Tindall (2010), leaders in the religious faith have faltered in utilizing social media tools because of the "fear of being able to

retain organizational control. Their reluctance has cost them a star seat in the rapidly moving cyber world” (Crumpton, 2018, p.5; Waters & Tindall, 2010).

Badmos (2014) asserts that social media has an anticipated effect on the church since many authors have considered the pros and cons of social media on the church (Badmos, 2014). Social media garners massive participation and impacts communal life, contributing to a person’s worldview structure. Humans are relational beings (Gorrell,2016). However, if pastors want the gospel to spread and for their churches to grow, they must embrace change. Technology is a form of change that is constantly changing and evolving.

Social media is vital. With everything, there is a positive and a negative side to it; however, social media can be an excellent platform for the church to share the gospel. Therefore, church leaders must encourage the use of “church group account, develop members’ enlightenment training programmers on social media usage, and advise on workable privacy and security issues on the social media websites” (Badmos, 2014, p.1). This can have a tremendous positive impact on the church's growth (Badmos, 2014). With the lack of social media and church websites not present in some churches, how are the Scriptures found in John 14:12 and Mark 16:15 manifested and applied in these churches.

This researcher’s rationale for the current study of social media development and church leadership social media experience in Southern Baptist churches and how social media was used to share the Gospel for God’s kingdom is what is driving this literature-related research.

Gap in Literature

There are different aspects of church life, including but not limited to spiritual, social, economic, administration, evangelization, and so on (Badmos, 2014). Smith (2013) examined the church life's social and spiritual aspects of church life. Arthur & Rensleigh (2012) discussed

evangelization as an aspect of church life, and Yeong (2004) studied the administration, another part of church life. Of these and other available literature examining the impact of social media on one or more of these aspects of church life, there continues to be an insufficiency of desired research that relates to this topic.

The two selected dissertations are studied methods similar to this researcher's choosing method. The two studies selected have a qualitative phenomenological research design. Dr. Brian Pinzer's dissertation was "A Phenomenological Study of Executive Level Leadership Development in Peer Cohort Models." His research aimed to conduct initial research to assess the value of emerging peer mentoring cohorts for leadership development (Pinzer, 2017). Furthermore, Pinzer (2017) stated the reason for the study stating that "This phenomenological study examined the structure of three peer mentoring cohort models as well as the influence these cohorts had on participants' development of leadership competencies found in the literature base and understanding of their personal" (p.viii). Pinzer (2017) interviewed leaders who were in leadership positions. The researcher used both qualitative research interviews with cohort leaders and qualitative surveys to answer the research questions.

The second example method was from Dr. Kathleen Nollett. Her dissertation topic was "Teacher Transformations: A Phenomenological Study on the Effect of Courage to Teach on Experienced Teachers' Growth and Development." This qualitative study aimed to investigate the effects and the type of experiences this professional development had on teachers who participated as a cohort in "Courage to Teach." "Courage to Teach" is a quarterly retreat program for teachers designed to foster growth while rejuvenating them personally and professionally. The phenomenological methodology study "examines the teachers' transformative learning as a result of their participation in Courage to Teach using... transformation as a permanent shift in

one's meaning perspective" (Nollett, 2009, p.iii). Nollett (2009) had two phases for her study. She initially emailed four open-ended questions given to twenty-three cohort members (participants). A letter of introduction and the questionnaire were mailed to the twenty-three cohort member participants. The letter offered the participants choices by answering four initial questions, asking them if they could participate in a focus group, interview individually, or be involved in both stages of the inquiry for step one. For phase two of her study, she purposefully selected ten teachers who participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews (face-to-face and phone). All discussions were audiotaped.

Profile of the Current Study

Online technologies offer substantial benefits, and churches, big or small, can incorporate some of these benefits into their strategic plan (Arthur & Rensleigh, 2015). Social media benefits include but are not limited to the following: "social media play a critical role in overcoming the impact that high levels of mobility and complexity can have on long-term relationships" (Badmos, 2014, p. 4). Christians can reconnect, retain, or make new friends using one of the social media outlets, such as Facebook. Badmos (2014) argued,

Social media can also be used as a tool to overcome some of the barriers faced by church members to forming and maintaining positive social relationships. These barriers can include a lack of safe, accessible, and welcoming public places to gather, limited transport to get there, and time free of structured activities such as school and sport. Social media challenge these barriers because they are accessible 24/7, from different physical locations, and via different technologies (e.g., computer, and mobile device). (Boyd 2007; Sefton-Green & Buckingham 1996, Badmos, 2014)

Furthermore, social media can give church members who feel isolated the ability to connect with other church members via social media and create a virtual game night or other virtual social activities. The possibilities with social media are limitless.

Every time there is an advance in technology, the kingdom advances. ...technology has a huge impact on our mission ... not the 'what' of our mission, but the 'how.' ... Technology is the frontline of evangelism. (Nicholau 2010). The church must see social media as an advancement for the kingdom of God. Arthur and Rensleigh (2015), cited Marcotte (2010) and Larson (2000),

confirm religious environments are not utilizing the Web and Internet to their full potential. Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) affirms Wilson's (2000) stance that small organizations should seek to use technological advancements to assist the churches to move into the 21st century. (p.1)

This literature by Arthur and Rensleigh is closely related to this researcher's research topic; however, it does not cover why selected Southern Baptist churches choose not to use social media as a platform to advance in any way the kingdom of God and if mission, evangelism, conversion, and church growth are their primary target. Furthermore, it does not mention why there is a solid social media presence in Southern Baptist churches and how social media was used as a communication tool to share the gospel online in Southern Baptist churches.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research goals were designed to explore and describe what happened, interpret the meaning to the people involved in what developed, and expose the transformation that took place (Creswell, 2018). In other words, qualitative research questions ask specific process questions, issues, or phenomena to be explored or described. Qualitative data analysis is the process that moves from the raw data collected as part of the research study to explanations, understandings, and interpretations of the phenomena, people, and situations studied (Bredfeldt, 2019). Creswell (2018) suggested that “in qualitative method research, the investigator poses questions and collects data in the form of text, audio recording, or video recording, or the researcher may collect data by observing the participants and directly asking them open-ended questions” (p.4). Chapter Three commenced with the Research Design Synopsis, followed by the Setting, the Participants, the Role of the Researcher, the Ethical Considerations, the Data Collection Methods and Instruments, the Data Analysis, and closed with the Chapter Summary.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

The “informational age” involving social media is an outlet that has altered how society communicates. With the use of the internet, information can now spread faster. Social media garnered massive participation and impacted communal life, contributing to a person’s worldview (Gorrell, 2016). Social media is prevalent in society. The use of this platform is strong in some churches, while it is non-existence in others. There appears to be an excellent opportunity to use digital tools for spiritual growth. We see “the influence of recent digital trends on churchgoers is undeniable, though perhaps not as extreme as you’d expect” (Barna Group

2020, p.1). Barna Group (2020) found out “that in recent decades, there has been increased interest in Livestream or satellite services, in which congregations, typically at mega- or multi-site church campuses, rely upon a video feed or in some cases even a hologram to hear from the speaker” (p.1). While technology seems to be advancing some churches are not embracing these changes. New Barna data suggested these “services are still a novelty. Very few—just 2 percent of practicing Christians—say they attend a church that uses a video or Livestream sermon, with the large majority (97%) still sitting under the teaching of a live, in-person preacher” (Barna Group, 2020, p.1).

Since the church is a place where people can share their thoughts and beliefs; therefore, members must participate in sharing these thoughts and views with others. But “due to the increasing digitalization in our networked world, more and more communication is becoming indirect. People are increasingly communicating online through social media websites to keep stimulating the religious discussion” (Badmos, 2014, para.5). It has become second nature “to the majority of Americans to get online to exchange information, greet other people, post ideas, share what one is doing, and discover what is going on around the world and in the lives of “friends” or of those one “follows” (Barna, 2008).

Andrew Perrin (2015) with Pew Research explained, “Nearly two-thirds of American adults (65%) use social networking sites, up from 7% when Pew Research Center began systematically tracking social media usage in 2005” (p.2). These formative habits are practices and integration of in-person and online relationships, which are connected to and impact Christian formation for congregants and pastors alike (Gorrell, 2016). Peter Fischer Nielsen (2012), in “Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture,” conducted an electronic survey of 1,040 pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Nielsen discovered that “for the

individual pastor, Google, Facebook, and YouTube have indeed become integrated elements of the daily working life” (p.2). Social media is here to stay.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. These churches were associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is an organization comprising over 47,000 Baptist churches throughout the United States and its territories. These congregations, which include a diverse range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups, are known as "cooperating churches." They have organized themselves to carry out a specific set of missions and ministry efforts, all with the goal of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone, everywhere (SBC.Net).

The research theory that guided this study was the mathematical theory of communication (Shannon, 2001; Weaver, 1953) developed by Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, and David Berlo. The communication model is an effective way to understand and explore the gap in the literature regarding God and the way He communicates with His people and to discover the concept of social media regarding sharing the Gospel in Southern Baptist churches.

Social media is a positive, helpful tool for ministry; however, there is a strong presence of social media in some churches versus no social media or very little in others. This study sought to understand the nature of social media in Southern Baptist churches. It explored these churches' concepts of how they use social media and how much they share the Gospel with the

world. The church's impact, sharing the Gospel, and the unique connection or lack thereof in presenting the gospel to the world were explored.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What type of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area using in their ministry to share the Gospel?

RQ2. How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the Gospel on a social media platform?

RQ3. What is the Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

Research Design and Methodology

The historical origin of qualitative research comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell, 2018). This description culminates in the essence of the experiences of several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). “Phenomenology approaches research as a constructivist endeavor where one can find meaning and experience in subjects and their experience related to their world” (Laverty, 2003, para.4).

This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (Creswell, 2018). In a phenomenological method, the research elected a nearly small number of participants' experiences to scrutinize patterns of meaning and experience (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Pinzer, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative phenomenological study is appropriate for this study.

This qualitative phenomenological study explored social media usage in Southern Baptist churches. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was designed to examine the nature of social media in Southern Baptist churches by collecting qualitative data using the interview (open-ended questions) process. The phenomenological research was selected for this dissertation because, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2018), “the term phenomenology refers to a person’s perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the individual. This study attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p.233).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method. “Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology effective for exploring how individuals experience a shared phenomenon” (Flanigan & Babchuk, 2015, para.11). Phenomenology was defined as the study of lived experience in a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Laverty, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Furthermore, “a phenomenological approach is that which considers the dynamics between humans and their world as the fullness of reality while the science focused on mere observation of an object finds only abstraction” (Moustakas, 1994, p.84). In phenomenological design, the research preferred a nearly small number of members' experiences to evaluate for emulating connotation and background (Moustakas, 1994).

This study first collected data in a qualitative form using the interview methodology to explore the social media development and experiences of using social media to share the gospel in Southern Baptist churches. Furthermore, the qualitative phenomenological interview methodology was used to collect data to understand the participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

A purposeful sampling technique was used for this study. This study examined four Southern Baptist pastors and eight Southern Baptist social media directors. They were leaders in charge of social media content in their churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording device were used to record the interview. A semi-structured, open interview was conducted with each participant to examine social media use in their respective churches.

The study began after receiving approval from Liberty University's IRB. The Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) with the screening survey question link (Appendix E) was emailed to 250 participants introducing the study. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) online database provided a list of churches affiliated for the researcher to contact. A list of churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area was contacted via email. A total of 250 Participant Recruitment Letters were emailed, followed up emails were sent out more than once to the potential participants. The 250 participants' letters sent out resulted in eleven Southern Baptist Churches and twelve participants.

The participant that responded by filling out the survey and meeting the study criteria were contacted via email with an official invitation. The participants that responded to the official invitation were asked to schedule an interview with a time and date; for the ones that responded to the official invitation and scheduled the time and date for the interview, a Consent Form was sent (Appendix D) along with the interview questions (Appendix F) via email. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email.

When the official invitation email was sent participants were required to respond to the email, and they were also required to sign the consent form and email it back before the day of

the interview. The consent form (Appendix D) and the interview questions (Appendix F) were sent via email once the participant accepted the online interview invitation. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording device were used to record the interview. The interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and after the interview, the data was transcribed using Microsoft Word online.

The interviews involved pastors and social media directors/leaders in charge of social media ministry or leaders who are the decision-makers regarding social media presence in their churches. Southern Baptist churches with a solid social media presence were the participants in this study. They were required to fill out the screening survey questions as a preliminary to see if they were qualified to participate in the study.

The study consisted of eleven Southern Baptist churches which participated in the study. A total of twelve leaders (four pastors and eight social media directors) were interviewed, and the research questions were answered. The research questions consisted of three questions divided into nine sub-questions, with twelve open-ended, qualitative, and semi-structured in-depth interview questions. The sample purposefully selected eleven churches and interviewed four senior pastors and eight social media directors to participate. A consent form and informational email were sent out explaining the research and asking for consent, and based on the initial results determined, the eleven churches participated.

The open-ended interview questions were collected to understand and explain the setting in relationships with the participants. Moreover, this method was selected because in phenomenology, the researchers “depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews...with a small, carefully selected sample of participants...” (Creswell, 2018, p.233). Furthermore,

Creswell (2018) stated that the “sample size depends on the qualitative design being used (e.g., ethnography, case study). We have some rough estimates to advance from a review of many qualitative research studies. The narrative includes one or two individuals; phenomenology involves a range of 3–10” (p.186).

Twelve participants from the Southern Baptist churches were interviewed. The sample questions and the consent form were sent out via email. Additionally, audio and video were used to record the interview process. The result of the interview was used to analyze the result. Lowe et al. (2018) suggested, “An aspect common to the assessment of qualitative research quality is the need to gauge the saturation of a data set, signifying that the data contain all information necessary to answer the research questions” (Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018, p. 192).

There was a difference between thematic and theoretical saturation. “Thematic saturation is achieved when further observations and analysis reveal no new themes” (Green & Thorogood, 2004; Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018, p. 192). Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (2009); Lowe et al. (2018) suggested, “It may be achieved without discovering the fullness of relationships between themes. In contrast, theoretical saturation occurs when additional data cannot further develop the qualitative theory derived from the data” (p.192).

For this study, a thematic theme was used. In terms of triangulation, eight social media directors and four pastors were interviewed; content analysis from the churches' social media platforms, digital observation from the church websites, and the questions from the screening survey were utilized for triangulation. As suggested by Leedy and Omrod (2016), “Content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (p235). Patton (1999) suggested that “Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to

develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena” (p. 545). Furthermore, Patton (1999) stated, “Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources” (p.545).

These sample techniques were used to collect participant meanings; focus on a single concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The sample type was purposive sampling, “that is, it entails choosing those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p.242).

This study collected data in a qualitative form using interview methodology regarding the reasons behind social media usage in these Southern Baptist churches and its implication in sharing the Gospel. The perspective of leadership, discipleship, sharing the gospel online, social media as a communication tool, and the challenges of using social media were also examined.

Setting

This study explored social media usage in Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The study was designed to help other Southern Baptist churches who are not using social media to share the gospel and to help them see its benefit. As a result, they will not just survive but will thrive. As of this writing, numerous Southern Baptist churches are in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The average church interviewed had around 50 or more active members. The leaders were currently in a leadership position. The pastors were senior pastors and decision-makers of how social media is used in their churches to share the gospel.

The interview was conducted online using a safe and secure connection and took place in the researcher's office and a secure room for the leaders. The doors were closed, and the conversation was not overheard. The setting was described to the participants and how the data was collected. The background data on the church organization, leadership, people group, and

denomination were provided and were described in detail. Since confidentiality was essential to authentic data selection and the virtuous benefit of that data alias for both “individuals” therefore, " establishments were also utilized in this section.

Participants

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis “(IPA) approach in a qualitative research study reiterates the fact that its main objective and essence are to explore the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants and allow them to narrate the research findings through their ‘lived experiences... allowing the interviewees (research participants) to express themselves and their ‘lived experience’ stories the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution” (Alase, 2017, para.1). Twelve participants who were part of the Southern Baptist Convention were interviewed, and they were leaders in the church. They were eighteen years older. They were pastors or social media directors. They had to use social media in their churches to share the gospel. The IPA was selected for collecting the data in the research study.

This study focused on the eleven Southern Baptist churches with twelve participants (four pastors and eight social media directors) in the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan area with 50 or more active members, which were included in the data collection and research. The participants are leaders who are decision-makers in media use in their churches. These leaders were the decision-makers who decided whether social media was used in their churches and to what extent.

This study looked at four Southern Baptist pastors and eight Southern Baptist social media directors who oversee social media in the Atlanta Metropolitan area and studied Southern Baptist churches with a solid social media presence. The study was a qualitative phenomenological study that explored social media usage in these Southern Baptist churches.

This study used the interview process. The interview questions explored resources such as leadership perceptions, social media platforms, and social media as a communication tool to share the gospel, discipleship, and challenges when dealing with social media and usage in these churches.

Role of the Researcher

The phenomenological accepted practices suggested that researchers interviewing participants acted as a recorder and reporters; therefore, this researcher recorded and reported the interviews and had limited interaction with the participants. The interviewer followed the guidelines in the IRB and its Graduate School of Divinity's Christian Leadership in Education doctoral program. Since the role of the researcher was to operate with honesty, respect, integrity, and fairness (Kvale, 1996), the interview was conducted under strict guidelines, and only reliable data was recorded and interpreted for this researcher's dissertation. The researcher also observed the digital content of the churches' websites that participated in the study. This observation was done following the research protocol. This was achieved by practicing bracketing. As suggested by Tufford and Newman (2010), "Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p.80). The instrument used to analyze all the phases across the qualitative research project was the researcher (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Therefore, "This subjective endeavor entails the inevitable transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions, and theories (hereafter referred to collectively as preconceptions), within and across the research project. These preconceptions influence how data are gathered, interpreted, and presented" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p.81). Bracketing prevents these preconceptions from being manifested. According to Tufford and Newman (2010),

bracketing can mitigate adverse effects of the research endeavor, importantly, it also facilitates the researcher reaching deeper levels of reflection across all stages of qualitative research: selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting, and interpreting data, and reporting findings. The opportunity for sustained in-depth reflection may enhance the acuity of the research and facilitate a more profound and multifaceted analysis and results. (p.81)

This setting was selected based on this researcher's denominational background and experiences. As a former Baptist and currently a non-denominational church member, this researcher was aware of the Baptist protocol and was familiar with the use of social media in the church. She understood how social media works and the procedure that entailed getting it started in ministry. Furthermore, this researcher was the social media director for the Lead Empowerment Ministry at her former Baptist church for four years.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration must be exercised when conducting research, mainly when dealing with humans. “Protecting human subjects through applying appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study” (Arifin, 2018, p.30). A qualitative study has a particular resonance due to its in-depth nature and the nature of the study process. In a qualitative study, “The concern of ethical issues becomes more salient when conducting a face-to-face interview with a vulnerable group of participants. They may potentially become stressed “while expressing their feelings during the interview session” (Arifin, 2018, p.30). Another consideration is consent. It was essential to follow ethical principles. Before obtaining their agreement, the researcher informed them of their rights as research study participants. To enable the removal of any reconsidered material provided in response to the research questions and any extra reviewed information that the participant may not want to divulge for research reasons, the researcher gave the participants access to the interview transcript. The goal was to put the interests of the participants at the forefront of the research project, not to hurt them. According to Arifin (2018),

the following procedures must be taken in order to get permission: (1) consent should be freely given (voluntary), individuals should comprehend what is being sought of them, and parties involved must be competent to consent. (2) As a result, participants must be fully informed about the study, comprehend the information, and have the option to accept or decline the invitation to participate. (3) The participants' consent to take part in the study was only obtained after they had received a thorough explanation of the research procedure.

All materials of the participants were kept confidential. The gathered data was protected via coding. The numbers one through twelve and the letters A through L were used to allocate numbers to the participants. To prevent the participants from being identifiable, the answers to the research questions given by participants were assigned numbers and letters. Additionally, the researcher got exclusive access to the password-protected database containing the interviews gathered throughout the research project. Before data analysis and recording, the participant had the opportunity to leave the research study at any time during the data-gathering phase. Before and after the interview, the researcher fully disclosed the study to each participant.

Before research could start, the IRB at Liberty University had to give the researcher approval to begin the research process.

Data Collection Methods and Instrument

The purpose and use of phenomenological research were selected to highlight the peculiar, to determine the phenomena over how the characters in a position discern them. Focusing on a single phenomenon allowed the researcher to limit the study to a singular concept to be implied and examined (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) noted that this spotlight channel does not transmit disclosed variables that are two or more or compared to two or more groups, as does quantitative research design (Creswell, 2018). However, what it does instead accelerates it

to a singular phenomenon, admitting that the study may derive toward an analysis of links or an analogy among opinions (Creswell, 2018). As a result, the researcher established a phenomenon of a human experience.

This selected phenomenological approach aimed not to test the “hypothesis” but to examine and describe “the lived experiences.” This researcher conducted the interviews to convey an “experiential” perception of the impact of Southern Baptist churches that do not have a presence on social media and the effect on sharing the Gospel.

Similarities and differences exist in other qualitative research methodologies compared to the phenomenological data collection methods and instruments. For similarities, the phenomenological approach relied on the interview process for data collection, similar to work in grounded theory, case studies, and ethnography (Leedy & Omrod, 2016).

Collection Methods

In the phenomenological research study, it is challenging for the researcher not to become a part of the interview experience process. Therefore, this researcher collected the data by engaging in the phenomenological practice of “epoche or bracketing,” as Moustakas (1994) described. Epoche, or bracketing, is the process of blocking all biases and assumptions so that the researcher can explain the phenomenon to establish meaning. This is a familiar predilection. The researcher must assume before beginning the phenomenological study. In bracketing, the researcher lays aside the presumption, prejudice, and biases to fully engage the interviewees in the data collection process. Therefore, this researcher did not try to sway the interview to fit her preconceived notion but followed all rules, including where the interviewees wished to conduct the semi-structured interview. Additionally, this was done through bracketing or epoche. This concept allowed this researcher to have the freedom to research and understand the interviewees.

The study was conducted in two steps: the preliminary step and the solid step. For clarification, the first part before the interview was the initial questionnaire emailed to the potential participants. The emails consisted of the consent form and the initial study questions. When the results were received, based on the results, eleven churches were selected to participate in step two of the research. The screening survey questions covered whether the participants wanted to participate in the Zoom interview. The screening survey also asked the demographic (Atlanta Metropolitan area) and size (50 or more active members), whether there is a social media ministry, and whether they are available to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Step two consisted of eleven churches with twelve participants (four pastors and eight social media directors). The interview was conducted using Zoom software and followed a guide (consent form/ recorded audio and video) and a script (interview questions). This interview collected the details of the “experience” by identifying the phenomenon, and the examiner (researcher) compiled the data from the individuals who participated in the same phenomenon. The examiner establishes a complex confession of the aspect of the background for all of the entities. This description consisted of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 83; Moustakas, 1994). As Creswell and Poth (2016) stated, evidence was gathered from the participants who witnessed the phenomenon.

Data collection in phenomenological studies dwells on extensive, exhausting multiple interviews with the individuals. Creswell (2018) recommended that the “narrative includes one or two individuals and that the phenomenology involves a range of 3–10” (p.186). Data collections such as observations and recommended journals were used to write the data. Therefore, the interview was taped using audio and video using Zoom software and another recording device, and the response was written down and transcribed as well (Creswell & Poth,

2016). This researcher asked the interviewees all open-ended questions, semi-structured. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggested asking questions such as “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” (p.81). Creswell (2004) argued, “Open-ended questions allow the participants to freely voice their experiences and minimize the influence of the researcher's attitudes and previous findings” (p.205). Nohl (2009) stated that “The semi-structured design gives the participants ample time and scope to express their diverse views and allows the researcher to react to and follow up on emerging ideas and unfolding events” (p.45). Therefore, open-ended questions were asked. The questions were catered to targeting the scrutiny on collecting the data information that leads to balancing and structuralizing the definition of the phenomenon. This led to a better understanding of the similar occurrence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The data collection involved a particular step for the researcher to follow. For example, this researcher used the data collection steps that were comprised of the boundaries of the sites that involved the study through inspecting and drafting gathering data through “unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials; as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p.194). A follow-up email was not sent since the data gathered did not need further clarification; therefore, a second interview was not required.

Instrument and Protocols

This phenomenological study used three key instruments: the screening questionnaire, the interview questions, and the content analysis (church websites and social media content). The interview was the protocol described in Creswell and Creswell (2017). Creswell and Creswell (2017) used a standardization protocol during the interview process. They suggested starting the

interview by greeting the participant, followed by asking the research questions and closing the process with a thank you. This interview protocol was a face-to-face online interview using Zoom software and asking open-ended questions, semi-structured.

Interviews

In the interview, reliability, and validity were used in the phenomenological method. The “consistency and trustworthiness” of the research is the reliability (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 281). Golafshani cited Patton (2001), stating that “validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study” (p.601). In other words, validity is the “truth, correctness, and strength of a statement” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 282-283). During the “design phase” of the interview process, validity was partially established, which integrated aid for the participant, as noted by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015).

There were twelve questions, including nine sub-questions and three main research questions. These were used consistently in all the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The questions were prepared in advance, and the participants saw the number of questions the researcher would ask in advance. The interview protocol had multiple vital parts. They consisted of fundamental questions such as an introduction and interview content with probes followed by closing instructions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Reliability, validity, consistency, and trustworthiness of the interview and data were stressed vocally throughout the interview protocol process. A greeting, an ice-breaker question, asking the questions, and finally, thanking the participants were all part of the interview protocol. Creswell and Creswell (2017) mentioned these steps for the interview: (1) Ask basic information to the interviewee; (2) Introduction; (3) Opening question; (4) Content questions; (5) Using probes; (6) And closing instructions.

Research Process

The research was a key instrument during the observation process. Three prompts were investigated. The process began by locating the church websites and identifying which social platforms were utilized according to the websites by opening and clicking different links to observe which social media platforms were being used, if any. The second was to do an in-depth search of search websites and identify how the gospel is being shared online. The third prompt confirmed whether what participants said during the interview was validated by observing their websites and social media platforms.

Procedures

This researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with participants using Zoom with eleven churches, interviewing four pastors and eight social media directors until saturation was achieved. The consultation involved open-ended questions and was semi-structured. The three research questions were subdivided into nine questions in the interview questions. The interview used audio and video recording using the Zoom software, and the second audio device also recorded the interview. Additionally, the discussion was hand recorded as a safeguard. This researcher drew on multiple sources, such as a second interview; however, a second one was not necessary since clarification and adequate interpretation of the data analysis were established. The information gathered from the interview was sufficient. The participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The computer was password protected, and audiotaped recorders were uploaded and safeguarded on the researcher's computer. The rationale behind this study was to use the interview process to receive various participants' perceptions to understand better social media usage in Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The initial study started with sampling questions asking originally 10 to 15 churches. Instead, 250

Participant Recruitment Letters with the screening survey link (sampling questions) were emailed.

The purposely selected process helped the researcher decide on qualified participants for the study. The Participant Recruitment Letter and a link to the survey were sent out via email. Of the 250 letters sent, twenty-one potential participants completed the survey, and twelve followed through with the process. Four pastors and eight social media directors were interviewed using the Zoom platform. The questions were open-ended, semi-structured, using open codes and pseudonyms for names to protect the privacy of the participants. The interview was conducted via Zoom software and was transcribed using online web-based software.

Leedy and Ormrod (2018) argued, “The telephone interview is an interview conducted using Skype (skype.com) or other video-conferencing software. Such a strategy can be helpful when face-to-face contact is desired with participants in distant locations” (p.153). The open-ended interview questions were collected to understand and explain the setting in relationships with the participants. The use of a qualitative phenomenological design examines the possible relationship between leadership’s development model of social media and its use in their churches. Therefore, the open-ended interview questions were designed to explore the theological perspectives of leaders on social media use in ministry, as well as (1) the role social media currently plays in the church’s ministry; (2) the positive and negative perceptions towards the use of social media in the church’s ministry; (3) the reasons for and against employing social media in the church’s ministry; (4) the future strategy for developing a social media presence as a church; (5) the perceived results of deploying social media in the church’s ministry; (6) the direct and indirect consequences of using social media in ministry; and (7) the resources dedicated to the use of social media by these churches were all examined.

IRB Approval Process

IRB approval had to be established before fieldwork could occur. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board approved the process. There were several steps that were involved, which are described in the Liberty University Institutional Review Board Handbook. There are about 15 to 16 steps that need to be completed. For example, this researcher application required her to submit information such as but not limited to 1) basic protocol information; 2) study materials and considerations; 3) purpose; 4) participant inclusion/exclusion; 5) recruitment, 6) research procedures; 7) data analysis and methods; 8) parental/guardian consent, 9) permission from children; 10) process of obtaining informed consent; 11) use of deception; 12) waiver of consent elements; 13) waiver of signed consent; 14) privacy and confidentiality; 15) participant compensation, and 16) risks and benefits (Application Instructions, 2021). Transparency with the IRB Liberty Board was essential. Liberty University's Institutional Review Board and dissertation committee following CLED programmatic policy were also necessary. The Consent Form was included in the Appendixes and other forms and documents received from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved a procedure. The procedure involved focusing, gathering, collecting, and reporting the information obtained from the participants, and the information gathered was based on the results as themes. The collected data was analyzed, and the statements gathered were reduced significantly to fit into the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Subsequently, this researcher established a balanced explanation of the actions of the participants “(what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced them in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the

textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.60). Moreover, this researcher regulated whether the research dilemma could be studied using a phenomenological approach.

The data analysis procedures were different from quantitative ones. In quantitative, the researcher collects and analyzes the information before writing the report. However, in qualitative, the researcher writes the report during the interview with collected data. Another procedure involved in the data analysis is “winnowing the data.” “Winnow” the data is when the researcher focuses on some of the information while neglecting other parts of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This action is distinctive from quantitative research, where the study tries hard to preserve all data. Using this process in qualitative, the researcher aggregates the data into a smaller number of themes, and sometimes the researcher can have anywhere from five to seven themes.

Analysis Methods

The qualitative data analysis required multiple sequential steps. The first step was preparing the data for analysis. In the interview process, this means deciphering the interviews, rewriting and typing notes, and sorting and arranging the data in different themes or types. This researcher transcribed the audiotaped interviews and the handwritten notes using web-based software. The online web-based software was used to enter information. The second step was reading through the data and making sense of the collected information and overall meaning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018).

The interview's gathered data was sorted into electronic documents (web-based) and posted on the researcher's desktop on different label e-folders. The third step was coding. The interview data was categorized, and a data coding process was utilized. The information

collected was searched for similar themes and was placed accordingly. Instead of employing a code or codes immediately, this researcher opted for the open-coding process, which is operating a deductive method to the data analysis, refraining from identifying any codes from the beginning, and exercising an open-minded policy to refrain from bias. The open-minded mindset allowed the principles to emerge. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) argued, “In qualitative data analysis, an inductive approach that entails reviewing collected data line by line to identify codes, rather than prescribing coding categories in advance” (p.346).

Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted that coding is refining data organization through “bracketing chunks” and writing words to represent a category in the margins. In other words, “It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often based on the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term)” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p.194). Step four used coding to generate a depiction and argument for the settings, people, places, and events. Themes can be analyzed for individual cases or descriptions within the phenomenology (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Step five was the description and articles. This step emphasized how the themes and descriptions were represented in the narrative. Narrative passages were used to convey the findings of the analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2017) mentioned eight steps that are usually used when forming the codes. Furthermore, these codes fall under three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and unusual codes.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the standard was trustworthiness. “Trustworthiness or truth value of qualitative research and transparency of the conduct of the study is crucial to the usefulness and integrity of the findings” (Cope, 2014; Connelly, 2016, para.1). In other words,

trustworthiness is the degree of confidence in the collected data, interpretation, and methods used to protect the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). This researcher's study used the qualitative trustworthiness standard to ensure that the data collected from the participants interviewed were interpreted correctly using proper themes and methods to ensure the study's quality was excellent. Therefore, the strategies this researcher applied to employ and enhance the findings' trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

The credibility boosts the confidence of the research data. Additionally, according to Connelly (2016), “Credibility of the study, or the confidence in the truth of the study and therefore the findings, is the most important criterion” (para.4). This researcher used triangulation method to increase the confidence of the study. The triangulation exposed the exclusive findings, required theories, and better understood the circumstances. It conceived an approaching way of understanding the phenomenon.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the security of the data over time and the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). Connelly suggested that “procedures for dependability include maintenance of an audit trail of process logs and peer-debriefings with a colleague. According to Connelly (2016), “Process logs are researcher notes of all activities that happen during the study and decisions” regarding the conditions of the study, similar to “whom to interview and what to observe” (Connelly, 2016, para.5). Therefore, this researcher was consistent with the design methodology and used a method for achieving dependability by administering the editor with a clear audited log/route.

Confirmability

Confirmability is making sure the findings are consistent and can be repeated. For example, “Qualitative researchers keep detailed notes of all their decisions and their analysis as it progresses” (Connelly, 2016, para.7). Others reviewed the notes to ensure they were consistent with the audiotaped information. The data was discussed with the supervisor in debriefing sessions to prevent biases and to avoid recording this researcher's perspective on the research.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how useful the findings are to people in other frameworks, and other people determine how the results apply to different situations (Connelly, 2016). Transferability in qualitative researchers “focus on the informants and their story without saying this is everyone's story” (Connelly, 2016, para.7). Therefore, this researcher backed the study transferability with a bountiful plan narrative situation, area, and participants, and was translucent regarding the investigation and adherence. This research gave future readers a transparent, detailed account with educated and profound information.

Chapter Summary

Phenomenological research has a strong implications. Creswell (2018) stated that “this design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews” (p.13). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to understand the nature of social media in these churches by collecting qualitative data using the interview (open-ended questions) process. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

The phenomenological study was selected for this dissertation because, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2018), “the term phenomenology refers to a person’s perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the individual. This study attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p.233). Therefore, the qualitative phenomenological study was appropriate for this study.

This study first collected data in a qualitative form using the interview methodology regarding reasons for social media usage in Southern Baptist churches, and its implication for church growth and sharing the gospel was examined. The data was then analyzed to determine the relationship. Furthermore, the qualitative phenomenological interview methodology was used to collect data to determine the relationship that exists, if any, between social media usage and sharing the gospel.

The interview was conducted via video conferencing software. The denomination was Southern Baptist, part of the Southern Baptist Convention. The interviews consisted of pastors or leaders in charge of social media ministry or leaders who are the decision-maker regarding social media presence in their churches. They were eleven Southern Baptist churches that were involved in the study. Three research questions were divided into nine questions, each with twelve open-ended qualitative interview questions. The purposeful sample was used to select the participants that fit the study criteria. This study's target was Southern Baptist churches with a social media presence in the Metropolitan Greater Atlanta. This research used a semi-structured in-depth interview. A total of twelve participants were involved in the study, four Southern Baptist pastors and eight Southern Baptist social media directors. A consent and information email were sent explaining the research, and once the participants filled out the survey and met

all requirements, an official invitation email was sent out. In the email, participants were asked to select a time and date for the interview. A copy of the consent form was also attached to the email. The participants who accepted the invitation and scheduled an interview were asked to sign the consent form and email it back before the interview.

The open-ended interview questions were collected to understand and explain the study in relationships with the participants. Moreover, this method was selected because in phenomenological. The researchers “depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviewswith a small, carefully selected sample of participants...” (Creswell, 2018, p.233). Creswell (2018) recommended that the “narrative includes one or two individuals and that the phenomenology involves a range of 3–10” (p.186). In phenomenological design, the research preferred a nearly small number of members' experiences to evaluate for emulating connotation and background (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher used the qualitative phenomenological study. These sample techniques collect participant meanings; focus on a single concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

The sample type was purposive sampling, “that is, it entails choosing those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p.242). The data were separated according to themes, studied for similarities reflecting similar themes, and divided by categories that stood out. Then, the data collected was further examined for accuracy.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenology study aimed to investigate social media usage according to leaders from Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. The research questions centered on issues such as, "What kinds of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders employing in their ministry to communicate the Gospel?" and "How do Southern Baptist congregations in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area deliver the Gospel on a social media platform?" and "What does the Southern Baptist leader think about the efficacy of social media in spreading the gospel?" The four sections of chapter four—Compilation Protocol and Measures; Demographic and Sample Data; Data Analysis and Findings; and Evaluation of the Research Design—cover the compilation protocol and measures, the analysis of the research findings, and their analysis in general. Some of the four sections have subsections to delve deeper into that specific area. The objective of this section was to analyze the results and provide evidence for the study's validity.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The participants of this study were the senior pastors and social media directors in the Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. The pastors had to be 18 years or older. Their churches had to be Southern Baptist or an affiliate. The individual participants were pastors or social media directors. This qualitative phenomenology study aimed to understand social media usage in sharing the gospel in Southern Baptist churches. The qualitative data were collected using the interview (open-ended questions) process. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore why there is a strong presence of social media in these Southern Baptist churches. The participants were leaders who were decision-makers in media

use in their churches. This study looked at eleven Southern Baptist churches in the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan area with 50 or more active members, and data was collected and analyzed.

A purposeful sampling technique was used for this study. This study examined four Southern Baptist pastors and eight Southern Baptist social media directors. They were leaders in charge of social media content in their churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The content analysis of the church's websites and social media platforms was observed, and information and findings were recorded. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording were used to record the interview. A semi-structured, open interview was conducted with each participant to examine social media use in their respective churches.

After receiving approval from Liberty University's IRB, the Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) and the screening survey question link (Appendix E) were emailed to 250 participants introducing the study. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) online database provided a list of churches affiliated for the researcher to contact. A list of churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area was contacted via email. A total of 250 Participant Recruitment Letters were emailed, followed up emails were sent out more than once asking these participants to participate. The 250 participants' letters were sent to eleven churches and twelve participants. The participant that responded by filling out the survey and meeting the study criteria were contacted via email with an official invitation. The participants that responded to the official invitation were asked to schedule an interview with a time and date; for the ones that responded to the official invitation and scheduled the time and date for the interview, a Consent Form was sent (Appendix D) along with the interview questions (Appendix F) via email. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email.

When the official invitation email was sent participants were required to respond to the email, and they were also required to sign the consent form and email it back before the day of the interview. The consent form (Appendix D) and the interview questions (Appendix F) were sent via email once the participant accepted the online interview invitation. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording were used to record the interview. The interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and after the interview, the data was transcribed using Microsoft Word online.

The participants' church websites and social media platforms were observed and compared with the interview results. Each participant's church website was scrutinized and analyzed to see how the gospel is shared online and which social media platforms are used more than others. The observation from the social media platforms and church websites answered research questions one and two. There, it is proven that these participants used these platforms in several ways to share the gospel online.

Demographic and Sample Data

The participant overview chart is based on the results of the survey. Based on the study, all twelve participants had a church with a size of 50 or more members. All participants were from the Southern Baptist Convention, and they were all 18 years or older. They were leaders in their churches. All participant's churches were located in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. They all used social media for ministry purposes.

The overview shown below showed which participant was from the same church. Only participants E5 and F6 were from the same church, E. All the other participants were from different churches. The chart also displayed what role each participant plays in ministry.

Table 1: Participant Overview

Participant	Church	Role
A1	A	Senior Pastor
B2	B	Senior Pastor
C3	C	Social Media Director
D4	D	Social Media Director
E5	E	Senior Pastor
F6	E	Social Media Director
G7	G	Social Media Director
H8	H	Social Media Director
I9	I	Senior Pastor
J10	J	Social Media Director
K11	K	Social Media Director
L12	L	Social Media Director

The lived experience of twelve church leaders selecting how to use social media in their congregations was collected and recorded. Each pastor and social media director had firsthand knowledge of how to use social media in their churches. All participants used social media to spread the gospel in their churches. Facebook, Instagram, and live streaming were all popular among these leaders, and they used them to spread the gospel. Each participant was given a pseudonym for privacy and secrecy and to prevent presumptive conclusions such as social or cultural. Once participants completed the survey and met the criteria, they were contacted, and

the interview was scheduled immediately. All participants signed a consent form and had access to the interview questions before the scheduled interview.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data were collected from twelve participants, four senior pastors, and eight social media directors regarding the use of social media in their churches to share the gospel. Each of these participants had a lived experience regarding using social media in their churches to share the gospel. All participants were eligible based on the study criteria. Interviews were scheduled for 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted online using the Zoom platform. After the first seven interviews, the answers became mundane and predictable.

Getting the number of participants needed to complete the study was challenging. Many Participant Recruitment Letters were sent out via email, approximately 250 letters. Of the 250 letters, twenty-one people filled out the screening survey, and seventeen were qualified, but only twelve responded and followed through the entire process. The participants were contacted repeatedly. A lot of emails were sent. Participants who were eligible to participate in the study received some emails two or more times. Some people reacted and continued, while others did not. Two hundred and fifty copies of the Participant Recruitment Letters were distributed. Many emails were sent out more than once to establish a response from the participants. Although 250 letters were emailed, twenty-one people filled out the screening survey, seventeen qualified, and twelve followed up and scheduled an interview. As stated, multiple emails were sent to the eligible participants, but only twelve followed up and kept their appointments. The other nine did not respond even though several emails were sent to them.

The recording was done with the participants' consent, who were aware of it. The voice recorder on another recording device and the Zoom platform software were both used to record

the interview. The information was immediately sent to web-based internet software after transcribing the interviews. The discussion about how social media is utilized in churches to spread the gospel and participant experiences with it was much anticipated. They responded to each study question in great detail. The interviews lasted an average of 30 to 40 minutes, except for two or three that were shorter—about 15-20 minutes. The interviews with the pastors were lengthier and more in-depth than the ones with the social media directors.

In order to absorb and categorize a shift in the study, there was a search for channels by creating subjects to draw from participant interviews. The themes were picked based on participant comments that were captured during the interview and transcribed from it. The themes are actual words that have been analyzed and interpreted for clarity. Groups were created in accordance with the topics that emerged. Groups defined professional experiences based on assumptions, tones, words, and strong responses. We collected the participants' feedback. The inductive and deductive processes were used for the data analysis and interpretation of the data collection. The inductive approach involves going back and forth between data comparisons until a common theme is identified. Deductive reasoning was used to decide whether further data needed to be investigated. The utilization of key concepts based on ideas and themes. The hand coding made it simpler to determine how to classify the concepts and topics into related categories. Key concepts were used to categorize the data into themes.

Table 2: Expansion of Themes

Key Concepts	Themes
Social media as a communication tool	Share church info with others Spread gospel locally and internationally Makes others aware of church events
Social media platforms	Facebook Instagram; YouTube Tik Tok; Livestream Twitter; LinkedIn
Social media and sharing gospel	Economical Easy to use and increase viewership Many can watch and rewatch worldwide
Social media and discipleship	Make and establish relationships with others Maintain, grow, and increase relationship with Jesus Christ
Social media and challenges	Relationship not personal not face to face
Social media and benefits	Worldwide and can increase viewership Real-time and share gospel faster

The themes and key concepts are listed in table 1 above. Table 2 shows the themes and descriptions of the lived experience of using social media to share the gospel in Southern Baptist churches.

Table 3: Themes and Descriptions

Theme	Description
Social media as a communication tool	Pastors and social media directors use social media as a tool to share the gospel.
Social media platforms	Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are widely used among Pastors and social media directors
Social media and sharing gospel	Social media is used widely among both groups to share the gospel.
Social media and discipleship	Social media makes it possible for discipleship to occur when it is challenging.
Social media and challenges	The challenge of social media is establishing a personal relationship.
Social media and benefits	The benefit of social media is that it is in real-time, and church information and services can be viewed worldwide

Research Questions Regarding the Use of Social Media

The first research question centered on this subject in order to learn more about how social media is used in Southern Baptist churches as a communication tool for sharing the gospel. The twelve interviewed mentioned using Facebook to share the word about Jesus. All of them had a Facebook page and/or many groups, whether it was a page for a Bible study group or a page for a youth group. Many people have a Livestream or broadcast service on their church website, a YouTube channel, an Instagram account, and an Instagram account. Some participants also interact and spread the word by using Tik Tok, LinkedIn, Vimeo, and podcasting. Few participants claimed that they only used Twitter to point people to their main church websites or their most popular social media platforms instead of interacting with or sharing the Gospel with their followers. Vimeo, which is used as a platform for sharing videos, is where videos are stored. The answers to the research questions are listed below.

Research Question 1

RQ1. What type of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area using in their ministry to share the Gospel?

The first Research Questions sought to address types of social media platforms used by leaders in the Southern Baptist Churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area that were interviewed and how these platforms are being utilized in ministry to share the gospel.

Table 4: RQ 1 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Facebook (communication)	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Instagram	11	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
YouTube Channel	8	A1, C3, D4, G7, H8, I9, K11, L12

Twitter	8	A1, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Livestream/Church Website	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Text/ Direct Messages	4	A1, B2, E5, F6
Tik-Tok	1	D4
Vimeo	2	K11, L12
LinkedIn	1	D4

Participant A1: We do use social media to get the gospel. The way we do it at our church is we use Twitter. We also use Facebook quite a bit.

Participant B2: Well, first, we do have a website. On the website, we do have a tab with the gospel written out, and then if someone is reading it, they have a way to respond, either through our contact or a text number. They can text the word Jesus and then when they do, I'll receive that, and I can then connect with them through text messaging. That's one opportunity. The other would be Facebook, so our church uses and has a church Facebook page, and then we also have a separate page for our youth group, so there's a youth Facebook page.

Participant C3: We do have a YouTube channel that we use where we stream all of our Sunday services. We also do a prayer service once a month. Also, some of our Wednesday night classes choose to stream as well. So it's individually. We have Facebook and Instagram.

Participant D4: Facebook, I would say it is primary, followed very closely by Instagram, then YouTube. We have a Twitter acct, LinkedIn, leadership materials, and Tik Tok.

Participant K11: We use YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Also, we use Vimeo. We use Vimeo more as a sharing platform than we do its own. We usually use it as a place to house our videos and then share links from there.

Social Media Platform Popularity

In response to research question RQ1-1, which asked which social media platform leaders preferred for spreading the gospel online, most participants said that Facebook was their top choice, followed by Instagram and YouTube. Some also mentioned using text messaging to continue interacting with and retaining members during church services and their church

website, which they use to live stream. Some of the participants have a church app. Those who utilize multiple platforms and cannot choose which is more practical than the others find it challenging to discern which is popular. The top four social media sites are shown below; all twelve participants used them in some capacity.

Research Question 1-1

Do you use any social media platform more than others in sharing the Gospel online?

Table 5: RQ 1-1 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Facebook	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Twitter	7	A1, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11,
YouTube	10	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, K11, L12
Instagram	11	B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12

Participant A1: Facebook is probably our primary means because it reaches a larger audience, and on my Twitter account, I have somewhere around 3500 to 4000 followers on Twitter. So, on a larger scale, we use Facebook. On my Twitter account, I put a bunch of quotes up.

Participant B2: I use Facebook and Instagram, personally. I have a personal account, as you know, just myself as an individual. I'll often use that mainly, but I'll frequently use it to communicate things that are happening in the church. The website is there. The gospel is there all the time. I looked at it the other day, and we average about 300 visits per month on the website. Also, on the Facebook page, we outline the gospel. In June, there were 491 visits to the website. We are a small church of about 100 people.

Participant C3: We use Facebook a little more because of our demographics. We have an older group. So, they tend to like Facebook better, especially streaming-wise. For our younger groups, like our students, it's Instagram. That's how we communicate with them.

Participant I9: We use Facebook. We do this by telling stories. YouTube would be the other one.

Capacity and Social Media Platforms

Pastors and social media directors use many social media platforms with varying capacities, but many of the techniques they employ are similar. For instance, participants share Bible verses on Twitter to engage followers and start stimulating discussions. In all twelve churches, Facebook is used to live stream services. Sunday services are broadcast live on the church websites. Live streaming is done on YouTube as well. A few individuals mentioned that they "show and tell" on social media, some for spiritual truth and others for the spread of the Gospel. Some participants utilize social media to disciple, interact with members, and motivate others online; At the same time, some use it to exchange sermon videos, and others use it to promote community/church events. Others use it to promote special deals, awareness-raising initiatives, regular events, and sermon series.

Research Questions 1-2

In what capacity do you use these social media platforms?

Table 6: RQ 1-2 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Livestream	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Bible Quotes	9	A1, D4, E5, F6, G7, I9, J10, K11, L12
Bible Study	10	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, I9, J10, K11, L12
Church Events	10	A1, B2, C3, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Youth Groups	9	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, I9, J10, K11, L12
Short Reels	9	D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Encouragement	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Devotional/Podcast	4	D4, G7, H8, I9,

Sermons	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Discipleship	5	E5, F6, G7, H8, I9

Participant A1: we use Facebook. We live stream. I always give an invitation to the Livestream. I provide an unambiguous gospel invitation as I'm winding up our service.

Participant B2: For Sunday morning sermons, we use Facebook live. We post the video on Facebook. We live to stream it at the time, but then it remains, so days later, you can go back and still look at that.

Participant C3: We use it to tell any events that we're doing. We are also streaming through it—just information about what we're doing for the coming week or any upcoming events.

Participant D4: We use Facebook to share the Gospel. Instagram is more visual, so we post short videos (reels) and story posts. We spend the vast majority of our time there on Twitter. Twitter is more of a leadership context and audience on that platform. We post quotes from our sermon on Sunday, along with events such as the leadership luncheon. On TikTok, we post fun videos, and on LinkedIn, we share our leadership podcasts.

Sharing Gospel on Social Media

The next question was how pastors and social media managers spread the gospel on social media. Live streaming services like Facebook are often used. On their church websites, several members simultaneously used Facebook Live and Livestream. For their followers to read, one participant tweeted their favorite verse. Facebook, which is preferred by older demographics, is preferred above Instagram by young people, who prefer Instagram. All participants recorded services and other church activities, such as Bible studies, for later viewing, and the majority posted them to their church's YouTube page or website. The majority of the participants said that they liked Facebook and used it frequently to spread the gospel. The top four social media sites are shown below; all twelve participants used them in some capacity.

Research Questions 2

RQ2. How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the Gospel on a social media platform?

The second Research Question sought to address ways the gospel is shared on different social media platforms in Southern Baptist Churches by the leaders that were interviewed. The responses confirmed what participants had noted in their surveys or provided additional platforms their churches used. Based on the participant's responses, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were the four most popular platforms.

Table 7: RQ 2 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Twitter	7	A1, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11,
Facebook	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
YouTube	10	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, K11, L12
Instagram	11	B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12

Participant A1: When you're on the platform, you're communicating to a broad scope; therefore, you come across a little different, so what I do is I put that stuff on Twitter so they can see another side of me. A more personal side sometimes helps them to get beyond what they see in the pulpit.

Participant B2: The Facebook page is just a written format and is available to be read, but we provide a means for a response.

Participant C3: We use YouTube to get our services weekly. We let them know what's coming up. We tell them about Jesus. Other than streaming any event, sometimes we will stream our student service if it's the Sunday service. But how I would say we spread the gospel.

Participant G7: We utilize Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. It is like our front door almost to say, go follow us here and let's connect you to some next steps, or connect you to a message or a podcast that maybe answers a question like, "you're wondering, is heaven real?" "How do I get to heaven?" "Who is Jesus, you know?"

Some Ways Share Gospel on Different Social Media Platforms

Participants use a range of social media platforms to promote the gospel. On the church account, some participants tweet inquiries, quotes, and Bible verses that are linked to the gospel to spark a conversation. Many participants tweet links to their church's social media platform

page on Twitter to direct users there. Other participants share the gospel on various social media platforms using Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo, YouTube, and live streaming services. A large number of members share the gospel on the church website, Facebook pages, and occasionally through Text in Church. Other members also share sermon videos. Some others use TikTok, LinkedIn, and podcasts to spread the word about Christ. The top four with the most responses are listed below. Below are the top four with the most responses.

Research Question 2-1

What are some of the ways you share the Gospel on different social media platforms?

Table 8: RQ 2-1 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Twitter	7	A1, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11,
Facebook	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
YouTube	10	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, K11, L12
Instagram	11	B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12

Participant A1: We use Twitter, the church website for live streaming, and Facebook. On our website, there's a place that talks about salvation. What is salvation? The scripture, that's there. It even has a sinner's prayer that they can pray, and it's got a place where they respond to us. We also have a section where we talk about the importance of baptism.

Participant B2: Facebook, Text in Church, and church website. Also, the written Word (the gospel) is found throughout the website. They could read, test, email responses, or watch the sermon's video.

Participant C3: Facebook, primarily for older people, streaming service on our church website, Instagram for youth, and our YouTube Channel.

Participant D4: we shared the gospel on YouTube and Facebook. We do live stream our Sunday morning worship services. We present not only a biblical worldview in our message every week, but the pastor and our production team put together intentional service relevant to our world and culture. We also present who Jesus Christ is.

Participant I9: We post a video testimony of someone, and it gets shared, but also we bring in keynote speakers. One keynote speaker had almost a million views. We highlighted moments like this which get pushed by our marketing team.

Social Platform Used

These social media platforms are primarily used to share the gospel. The tweets are to encourage the participant's followers. Facebook is used to share the gospel and to stream live services. Text In the church is used for giving, salvation, and sharing the gospel and church events. Instagram is used for youth students and streams youth services. It is also used to share Scriptures, Bible study, and prayer.

Research Questions 2-2

How do you use these social media platforms?

Table 9: RQ 2-2 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Livestreaming	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Salvation	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Baptism	4	A1, G7, I9, K11
Words of Encouragement	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Events	10	A1, B2, C3, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Sermons	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Facebook Groups	8	C3, D4, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Instagram Groups	10	A1, C3, D4, E5, F6, I9, J10, K11, L12
Devotional/Podcasts	4	D4, G7, H8, I9
Discipleship	5	E5, F6, G7, H8, I9

Participant A1: Live streaming on our website, we use for salvation, and baptism, to share the gospel, encourage others, and post-Bible verses post videos on Facebook.

Participant B2: Stream live services, Website- salvation, encourage, to share Scriptures, post weekly videos.

Participant C3: stream live services, encourage post-church events, prayer, and post-Bible verses, share the gospel, and post weekly videos.

Participant L12: Posting and commenting, you know, and live streaming. Sermonette, reels on Instagram, devotional content, ministry events.

Participant K11: We post our volunteers, what they are doing, and how they are involved in the church. We share church events with pictures of people having fun and communicating. We share testimonies and life-changing stories on our social media platforms. We just want to be authentic and share what God is simply doing in our life.

How Ministry Use Social Media for Discipleship

Many participants mentioned that they advertise events on social media and their website to attract people so they may disciple them. Other participants use social media and the Zoom tool to meet with other leaders to help spiritually. They assemble, pray, and discuss issues affecting their churches and personal lives. Each one supports the other. In contrast, others utilize the church website and social media to post sermons and discuss salvation, baptism, and for spiritual growth and development. They share their weekly sermons on their websites, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Many promote discipleship courses on the church website and social media platforms.

Research Questions 2-3

Explain how your ministry uses social media for discipleship.

Table 10: RQ 2-3 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Livestream	3	A1, B2, C3
Events	1	C3
Life Group	1	A1
Classes	2	A1, B2
Online Bible Study	2	A1, B2

Participant A1: The pandemic has driven a lot of this. When everything shut down back in 2020, you were suddenly trying to figure out that we're going to be out for a while, so how in the world do we keep people connected? You know, that's where live stream became dominant. We call Sunday school life groups. We made it available that our life group teachers would go online just like we're doing now, and they would teach their Sunday school life group lessons. During our discipleship, we did the same thing. We utilized Wednesday nights as our discipleship night so those who taught certain classes, like grief, share. We kept them all engaged, seeing one another face to face and conversing with one another, so the pandemic has gotten a little behind us. But as far as discipleship, we still make it available, no matter what we teach in the church. We give our people access to live stream through zoom through different things like that, and another thing we do is that my son will take quotes out of my sermon on Sunday, and he'll put those up on our church's Facebook on our churches. The website and our churches, Twitter account, or whatever, so that it's just a caption of some of the critical things that I said that if it captures them.

Participant B2: when COVID had us shut down during 2020 and early 2021, we did host a few online Bible studies using zoom. We had several online ladies Bible studies using zoom online. But I personally am benefiting from a network of other pastors I connect with, so I am being disciple by some other pastors. We sharpen one another and encourage one another.

Participant C3: we tell people about the events so they can come, and we can disciple them in that way. Once they enter our building, we can have that one-on-one discipleship with them.

Participant F6: We promote discipleship courses on our website and social media platforms. We have lots of educational opportunities. On our website, they are several classes that are available for viewers to access. Our discipleship course, which we taught online, was a five-

week course and will be uploaded to our website along with course materials for anyone to access and grow spiritually.

Participant J10: Individual pastor quotes or quotes a pastor's question.

We use social media for discipleship through events like youth events. They go on different mission trips which are promoted, and mission trips are available for all age groups. We have church camps throughout the year and then age-related events. We do Bible study with an event or have a social event. So, I'm going to combine discipleship with an event because it's a component of it.

Perceptions of Leaders Using social media to Share Gospel

Social media is being used by participants to share the gospel. One participant stated it is an excellent opportunity to share faith with youngsters because they are constantly on their phones. Through social media, other participants connect with churchgoers who are still unable to attend services because of the COVID-19 pandemic, from which the world is still recuperating. Overall, everyone who took part was in support of using social media to spread the word about Christianity online. Other participants communicate through social media with churchgoers who can still not attend services because of the COVID-19 pandemic that the world is recovering. Overall, all of the participants were in favor of using social media to spread the gospel online.

Research Question 3

RQ3. What is the Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

The third Research Question sought to address perceptions that Southern Baptist Leaders interviewed have of using social media platforms to share the gospel.

Table 11: RQ 3 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Positive	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Secondary option	3	B2, J10, K11,

Expansive reach	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
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Participant A1: The positive is that we're reaching a whole segment of people out... The positive is that people can utilize it anytime during their chosen week. There's a host segment out there who works on Sunday morning. You cannot get there, so it opens an avenue for them to be still a part of what's going on in the building and access it at their convenience during the week.

Participant B2: When I think about sharing the gospel...social media is usually not my number one choice. Yes, it is the best way to convey the gospel...it is the best way to communicate with an individual because you're not living in the same town, or maybe you're across the world, then social media is awesome.

Participant C3: I see that it is a great way to reach them, especially in our youth, because they always have that phone in their hands. As I said, we have an older demographic, so it's really those that are on it, but we still have some that don't. So, I think it's a great way to reach the younger generation that is high school age and up and young adults.

Participant J10: I think it's a moving target. I think it's good for you to hit a certain population who's always on Facebook, for example, who's always on social media. I'll hit them that way, but then you'll always have to back it up with some other means of communication because you're not going to hit all your audience members, your church members. So, it's hit or miss.

Social Media and its Effectiveness

Which social media platform effectively shares the gospel online was determined by asking the following questions. Again, Facebook was the preferred platform for the majority of users, who also preferred Instagram and YouTube. According to some participants, all social media platforms have the potential and the ability to be successful because each platform targets a specific audience. As a result, several of the participants claimed that social media platforms are made to appeal to different audiences, demographics, and age groups.

Research Question 3-1

What are social media platforms effective in sharing the gospel online?

Table 12: RQ 3-1 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Facebook	10	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, H8, I9, J10, K11
Twitter	3	C3, I9, K11
Instagram	7	C3, D4, E5, F6, H8, I9, K11
YouTube	5	D4, G7, I9, K11, L12

Participant A1: The church website and Twitter and Facebook as well.

Participant B2: The weekly sermon videos through Facebook live, at least given what we're doing, are probably the most effective.

Participant C3: I would say Instagram and Facebook are the two biggest.

Participant K12: YouTube is really effective because of the platform. It is easy to access. There is not much buffering. They have a good server. Many people search for answers on YouTube, so we want to provide content where they search and respond to every comment. We get thousands of comments, and I respond to all of them every one of them.

Participant I9: Facebook has been good to us. Facebook has been the means because that's where most of our church is social media-wise. Yeah, YouTube is a little more free to access and not as picky with the controls.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Social Media Ministry

The majority of participants claimed that the relationship element is the social media ministry platform's shortcoming when it comes to online gospel sharing. The capability to instantly connect with individuals around the globe was the strength. There was a consensus that the lack of personal touch or inability to talk face-to-face was the weakness of social media ministry. Social networking can often be "too gimmicky," according to many participants. One claims that one of the flaws is the scathing remarks that individuals typed. Others complain about

the "digital exhaustion," "digital noise," and "lack of accountability" in the social media community.

Research Questions 3-2

What do you believe are the strength and weaknesses of the social media ministry platform that exist when sharing the gospel online?

Table 13: RQ 3-2 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Lacking Personal Relationships/Hard Disciples	10	B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Reach More People	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Share Gospel Across Globe	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12

Participant B2: I would probably think the strength is that you can connect with someone who could be on the other side of the globe. I think its most significant strength of it is its utility. The fact that you truly can connect and communicate with someone in a totally different city is incredible. I personally think one of the weaknesses is that it does limit the relational component. It lacks the ability to be fully relational.

Participant C3: I think that the strength is that you can reach more people, but you don't have a personal touch, which I think is important, and that's a drawback. I think because we can put it out there, but if they don't respond to it or we don't have a personal conversation with them, then I think that's the drawback. I think you still must have that one-on-one personal contact. Social media is great for getting it out there, but it takes away from how they still have to respond. I think you know you can scroll through that and say, oh hey, that's great, but unless it gets them to call the church or come, it's a drawback.

Participant G7: The strength is, I mean, it is effective, and God can use anything for good, for his good.

Participant H8: So social media opens up a whole realm of possibilities of other people that we can reach with the gospel. So, I think that's the biggest strength of it. The weakness would be the discipleship part of social media is tricky. The discipleship part is really hard online.

It is not impossible, but harder. So, the weakness would be how difficult it can be to communicate the gospel and push people toward discipleship online. Also, personal relationship is lacking. It can be built, but it takes more time to build that personal life.

Challenges of Using Social Media to Minister

The challenge is that leaders are learning the best way to fine-tune their social media usage and finding other meaningful ways to effectively communicate with people online that are using social media to listen to the gospel. They are learning to be humble regardless of how their viewership has increased. Also, they are learning how to keep people interested, plugged in, and returning to the site to grow spiritually and keep the older groups interested and interested and spiritually employed while online.

Research Questions 3-3

What are some of the challenges of using social media to minister online?

Table 14: RQ 3-3 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Effectiveness	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Keeping Viewers interested	7	A1, B2, D4, G7, I9, K11, L12
Drawbacks Older Groups	3	C3, J10, k11

Participant A1: They test drive us on social media, so we have to learn like all of the pastors, and we haven't learned how to fine-tune social media to get the gospel out to the people in our reachable area and literally had to remind ourselves we were talking to people around the world as well.

Participant B2: One of the challenges is that I need to be careful that I don't think It is effective because I have 400-plus people watching my sermon videos. It's better than nothing. I'm sure it helps, and it's good. I will keep doing it, but I can't just put all my eggs in that basket if that makes sense.

Participant C3: Probably the biggest thing is that our older group tends not to use it, so we've had to go back and do the old ways, like bulletins and stuff like that. So that can be a drawback, depending on the demographics that your church has, I think.

Participant K11: I think some challenges would be it's an ever-changing medium that you have to stay up with. You have to research and welcome others' input and creativity. You have to stay humble and be open to learning from other people who are doing it well.

Benefits of Using Social Media

Many participants stated that social media is very beneficial. Many think it is an economical and inexpensive way to share the gospel worldwide. Many participants have credited social media for their church growth.

Research Questions 3-4

What are some of the benefits of using social media to minister online?

Table 1: RQ 3-4 Response

Response	Frequency	Respondents
Great tool	12	A1, B2, C3, D4, E5, F6, G7, H8, I9, J10, K11, L12
Economical	5	A1, B2, L12, H8, G7
Reach further with Ads	4	C3, I9, E5, F6

Participant A1: It gives the gospel and our church exposure to those seeking, and I think that's the most significant benefit of it. I have people that watch from all over the world, and I've got missionaries in different parts of the world that tune into it. I got missionaries, and I got pastors who are in Russia that watch us.

Participant B2: It's an absolutely fantastic tool. We can present the Gospel online and through social media.

Participant C3: I think we can because we can, especially with Facebook and Instagram, you can do an ad, and you can reach further out than just your group of people. So that is one economical way, but it's also, you know, can be far-reaching as well.

Participant K11: There are so many. Through social media, we've been able to see life transformation. It happens through these little interactions and messages where, ultimately, we get to see people come and get baptized, join our church, or grow in their faith.

Participant G7: I think one of the benefits I see with social media is, I mean, for us, it's driven people to our church.

Content Analysis

Eleven churches participated in this study. These participants complied with all the rules and guidelines. Each of them had a website for their particular church, and some showed signs of frequent updates. The charts below show the information that was discovered. The findings were consistent with the Shannon and Weaver model and theory of transmission communication undergirding this study. The content analysis demonstrated that the participants used various social media platforms to engage a diverse audience. This occurrence supports the model and theory. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver developed the data transmission communication model “is the most commonly used communication model at the technical level and has been used extensively in other fields of study” (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p. 1). Computers and network technologies have made it possible to overcome limitations that may have been imposed in the past between time and space on communication (Al-Fedaghi, 2012). As discovered in this research, participants used various social media platforms to overcome communication limitations imposed by time and space challenges.

Shannon and Weaver’s model is a transmission model consisting of five elements: (1) an information source, which produces a message; (2) a transmitter, which encodes the message into signals; (3) a channel, to which signals are adapted for transmission; (4) a receiver, which decodes (reconstructs) the message from the signal; (5) a destination, where the message arrives (Shannon, 1948; Weaver, 1953; Shannon & Weaver, 1964). The nature of the most popular social media platforms used by the participants in this study aligns with the five elements that make up Shannon and Weaver’s model. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc., all meet the five elements of Shannon and Weaver’s model. These popular social media platforms, through

internet use of the internet, convey a message, encodes messages, are adapted for transmission, decode the message, and arrive at a destination.

This study found that Facebook was the number one used among all social media platforms to overcome any time and space limitations to communication. Facebook was one of the most popular platforms, according to participants. Facebook, including all other online platforms reported by participants, fulfills the five elements of Shannon and Weaver's model and theory. For example, Facebook (1) is an information source, (2) is a transmitter, (3) is a channel, (4) is a receiver, and (5) is a destination (Shannon, 1948; Weaver, 1953; Shannon & Weaver, 1964).

The study found, according to participants, that Facebook was geared toward adults, while Instagram was a favorite among young adults and the younger generation. Twitter was used in some churches, while others chose not to use it as much. Most churches have their own church YouTube Channel used to Livestream and store sermons and church-related video content. The church website was also used for Livestream services and church-related activities. In addition to other factors, this researcher looked at these participants' social media handles, provided at the bottom of their websites. There was also information about baptisms, scriptures, and other contact forms on these websites.

There was a contention between the model and theory noted by Shannon. According to Shannon, the primary communication issue is "reproducing at one place, exactly or approximately a message picked at another location" (Krippendorff, 2009; Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 3). This issue impacts the popular social media platforms cited in this study positively and negatively. With the live stream functionality of platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube, the issue mentioned by Shannon has a positive outcome because the message

conveyed over these platforms has a shallow risk of interference. Suppose both the sender and the receiver's technology are functioning as expected or as they should; then the message or communication sent should not have any or minimal interference. In the case of other reported popular platforms or non-live stream functionality, such as Twitter and Instagram, there are increased chances of interference with the intended message. These platforms or functionalities create opportunities in the text where the intended message may be misinterpreted for many reasons.

The church's calendar, events, promotions, salvation, and other activities were included. As described and indicated in the interview, many of them used a range of social media platforms. Some of the participants' churches were on social media platforms discovered during the observation but were not disclosed by them during the interview. One participant had profiles on all the major social media networks. After carefully reviewing the websites of each participant church, the researcher determined whether the following platforms were utilized regularly.

Observation of Websites Content

The churches' websites and social media pages of each participant were observed. The researcher compared the participants' answers during the interview with information on their church websites and social media pages. This information was used to determine consistency and relevance. The participants' websites displayed salvation, scriptures, events, activities, and links to their social media and Facebook pages. The websites also listed the relevant information regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ. All the websites had several ways that the gospel was shared directly or indirectly. Members can go to the website and watch live sermons and other events, follow links, and view present and past addresses on the websites and other social media

mediums such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Most of the churches had their own main church YouTube channels. Some of the websites had links to Vimeo, where sermons and other events and teachings, such as discipleship classes stored for viewers to watch at their own pace and convenience. Instagram pages had short reels relating to church content. All participants widely used Facebook, and it was a favorite among all. Twitter had Bible quotes, Scriptures, and the main church website links. Overall, the church websites and social media platforms shared the gospel using different tactics and cleverness.

Content Analysis Chart

The first graph displays whether the researcher observed or did not observe platform usage on the websites and whether the researcher verified or did not verify social media usage at the pertinent sites. The usage patterns and extent of participant websites that the researcher had or had not seen were depicted in the second graph.

Table 16: Content Analysis Church Website-Platforms

Platform/ Participant	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Vimeo	LinkedIn	Tik-Tok
A1	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
B2	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
C3	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
D4	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
E5	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
F6	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
G7	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
H 8	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed

I 9	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
J 10	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
K11	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed
L 12	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Not Observed

Social Media Usage Types

The process of analyzing written, vocal, or visual communication signals is known as content analysis (Cole, 1988). This study's content analysis was focused on visuals, communication, and, more explicitly, analyzing the participants' church websites. The content analysis began by searching participant church leaders' church websites. This chart addresses Research Question Two: How do Southern Baptist Churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area share the gospel on a social media platform? Streaming services, events, discipleship, Scripture quotes, podcast, promotion, and salvation were the most popular answers among the interviewees. The following chart depicts the solutions in which participants shared the gospel using social media platforms. This researcher was the critical instrument for the content analysis and the primary observer in determining which ways they shared the gospel according to their websites and social media platforms. The chart observed indicates that this researcher found evidence of the participants sharing the gospel in one of the above ways, and not observed means the contrary that no evidence was found.

Table 17: Content Analysis-Ways Social Media Used

Analysis Church Website/ Participant	Streaming Service	Events	Discipleship	Scripture Quotes	Podcast	Promotion	Salvation
A1	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Observed
B2	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Observed
C3	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
D4	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
E5	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Observed
F6	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not Observed	Observed	Observed
G7	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
H8	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
I 9	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
J 10	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
K11	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed
L 12	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed

Evaluation of the Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. This study explored the lived experience of using social media to share the gospel. The three essential research questions were: RQ1. What type of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area using in their ministry to share the Gospel? RQ2. How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the Gospel on a social media platform? RQ3. What is the Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis “(IPA) approach in a qualitative research study reiterates the fact that its main objective and essence are to explore the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants and allow them to narrate the research findings through their ‘lived experiences... allowing the interviewees (research participants) to express themselves and their ‘lived experience’ stories the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution” (Alase, 2017, para.1). Twelve participants who were part of the Southern Baptist Church were interviewed, and they were leaders in the church. They were eighteen years older and could not be pastors or social media directors. They had to be one or the other. They had to use social media in their churches to share the gospel. The IPA was selected for collecting the data in the research study.

The research study processes validated the data collection, and the data collected was cautiously analyzed and coded accordingly. The participants' lived experiences were produced by combining common themes with similar patterns from the data. The conclusion of the research was recorded, and an extensive explanation of it was documented along with the research findings. The findings are listed before each research question and sub-questions. The fourteen tables recording the research findings are presented in table forms according to response, frequency, and respondents. The church websites of all participants were also observed, and a digital analysis of the website using two charts is displayed above. Saturation was achieved.

Strengths of the Design

This study collected definitive data as a response to the interview questions. Additionally, the Research Questions were adequately addressed. The next strength relates to the quality of data the researcher received from the participants' responses. The responses were vibrant and thick and adequately addressed the interview questions. The design outcome produced more than

the initially sought-after sample of participants. The result of obtaining more than the required sample of participants can be viewed as a strength of the design. However, this researcher initially faced challenges with the target study group recruiting participants and found it necessary to change the study group.

Weaknesses of the Design

This design was appropriate for the type of this research purpose and questions. So the flaws observed were very few. One of the weaknesses which were eluded to in the above section was having to change study groups to reach the targeted sample size. This weakness indicates that the design may require sampling from different target groups and populations before reaching the desired sample size for participants.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. This study explored the lived experience of using social media to share the gospel. The three essential research questions that guided the study were (1) What type of social communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders using in their ministry to share the gospel? (2) How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the gospel on a social media platform?; and (3) What is the Southern Baptist leader's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

Four pastors and eight social media directors were interviewed via the Zoom platform, and the interview was recorded using the Zoom software and a phone recording device. The interview was to explore social media use in Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The open-ended semi-structured interview provided extensive data for

analysis and interpretation. The pastors and social media directors interviewed disclosed their lived experiences regarding the use of social media usage in their churches. A detailed result of each question was provided for each question used in the interview.

The qualitative phenomenological data collection analysis was validated through the research study. The researcher analyzed the research data, used thematic themes accordingly, and reported the result of the research findings. The researcher used common emerging themes while identifying a pattern from the lived experience. Themes that were dominant of the emerging themes from the data were (1) social media as a communication tool; (2) Social media platforms; (3) Social media and sharing gospel; (4) Social media and discipleship; (5) Social media and challenges; (6) Social media and benefits.

In conclusion, in this chapter, the researcher interpreted the data analysis's findings using emerging themes and patterns to combine and create the tables. Saturation was achieved. The next chapter, chapter five, examined the collection of the research purpose, research questions, research conclusions, implications and applications, the research limitations, further research, and the summary of the chapter was discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

In the first four chapters, this researcher disclosed the problem, background, literature review, literature gap, and analysis of the findings regarding social media usage in Southern Baptist churches. In chapter five, this researcher highlighted the conclusion. The purpose of this chapter was to explore the Research Purpose; Research Questions; Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications; Research Limitations; and Further Research. This chapter concluded with a chapter summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore social media usage according to leaders from churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. These churches were associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is an organization comprising over 47,000 Baptist churches throughout the United States and its territories. These congregations, which include a diverse range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups, are known as "cooperating churches." They have organized themselves to carry out a specific set of missions and ministry efforts, all with the goal of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone, everywhere (SBC.Net).

At the research stage, social media was defined as any platform that can be used to share the Gospel or any social media networking site. Social media was also designated as "applications and websites that enable social networking and the creation/sharing of digital content" (Al-Fedaghi, 2012, p.12). Furthermore, social media for this study is "digital

technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.5; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009).

The research theory that guided this study is the mathematical theory of communication (Shannon, 2001; Weaver, 1953) developed by Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, and David Berlo. The communication model effectively understands and explores the literature gap regarding God and how He communicates with His people. According to leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention, the study explored social media usage to share the gospel. The communication model was used because it has shown to be beneficial in conveying the message. It is a two-way process between the sender and the receiver. In social media, the message is transmitted between the sender and the receiver. Throughout the Bible, we see God communicating back and forth with man. The conversation is occurring between both parties. It is not a one side conversation.

Social Media Powerful Medium

Social media is available and is a positive, helpful tool for ministry; however, there is a strong presence of social media in some churches versus no social media or very little in others. This study sought to understand the nature of social media in Southern Baptist churches. It explored these churches' concepts of how they use social media and to what extent they share the Gospel with the world. The church's impact, sharing the Gospel, and the unique connection or lack thereof in presenting the gospel to the world were explored.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What type of social media communication tools are Southern Baptist church leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area using in their ministry to share the Gospel?

RQ2. How do Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan areas share the Gospel on a social media platform?

RQ3. What is the Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area's perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in sharing the gospel?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Research Conclusions

This study explored social media usage in Southern Baptist Churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. This research may benefit pastors who are thinking of using social media but do not currently see the benefit. This research may help stir them in the right direction. Before the interview process, there were a few assumptions; however, the survey and the analysis uncovered how different social media platforms are used in the church to share the gospel. The opened-ended questions for the qualitative study that were answered filled the research gap.

Research Question One Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, Southern Baptist churches frequently used Facebook to spread the gospel. Each participant acknowledged the popularity of Facebook, the use of Facebook Live, and the fact that links to Facebook were put on their church website. Using Facebook Live and church streaming equipment, Sunday services and weekly services are broadcast to viewers worldwide through their church website. The most often reported social media platforms by participants were Facebook and live stream/church website, which all twelve participants used. Instagram was the second most frequently mentioned social media platform, with eleven participants claiming to use it. Participants' third most popular social media networks

were YouTube and Twitter, with eight responding that they used these services. Text/direct messaging, Vimeo, TikTok, and LinkedIn were the other platforms mentioned by four, two, one, and one people, respectively.

In these churches, Facebook pages for adults and youth were formed to spread the gospel. Bible studies, women's groups, and other church organizations use Facebook Live. YouTube is the second most well-liked communication platform. Many of these churches had their own YouTube channels where people could share and watch the gospel in real time and afterward upload videos of the services.

Additionally, these churches spread the gospel through other social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. According to the interview results, Facebook Live and Facebook Pages are the most popular ways for participants to spread the gospel. The second-most preferred communication platforms among pastors and social media managers were Instagram and YouTube.

Research Question Two Conclusion

As suggested in the literature review, social media makes the world seem smaller than it was for the previous generation. After interviewing the participants, the results suggested and confirmed this statement made by Wise (2014) regarding the use of social media to share the gospel, "It is a way to get that sense of community that we still crave. There are different aspects of Church life. These include spiritual, social, economic, administration, evangelization, and so on. Social media can be used as a reconciliation platform" (Wise, 2014).

The answers were similar. The participants stated that the gospel was shared using Bible quotes on Twitter and Facebook. Uploaded sermons, Bible study, encouragement, tweets, to initials conversations were different ways the gospel was shared online. Church announcements,

events, salvation, church group meetings such as prayer groups, and discipleship were other ways the gospel was shared online.

The findings based on the content analysis regarding Research Question Two indicated that YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook were the most popular used social media platforms according to participants' church websites. The content analysis conducted by the researcher confirmed most of the responses given by participants about the social media platforms they utilized. There were isolated and outlined instances where the researcher did not observe the social media users on their websites and how they were used. In most cases, the researcher could not confirm or observe the use of Vimeo, TikTok, and LinkedIn according to participants' websites.

Participant A1: On my Twitter account, I put a bunch of quotes up. I put up a bunch of just some of my favorites... We stream live on Facebook. We use social media not only for salvation but to share the gospel.

Participant C3: We use YouTube to get out our services each week... streaming any event, like the Sunday service. We will stream our student service. We may, on Instagram or Facebook, post a Bible verse. We post quotes. Sometimes we ask questions, how can we pray for you or things like that?

Research Questions Three Conclusion

Using social media to spread the gospel was perceived favorably by the participants, according to their comments. Participants listed the several methods they use to spread the good news on social media, including but not limited to preaching, Bible study, discipleship, salvation, water baptism, and spiritual development. Throughout the interviews, every participant agreed that social media was an excellent tool for connecting with children and young adults. Social media can quickly and effectively reach more individuals, according to many. The majority of participants claimed that social media has boosted viewership, is very cost-effective, and has other advantages.

Responses were:

Participant A1: The positive is that we're reaching a whole segment of people out. Here that we were not reaching...It gives the gospel and our church exposure to those seeking it, and I think that's the greatest benefit of it. I have people that watch from all over the world. Social media is free and economical.

Participant C3: I see it is a great way to reach them, especially in our youth, because they always have that phone in their hands. I think it's a great way to reach the younger generation, high school age and young adults. I believe that the strength is that you can reach more people. But you don't have a personal touch, which I think is important and that's a drawback. So that is one way that's economical, but it's also, you know, can be far-reaching as well.

Implications and Applications

The main objective of this research study was to explore social media usage in Southern Baptist churches. A tremendous amount of literature review was used to support this study. Therefore, the survey aimed to explore the extent to which social media platforms are used, the purpose, and their implications in sharing the gospel. The study reached an overall conclusion which this researcher has outlined in the next section. This section covered the impact and application. The following section has detailed explanations of the implications that were discovered.

Practical Implications

The implications found in the research conclusion were several. One of the implications was leaders' perception of sharing the gospel online using social media. The discovery was that the senior pastors interviewed used social media mainly to share the gospel. They have a heart for people and genuinely want to see everyone saved. The participants interviewed all see social media as an excellent communication tool for sharing the gospel. They had an evangelistic heart and a passion for their calling.

Research Implications

The research implies which social media platform is more famous for sharing the gospel online. Facebook was the most used. Additionally, the participants use live streaming on their leading websites to share the gospel. They used YouTube Live and Facebook live to stream services and share the gospel. They also used other streaming devices and services to share the gospel.

This researcher connected the study by looking at social media, cyber churches, and the valuable connection available for churches to reach the people who would not usually be contacted using the internet platform. Internet and social ministry have become a “thing,” according to Barna Group (2020). There is a great need for social media in the church. The possibilities with social media are limitless.

The literature by Arthur and Rensleigh (2015) is closely related to this researcher's research topic. Arthur and Rensleigh (2015) researched whether small churches are aware of the opportunities created by the usage of online technology. Online technologies promote the sharing of human knowledge as well as the teaching of the Bible (Arthur & Rensleigh, 2015). Examples of these online technologies include email, blogs, forums, podcasts, polls, wikis, and online social networks. Arthur and Rensleigh (2015) study does not cover why selected Southern Baptist churches choose not to use social media as a platform to advance in any way the kingdom of God and if mission, evangelism, conversion, and church growth are their primary target. Furthermore, it does not mention why there is a solid social media presence in Southern Baptist churches and how social media was used as a communication tool to share the gospel online in Southern Baptist churches.

The website was observed from all the churches with overwhelming information about salvation, baptism, events, and church info. The third implication was how leaders perceive social media in sharing the gospel; all leaders had positive things to say about social media. They all perceived social media as an excellent avenue to reach people who wouldn't usually come to a church building. However, they discovered from observing their online traffic and testimonies that they are accomplishing this task. For example, to clarify this implication.

Participant A1 stated: "I baptized a man who was saved by watching us on live stream, never been to our church. Sunday morning, I baptized it." The fourth implication is many pastors had stories of people who came to join their churches after watching them online for a few years. Participant A1 continued, "we had a couple come to me during guest reception, and her mother has dementia, really bad, and so for the last two and a half years, while the pandemic has been going on, they just put us on live stream on Sunday mornings, and they've watched us for 2 1/2 years, and they came to me in guest reception and said we've been watching you for 2 1/2 years. We like to join this church."

Another implication was how social media influences the youth and the older generation in sharing the gospel. Instagram was very popular among the youth. Many of these participants used Instagram to share the gospel with the youth, while Facebook was the popular social media platform for sharing the gospel with the older generation. The data collected from this study confirms what Pew Research claimed. Pew Research (2018) survey cited in the literature review that Facebook teen users are down from 71% to 51% more teens and that more teens are on Instagram (72%). In a survey conducted in August/September 2020, 36 % of adults received their news from Facebook, 23 % from YouTube, 15 % from Twitter, and 11% from Instagram and other social media platforms; among this number, 65 % of women are more likely to get the news from Facebook versus 35% for men. Furthermore, Pew Research (2021) also reported that "Americans 65 and older are the least likely age group to use Facebook, with half saying they do. But that still represents a 30-percentage point increase since August 2012, when just 20% reported using it" (para. 5). This study finding is consistent with the previous research.

The participants also used Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platform for discipleship. According to a poll conducted by Barna Group in 2020, social media is used to fundamentally transmit messages to the general public as well as for marketing and informing people about churches. The social ministry component is all about mentoring and assisting people in deepening their religious commitment. Again, this finding is consistent with the previous research. Social media is used whether meeting with other pastors to encourage each other or streaming to share the gospel for spiritual enrichment classes and discipleship; social media is the platform of choice, especially since the pandemic (COVID-19).

The last implication is how the participants view social media. A few interviewed directors viewed social media as not an evangelism tool but a sharing device or a “means to an end.” Most of them did not think social media could be used for discipleship but could be used as a tool to draw them into the building to be disciplined. The social media directors and pastors were also concerned about developing personal relationships and thought it was nearly impossible to do online. The pastors believed developing an emotional connection online is challenging but not impossible. The goal was to draw the person to come onsite to create spiritual growth. The last implication was that many pastors observed church growth online with increasing viewing, especially during Covid-19.

One of the study's significant findings essentially confirmed previous research in the literature review. The literature review revealed and established by this research, Enns (2014) points out that the gospel can reach the nations and the people who are hard to minister face-to-face or are not using the traditional platform (Enns, 2014). The participants in this study also confirmed the research from Enns (2014) that one of the primary advantages of social media is to reach people in hard-to-reach places. This further aligned with the communication theory

postulated by Al-Fedaghi (2012). Participants confirmed Al-Fedaghi's (2012) position that computers and network technologies have made it possible to overcome limitations that may have been imposed in the past between time and space on communication (Al-Fedaghi, 2012).

Applications

The researcher uncovered a few applications that can be employed in conjunction with the research findings and implications. The church and social media are familiar sources of concern. Social media is essential. Many pastors who were averse to using social media to promote the gospel were forced by the pandemic to quickly adapt and find ways to stream because the world had practically "shut down." The researcher's concerning and disquieting discovery was that churches with plans were not as affected as those with no idea what to do. In terms of church maintenance, certain people who were not as well equipped and prepared owing to the lack of social media had to figure things out. To keep the church running, sure participants who were not as qualified and prepared due to the lack of social media had to work things out with their people and devise means to start streaming online to keep the church running.

The application is that leaders may want to embrace social media more since it is here to stay. One thing discovered during the interview is that the churches with social media already in place when the pandemic occurred and that church buildings were forced to close were equipped and prepared for such changes. The churches that had social media platforms and websites and were already streaming lives did not suffer financially; some saw membership increase.

Another application is that churches should leverage social media usage because the study found that when terrible occurrences such as the pandemic or whatever the situation may be in the future, social media was a medium utilized to keep operations running.

The study also found that churches that used social media to share the gospel with a broader audience and for discipleship found it to be a crucial tool for completing those responsibilities.

Research Limitations

This research study explored social media usage in Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The strong presence of social media was present in these selected churches. Therefore, the study was limited to the lived experiences of these participants. This researcher's limited experience with interviews was noticed when this researcher listened to the interview, reviewed the notes/transcripts, and hoped that more followed questions were asked.

The researcher attempted to focus on learning the participants' point of view concerning the subjective topic and research questions that were asked and not enter this researcher's meaning or interpretation or what was known during the literature review. The researcher mirrored the IRB and Liberty Dissertation handout. Additionally, researcher biases were restricted and limited. While collecting the data, an open mind was kept ensuring that bracketing was practiced and used. Tufford and Newman (2012) stated that "Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p.80). Additionally, "reflexivity" was employed in self-observation to disclose how the data collected impacted the background when interpreting the participants' results (Creswell, 2014). This researcher believed that regardless of her limited experience in the interview, the findings, implications, and application results would have been the same irrespective of if an expert interview had been conducted; everything was recorded and followed according to the Liberty guidelines.

This study was limited to only the Southern Baptist denominations. The location was churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The results might have been different if the survey

had been open to other denominations and backgrounds as far as data collected for limitations and assumptions that may have been different, constituting the interpretation of social media usage and its implications in Southern Baptist churches.

Further Research

This study explored the usage of social media in Southern Baptist churches. As a result of this study, additional research in various denominations, localities, and church sizes may be conducted to address issues that this study did not identify or may be concerned about.

Furthermore, future research outcomes may differ if other study research designs and tools are used. Changing the denomination, for example, may result in different data and consequences. The number of participants may also fluctuate, providing extra information. The explanation is that this researcher began with a different study group but had difficulty attracting participants; hence, shifting denominations resulted in faster and greater participant recruitment.

This study focused on Southern Baptist churches with a membership of 50 or more; however, increasing the size and concentrating on churches with a membership of 2500 to 5000 may result in a different result; larger churches tend to have their social media in place and are more adaptable to using it. Furthermore, as a result of this investigation, other pressures and issues that were not included in this study may be addressed in future research employing a quantitative research approach. For example, if a study is done on the effectiveness of social media, the result will change. Many participants stated that Instagram was more popular with young adults. A focus group to study the younger demography and the effectiveness of using Instagram to connect young adults with their local church can be addressed. Also, a focus group that selects participants 30 years and older to see the impact of social media, how these participants use the platform to connect to the local church, and to what extent it can be done. A

mixed methods study on the implications for church membership and growth regarding attending church in person versus online is another study that can be done. The decline of in-person church attendance compared to the growing numbers of church attendance via social media platforms can also be done using a quantitative study design to study the underlying issues and pressures associated with the change. Compare prevalent platform that is current for younger adults 30 yrs and younger and popular existing platform of the older generation at the time is another study that can be done to share the gospel. This study can be qualitative. A focus group study can also be done to determine the impact of social media based on age demographic and how they utilized social media to share the gospel.

This study was a Qualitative Phenomenological study that focused on Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area; however, changing the location and type of study methodology may result in different data and findings. If the study is changed to a ground theory and the site is changed to a small town or a major city, the outcome will be different, and the researcher may have more or fewer participants. As a result, more research may be required to determine how social media is used across these mediums and platforms. Different outcomes would be obtained if denominations and churches-imposed limitations on social media usage and content.

Summary

This research study explored social media usage in Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. In summary, this dissertation has five chapters, with Chapter One beginning with this researcher's research concerns. Chapter Two was the literature review—chapter Three detailed the research methodology. Chapter Four analyzed this researcher's research findings. Finally, Chapter Five outlined this researcher's conclusion.

A purposeful sampling technique was used for this study. This study examined four Southern Baptist pastors and eight Southern Baptist social media directors. They were leaders in charge of social media content in their churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The content analysis of the church's websites and social media platforms was observed, and information and findings were recorded. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording were used to record the interview. A semi-structured, open interview was conducted with each participant to examine social media use in their respective churches.

After receiving approval from Liberty University's IRB, the Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) with the screening survey question link (Appendix E) was sent out via email to 250 participants introducing the study. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) online database provided a list of churches affiliated for the researcher to contact. A list of churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area was contacted via email. A total of 250 Participant Recruitment Letters were emailed, followed up emails were sent out more than once asking these participants to participate. The 250 participants' letters that were sent out resulting eleven churches and twelve participants. The participant that responded by filling out the survey and meeting the study criteria were contacted via email with an official invitation. The participants that responded to the official invitation were asked to schedule an interview with a time and date; for the ones that responded to the official invitation and scheduled the time and date for the interview, a Consent Form was sent (Appendix D) along with the interview questions (Appendix F) via email. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email.

When the official invitation email was sent participants were required to respond to the email, and they were also required to sign the consent form and email it back before the day of the interview. The consent form (Appendix D) and the interview questions (Appendix F) were sent via email once the participant accepted the online interview invitation. A Zoom meeting invitation link was sent out to them a few days before the interview via email. The interview was conducted using the Zoom software video conference feature. The Zoom feature recording and another recording were used to record the interview. The interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and after the interview, the data was transcribed using Microsoft Word online.

The participants' church websites and social media platforms were observed and compared with the interview results. Each participant's church website was scrutinized and analyzed to see how the gospel is shared online and which social media platforms are used more than others. The observation from the social media platforms and church websites answered research questions one and two. There, it is proven that these participants used these platforms in several ways to share the gospel online.

This study concluded with this research stating that social media may not be embraced in other churches or denominations, but it is prevalent based on the results of this study. The churches adopted to use are ripping priceless benefits, and it is the “free” “gift that keeps on giving.” Present and future pastors may want to reflect, think, change their minds, and start incorporating social media to share the gospel. Leaders against social media must understand that when the gospel is shared, salvation occurs, people get saved, conversion happens, and people can influence society with God’s Word to change. Acts 2:39 says, “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (NASB).

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 1, 2022

Patricia Rankin
Brian Pinzer

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-340 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN GENERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES

Dear Patricia Rankin, Brian Pinzer,

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 to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption 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 exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

Sincerely,

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

APPENDIX B: IRB MODIFICATION APPROVAL LETTER**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 7, 2022

Patricia Rankin
Brian Pinzer

Re: Modification - IRB-FY21-22-340 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES

Dear Patricia Rankin, Brian Pinzer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY21-22-340 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES .

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to change the focus of your study from individuals associated with "general Baptist denomination to Southern Baptist denomination" and to reduce the length of your interviews from 1-1.5 hour to 30-45 minutes has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

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

APPENDIX C: LEADERS RECRUITMENT LETTER

____/____/2022
[Recipient]
[Leaders Title]
[Church Name]
[Church Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The proposed title of my research project is “A Phenomenological Study of Social Media Usage in Southern Baptist Churches.” The purpose of my research is to explore and understand social media usage according Southern Baptist leaders in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

As the current leader in the Southern Baptist denomination in the Atlanta Metropolitan area, I am asking you to please consider participating in this study. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a recorded interview. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedure listed above with an additional follow-up phone call of about 15 to 20 minutes as needed. My formal research questions will be provided to you in advance of our first meeting. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential.

To participate, please email me to schedule an interview at your earliest possible convenience.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time.

in Him,

Patricia M. Rankin
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Social Media Usage in Southern Baptist Churches

Principal Investigator: Patricia M. Rankin, Liberty University, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Christian Leadership in Education Program.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in the research study to explore social media usage in the Southern Baptist churches. You were selected because you are a senior pastor or a social media director, a leader in the Southern Baptist denomination within the Atlanta Metropolitan area, you are 18 years of age or older, and your church used social media to share the gospel. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of my research is to explore and understand social media development and experiences in the selected Southern churches in the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- (1) Participate in a recorded interview online via Zoom that will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.
- (2) Be available for a follow-up via email (if needed) to answer any questions that may need clarification or additional information.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping other churches that are not using social media to see the benefit of using social media in their churches. Also, the information obtained will benefit the church community and have an impactful meaning on a better understanding of the effect of using social media in Southern Baptist churches to spread the Gospel.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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Approved on 6-7-2022

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. 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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The interview will be conducted in a safe place via a secure connection where no one will be able to overhear the conversation.
- The interview platform will be Zoom, and the interview will be recorded using audio and video and will be stored using an external hard drive.
- Data will be locked in a password-protected computer and will be kept in safeguard for three years and thereafter all data will be destroyed.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participating in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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 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?

The researcher conducting this study is Patricia M. Rankin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Pinzer [REDACTED].

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.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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 of 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 and video record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
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Approved on 6-7-2022

APPENDIX E: SCREENING SURVEY

1. Are you 18 and above? _____ Yes _____ No.
2. Does your church have a congregation of 50 or more? _____ Yes _____ No.
3. Do you currently serve as one of the following:
_____ pastor
_____ elder
_____ social media director or
_____ a leader in the social media ministry
4. Is your church denomination Southern Baptist, if not what is your denomination?

5. Does your church use social media for ministry purposes, if so,
Please check all that apply
_____ Twitter _____ Instagram _____ Facebook _____ YouTube
_____ Other Please specify _____

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RQ1. What type of social media communication tools, are you using in your ministry to share the Gospel?

- A) Do you use any social media platform more than others in sharing the Gospel online?
- B) In which area of your ministry do you use these social media platforms?

RQ2. How do you share the Gospel on a social media platform?

- A) What are some of the ways do you share the Gospel on different social media platforms?
- B) How do you use these social media platforms?
- C) Explain how your ministry uses social media for discipleship?

RQ3. What is your perceptions as a leader in using social media to share the Gospel?

- A) What social media platforms are effective in sharing the Gospel online?
- B) What do you believe are the strength and weaknesses of the social media ministry platform that exist when sharing the Gospel online?
- A) What are some of the challenges of using social media to minister online?
- B) What are some of the benefits of using social media to minister online?