

The Effect of Digital Marketing Strategies on Church Growth in Nigeria: A Focus on the Presbyterian Church

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Abstract

The evolution of digital technologies and the global shift toward digital communication have significantly impacted how organizations, including religious institutions, engage with their audiences. For churches, digital marketing presents a powerful tool to expand outreach, enhance engagement, and foster spiritual and numerical growth. However, the extent to which these digital strategies are effectively implemented and their actual impact on church growth remain areas of concern, especially for historic denominations such as the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN). The PCN has traditionally relied on conventional methods of outreach such as house-to-house evangelism, physical worship services, and community-based programs. While these approaches have contributed to its growth over the decades, the current generation—largely digital natives—are increasingly unreachable through traditional means alone. This study therefore aims to evaluate the extent to which the church's adoption of digital marketing strategies influences church growth in Nigeria. The study adopted the cross-sectional research design and collected data with the use of the questionnaire distributed to 400 church members and staff of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State, Nigeria. Data was presented and analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while hypotheses were tested using the one-sample T-test. The study's findings show that digital marketing strategies are vital to promoting church growth in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that the church should improve on the use of digital technologies and intentionally teach their

members on how to utilize them in order to achieve optimum growth.

Keywords:

Digital marketing, church, growth, social media,

Introduction

The 21st century presents digital marketing as a transformative tool for organizations across sectors, including religious institutions. The proliferation of internet access, social media platforms, and mobile technology has fundamentally altered how information is disseminated and consumed, enabling organizations to engage with wider audiences beyond geographical boundaries (Runtuwene et al., 2018). Digital marketing refers to the use of digital technologies such as websites, social media, email, and mobile applications to promote products, services, or causes. In the context of the church, digital marketing is used to promote events, share sermons, engage with congregants, and reach new converts. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become integral tools for church outreach and engagement, especially in a rapidly digitizing society such as Nigeria (Muchuki & Kiriri, 2019).

The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, established in 1846 by Scottish missionaries, has a rich history of evangelism, education, and community development. Churches, including the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN), are increasingly adopting digital marketing strategies to enhance evangelism, improve communication, and drive church growth. It is

thus considered one of the oldest Christian denominations in the country. However, like many mainline denominations, the PCN faces challenges such as declining attendance, generational disconnect, and competition with newer Pentecostal and Charismatic movements (Essien et al., 2023). These challenges necessitate a reevaluation of traditional outreach methods and an embrace of innovative strategies such as digital marketing in order to remain relevant and effective in fulfilling its mission. The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the adoption of digital platforms by churches globally (Tabuena et al., 2022) as many congregations in Nigeria began streaming services online, organizing virtual Bible studies, and using social media for community engagement. For the PCN, this shift opened up new opportunities for evangelism and spiritual nurture but also presented challenges related to infrastructure, digital literacy, and content development.

Yet, despite the growing use of digital tools, there is a lack of empirical research on the specific effects of digital marketing strategies on church growth within the PCN. Church growth, in this context, includes not only numerical increase in membership but also spiritual maturity, financial sustainability, and organizational expansion (Yalley, 2022). Understanding the impact of digital marketing strategies on these dimensions is essential for strategic planning and resource allocation within the PCN. This study therefore aims to bridge this knowledge gap by critically examining the digital marketing strategies employed by the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and evaluating their effectiveness in promoting church growth. This study specifically focuses on:

1. Evaluating the extent to which having an online presence significantly increases church attendance of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria
2. Ascertaining the extent to which holding church programs via the internet has a significant influence on increasing new membership of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria
3. Assessing the extent to which the church's social media platform significantly influences membership retention of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria

4. Investigating the extent to which the use of electronic platforms for church contributions significantly improves the financial strength of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria

Review Of Related Literature

Concept of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing, traditionally associated with commercial enterprises, has increasingly permeated nonprofit and religious organizations. Dzirasa-Payne (2024) defines digital marketing as the use of digital channels, devices, and platforms to promote services and engage audiences. Digital marketing refers to the use of digital platforms, tools, and techniques to promote and communicate an organization's values, services, or products. Key elements include social media marketing (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), content marketing (sermons, blogs, devotionals), search engine optimization (SEO) for church websites, email marketing and newsletters, livestreaming, and video content. In the religious context, this involves leveraging social media, email marketing, church websites, and online video platforms to reach congregants and evangelize. The global shift toward digital engagement has prompted churches to adopt these tools to remain relevant and accessible. According to Charles (2018), digital religion reshapes how faith is expressed and experienced, encouraging churches to integrate technology into their spiritual mission.

Digital Marketing in Religious Institutions

Digital tools have transformed communication in churches. Muriithi et al. (2022) discuss how churches utilize social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp for real-time interaction, sermon dissemination, and event promotion, which also enhances participation and facilitates community building. In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches have embraced live streaming and online campaigns to broaden their audience (Nwankwo & Emeahara, 2024). These tools help overcome geographical limitations, which is highly important, especially in a diverse and expansive nation like Nigeria. For the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN), embracing digital communication remains

critical to attracting youth and engaging diaspora members.

Digital marketing has been linked to both numerical and spiritual growth in churches, as studies show that investing in digital strategies brings about increased attendance, especially among younger demographics. The use of digital marketing platforms democratizes evangelism and allows for targeted messages that appeal to various demographics, resulting in enhanced visibility, membership growth, and improved donation inflows. Nwankwo & Emeahara (2024). However, in the context of PCN—a denomination known for its traditional roots—the effect of digital strategies is nuanced. Resistance to change, infrastructural limitations,

and generational gaps affect adoption and impact. Nigerian churches use hashtags, visual storytelling, and live videos to reach unchurched audiences. The adoption of digital marketing in churches is not without challenges. Yalley (2022) points to issues such as the digital divide, lack of technical skills, and theological concerns. For older congregants and leaders in the PCN, these challenges may hinder effective utilization of digital tools. In Nigeria, systemic issues such as unstable internet, limited access to digital tools, and cost barriers pose challenges that are even more acute in rural PCN congregations, leading to unequal adoption of digital marketing across the regions (Essien et al., 2023).

Research Conceptual Model

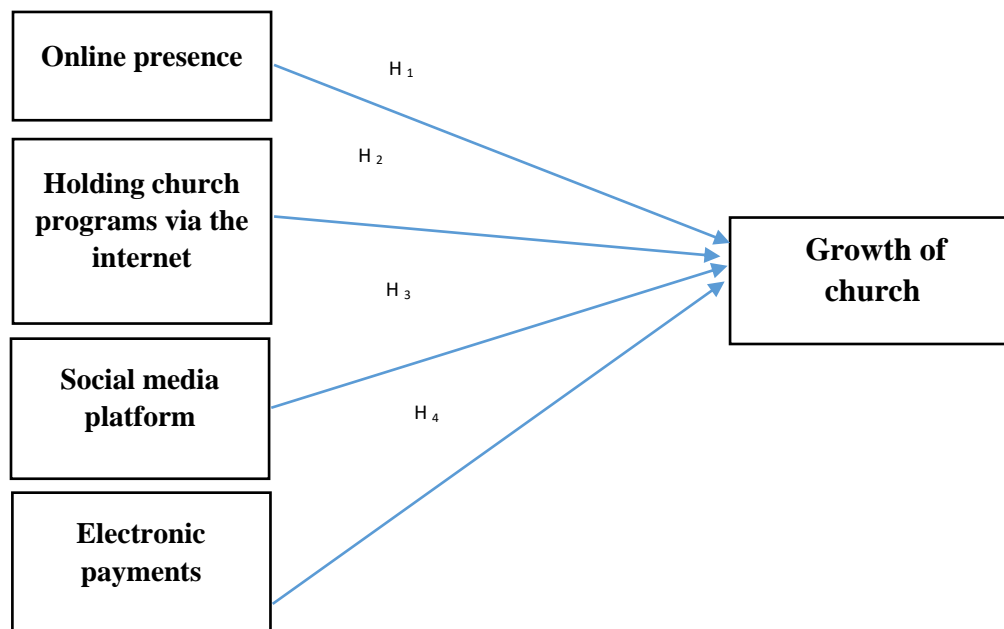


Figure 1: Conceptual Model on Digital Marketing and Church Growth
Source: Researcher (2025)

The conceptual model illustrated above shows the main concepts driving this study vis: online presence, online programs, social media, electronic payment systems and church growth.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive research design while the study area was Lagos state, Nigeria. The study's population comprised of church members and parish staff of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria in Lagos with approximately over 6,806 members and 37 churches across Lagos State. Using Taro Yamane's model of determining sample size for a known population, a sample size of 400 was generated for the study. The convenience sampling technique was used to draw samples from the population while data for this study was generated through the use of structured questionnaire. The research instrument was tested for validity using the face validity method, and also checked for reliability using the Cronbach's alpha method for checking internal consistency of the research instrument. The questionnaire was found to be valid and reliable.

Data Presentation And Analysis

This chapter is focused on the questionnaire return rate, analysis and presentation of data, and interpretation of obtained results. Data was presented and described using tables and percentages while hypotheses were tested using

the one sample T-test statistic. Data analysis was performed based on the research questions and research hypotheses that guided this study.

Table 1 Socio-economic profile of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	259	64.8
Female	141	35.2
Total	400	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
Less than 20 years	47	11.8
21-30 years	85	21.3
31-40 years	169	42.3
41-50 years	1	.3
51-60 years	98	24.5
Total	400	100.0
Marital status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Single	207	51.7
Married	114	28.5
Widowed	50	12.5
Separated	29	7.2
Total	400	100.0
Educational level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Primary	125	31.3
Secondary	40	10
Post-secondary	26	6.5
University	209	52.3
Total	400	100.0
Income	Frequency	Percent (%)
Below N100,000	90	22.5
N100,000-N200,000	32	8
N200,000 - N500,000	37	9.3
Above N500,000	241	60.3
Total	400	100.0

Source: Field survey (2024)

In the table above, the data on gender shows that there are 259 male and 141 female respondents representing 64.8 percent and 35.2 percent respectively. This indicates that there are more male respondents. Table 4.3.2 above indicate the age characteristics of respondents. The data on age shows that a total of 47 respondents (11.8 percent) are less than 20 years of age, 85 respondents (21.3 percent) are between 21 to 30 years old, 169 respondents (42.3 percent) are between 31 to 40 years old, only 1 respondent (0.3 percent) is between 41 to 50 years old, and 98 respondents (24.5 percent) are between 51 to 60 years old. This indicates that most of the respondents are between ages 31 to 40 years of age. The data on marital status shows that a total of 207 respondents (51.7 percent) are single, 114 respondents (28.5 percent) are married, 50 respondents (12.5 percent) are widowed, and 29 respondents (7.2 percent) are separated. This

indicates that most of the respondents are single. The data on educational level shows that a total of 125 respondents (31.3 percent) have only primary education, 40 respondents (10 percent) possess secondary school education, 26 respondents (6.5 percent) have acquired post-secondary school education, and 209 respondents (52.3 percent) have university degrees. This indicates that most of the respondents have acquired university education. The data on income also shows that a total of 90 respondents (22.5 percent) earn less than N100,000; 32 respondents (8 percent) earn between N100,000 to N200,000; 37 respondents (9.3 percent) earn between N200,000 to N500,000; and 241 respondents (60.3 percent) earn above N500,000. This indicates that most of the respondents earn above N500,000.

Test of Hypotheses

H₁: Having an online presence has no significant increase in church attendance of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State.

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Onlinepresence1	400	1.00	4.00	2.8625	1.32589	
Onlinepresence2	400	1.00	4.00	2.9150	1.30077	
Onlinepresence3	400	1.00	33.00	3.1575	4.13042	
Onlinepresence4	400	1.00	4.00	2.9775	1.28885	
Onlinepresence5	400	1.00	4.00	2.7150	1.34473	
Valid N (listwise)	400					

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Hypot1	400	2.8205	1.08887	.05444

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Hypot1	-3.297	399	.001	-.17950	-.2865	-.0725

A one sample t-test was carried out to find out whether the fact that the Presbyterian church of Nigeria has an online presence has any significant increase on church attendance. The result shows ($t=-3.297$, $p<0.05$). With a mean value of 2.82 (slightly less than the test mean score of 3), and a p-value < 0.05 , it is clear that the influence of the church's online presence on church attendance is significant. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis, and hereby accept the

alternate hypothesis which holds that having an online presence has a significant increase in church attendance of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State.

H₂: Holding church programs via the internet has no significant influence on increased new membership of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Churchprogram1	400	1.00	4.00	3.0150	1.27036
Churchprogram2	400	1.00	4.00	2.9150	1.35179
Churchprogram3	400	1.00	4.00	2.7050	1.21724
Churchprogram4	400	1.00	4.00	3.0225	1.31198
Churchprogram5	400	1.00	4.00	3.0350	1.27979
Valid N (listwise)	400				

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean

ChurchProg	400	2.9385	1.13523	.05676	
One-Sample Test					
Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
					Lower Upper
ChurchProg	-1.083	399	.279	-.06150	-.1731 .0501

A one sample t-test was carried out to ascertain if the Presbyterian church of Nigeria holds church program via the internet, there would be a significant increase on new membership. The result shows ($t=-1.083$, $p>0.05$). With a mean value of 2.93 (slightly less than the test mean score of 3), and a p-value > 0.05 , we infer that holding church programs via the internet does

not lead to any significant increase in new membership. Therefore, we do not reject the null hypothesis.

H₃:Social media has no significant influence on the membership retention of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Membershipretention1	400	1.00	4.00	2.8000	1.33208
Membershipretention2	400	1.00	4.00	2.7600	1.17082
Membershipretention3	400	1.00	4.00	2.4350	1.08800
Membershipretention4	400	1.00	4.00	3.1400	1.22848
Membershipretention5	400	1.00	4.00	2.6200	1.32854
Valid N (listwise)	400				
One-Sample Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Membershipret	400	2.7510	.92387	.04619	
One-Sample Test					
Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
					Lower Upper
Membershipret	-5.390	399	.000	-.24900	-.3398 -.1582

A one sample t-test was carried out to ascertain if the utilisation of the social media by the Presbyterian church of Nigeria leads to a significant influence on membership retention. The result shows ($t=-5.390$, $p<0.05$). With a mean value of 2.75 (slightly less than the test mean score of 3), and a p-value < 0.05 , it is clear that the social media presence of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria significantly leads to an increase in new membership.

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, and hold the alternate hypothesis which states that social media has a significant influence on the membership retention of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State.

H₄:Utilizing electronic platforms for church contributions has no significant influence on the financial strength of the Presbyterian Church in Lagos State.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
UtilisingElectPlat1	400	1.00	4.00	3.1175	1.24401
UtilisingElectPlat2	400	1.00	4.00	2.3550	1.09863
UtilisingElectPlat3	400	1.00	4.00	2.6725	.94205
UtilisingElectPlat4	400	1.00	4.00	3.1600	1.17808
UtilisingElectPlat5	400	1.00	4.00	2.1700	1.33437
Valid N (listwise)	400				

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ElectPlat	400	2.6950	.80286	.04014

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Elect Plat	-7.598	399	.000	-.30500	-.3839	-.2261

A one sample t-test was carried out to ascertain if the utilisation of electronic platforms for church contributions by the Presbyterian church of Nigeria leads to a significant influence in the church's financial strength. The result shows ($t = -7.598$, $p < 0.05$). Even though the mean value is lower than the test mean score and a p-value < 0.05 , the result still shows a significant influence. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, and hold the alternate hypothesis which states that utilizing electronic platforms for church contributions has a significant influence on the financial strength of the

Summary, Conclusion And Recommendations

This study investigated the effect of the adoption of digital marketing on church growth in Nigeria. The research employed a quantitative approach, using T-test analysis to examine the relationship between digital marketing and church growth. The findings show that the

church's online engagement is generally low, with most metrics falling below the midpoint, while there is significant variability in online engagement across different aspects. The findings also show that membership retention strategies are generally weak, with several metrics indicating poor retention. In addition, the church's utilization of electronic platforms for contributions shows some forms of inconsistency. While some social media platforms are underutilized, others show successful engagement. It is also pertinent to note that the church is still yet to effectively incorporate digital marketing tools into her operations. However, the church has made attempts to leverage online platforms, programs, and electronic contributions in recent times. As the study clearly indicates that the four constructs, namely online presence, online church programs, social media, and electronic payments, significantly influence church growth, it is thus recommended that the church should

enhance digital engagement by investing in user-friendly online platforms and interfaces while optimizing online content for relevance and user interaction. In addition, intentional steps should be taken to provide training to church members on how to use online platforms.

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