

## THE INFLUENCE OF FACEBOOK USAGE ON CHRISTIANS, A REVIEW

### ABSTRACT:

*In this dispensation of technology, more activities of Christians are accomplished through Facebook medium. It is against this background that this research was done to review the influence of Facebook usage on Christians. With the collaborative effort of Facebook technology, Christians are able to communicate and share information with spouses and other family members, fellow Christians, friends, teachers and students, co-workers in the corporate world and others globally without any geographical barrier. The study revealed that there are two major ramifications that Facebook usage has on Christians; 1) In partial fulfillment of the divine assignment for Christians, preaching and teaching the Holy Bible, worship and praise, biblical counseling, facets of prayer among other Christian ministries and programs are done through Facebook technology in all parts of the world, and 2), there are myriads of abhorring activities on Facebook platform which expose Christians to immorality and paralyze their faith in Jesus Christ and subsequently subject them in the mire of sin. The article has three major divisions—the concept of Facebook Technology, Christians, and Dual Ramifications of Facebook on Christians.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

God is a communicating and information sharing Creator (Gen. 1:26-30). Human beings—

created in the image and likeness of God are also communicating and information sharing creatures (Gen 3:6-12). Hence, communication and information sharing are fundamental and paramount in relationships—thus, interaction between God and human beings and vice versa (Gen. 4:1-10).

Rogers and Steinfatt define communication as the process through which participants create and share information with one another as they move toward reaching mutual understanding. Communication is involved in every aspect of daily life, from birth to death. It is universal.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the authors of this paper advocate that communication and information sharing are prevalent in God's economy.

Over half of a century ago, technology has become useful platform for communication and information sharing between students, spouses, families, and the corporate world without any geographical hindrance. Facebook technology is widely used globally by Christians as well as non-Christians. However, this article focuses on the influence of Facebook usage on Christians. The research found out that Facebook is a catalyst of either life or death to Christians according to how Christians use this medium.

## **THE CONCEPT OF FACEBOOK TECHNOLOGY**

Facebook can be described as an online social media service that enables people to connect with one another from any location, making the earth a global village. Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg. Initially this social networking site was called "The Facebook", and it was launched in February 2004. Its name was changed to Facebook.com in August 2005. Facebook was made with the initial intention of assisting college students get connected, and a subscriber must be a college student to be able to sign up for an account. However, after some years the designers of Facebook opened the social media

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<sup>1</sup> Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication*, (Long Grove, Waveland Press Inc. 1999), 113.

site for anybody who is above thirteen years in any part of the globe to sign up and use the service.<sup>2</sup>

Facebook connects people with others. It enables users to communicate, stay up-to-date, and keep in touch with friends and family anywhere<sup>3</sup> at any time. Users of Facebook are able to post comments and do other things such as engaging in live chat, sharing links to items on the World Wide Web, streaming videos, playing games and sharing photographs. One of the platforms under the umbrella of Information Technology that has revolutionized communication globally is Facebook. Facebook reports about 845 million users, or a little more than 10 percent of the earth's population! If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous country in the world, with a population larger than the United States!<sup>4</sup>

Facebook has several applications and features which provide different ways to communicate. Facebook features and applications include the following:

- **Events:** The event application enables Facebook users to check on events which are of interest to them...Users of Facebook are able to browse events by location, time, and interest to see what is happening around so that they can decide where to go and the time to go there. Also there is a calendar view to help users to view how events fit together with other events<sup>5</sup>.
- **Photos:** Users are able to upload, share, and comment on pictures uploaded using photos application. There is also a tag feature which enables Facebook users to send pictures to their Facebook friends. The tag feature allows users to identify a friend and the picture is automatically sent to the friend's wall. Users are able to adjust their Facebook account settings to prevent other people from tagging them to display their pictures. Tagging a person in a photo does not only reveal the person in the photo, but it also provide links to the person's Facebook profile.

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Philips, 2007, A brief history of Facebook

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul25/media.newmedia> (accessed on April 10, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Abram and Leah Pearlman, *Facebook for Dummies, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Wiley Publishing Inc. Hoboken NJ, 2010), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Wyatt Ciesielka, 2012, Tomorrow's World: Facebook Consequences

<https://www.tomorrowworld.org/commentary/facebook-consequences> (accessed on June 10, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Rita Khoury, 2016, Facebook releases its standalone Events app for Android

<http://www.androidpolice.com/2016/12/13/facebook-releases-standalone-events-app-android-two-months-ios/> (accessed: April 20, 2017).

- **News Feed:** It can be found at the middle of a Facebook user's home page, and it provides constant updates from people and pages that users follow on Facebook. News Feed has features such as status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and “likes” from people, Pages and groups’ users follow on Facebook. The content that Facebook users see on their news feed is under the control of an algorithm that factors in the number of people commenting on a certain piece of content, the person who posted it and the nature of the content (photo, video, etc.)<sup>6</sup>. Users have the liberty to exercise some control over their feeds by adjusting the news feed controls under Facebook's settings.
- **Timeline:** User's Facebook wall and profile are merged into one page by Timeline, resulting in a more visually complete profile. Status updates, photos, friendships made, as well as job history, marital status changes, and other information that users have recorded in their profile are displayed by Timeline application. Users are able to adjust their settings to limit people who see all the entries of their Timeline.
- **Notifications:** The notification application provides update about activity on Facebook. Users are not able to turn off notifications entirely, but they can go to their notifications settings to adjust what they receive and how they are notified.
- **Videos:** Facebook allows users to upload videos to their profile directly from their mobile, webcam, or hard drive. Users can use the option of video messaging. Videos cannot be placed in categories.
- **Messages and inbox:** Users of Facebook are able to send messages to their Facebook friends. When a person sends a message to a Facebook friend, the message will go to the inbox of the user. When a person who is not a Facebook friend of another user sends that user a message, the receiver will get a message request. When a user deletes a message from his or her inbox, it does not delete it from the inbox of other users.
- **Groups:** This application permits a group of users to have dedicated space for their groups. Members of the group can post photos, comments,

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<sup>6</sup> Facebook Help Center, How News Feed Works, <https://www.facebook.com/help/327131014036297/>, (accessed: April 21, 2017)

links, media, questions, events and other status updates. Users can search for groups that already exist for things they are interested in. The privacy settings of post of group members are predetermined by the group's settings. There are three different kinds of privacy settings for Groups: These are Open Settings, Close Settings, and Secret settings. "Open settings" means that both the group, its members and their comments are visible to the public including non-members but the non-members cannot take part of the interaction without joining. "Closed settings" implies the group and its members visible to the public but their comments are not visible until a non-member joins the group. "Secret settings" means that nothing concerning the group can be viewed by the public unless a member invites another user to join the group.

## **CHRISTIANS**

Christians are people who demonstrate unambiguous faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 3:16), recognize the One true Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on their behalf (Rom. 4:25), born anew into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-7), are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12), are imputed the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21), do ascribe the exclusive Lordship to Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), abide in Him and Him in them for fruitful Christian living (John 15:1-7), and are waiting the Second coming to take Christians and have eternal physical communion in Heaven with them (John 14:1-3).

The Disciples (learners, students, committed followers) of Jesus Christ "were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26c NIV). Christians are called to testify Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord to depraved humanity (Matt. 24:14, 28:19, Acts 1:8) with the ultimate goal to bring them out of bondage of Satan into the Kingdom of Light and Life for perpetual communion with God. Though the mortal beings of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16), meeting places (church buildings) are constructed for fellowship with other Christians to worship the Living God, study the Holy Bible, pray for one another and non-Christians, have fellowship with other Christians, give biblical counseling whenever there is a need, and demonstrate other Christian virtues. Christians are the light and salt of the earth to the dying world (Matt. 5:13-16).

## DUAL RAMIFICATIONS OF FACEBOOK ON CHRISTIANS

### Fruitful influence on Christians

Facebook is a powerful platform that Christians use for fruitful Christian life and ministry.

The following are some of the positive impact Facebook has on Christians—

**Church Marketing:** In recent times, most churches have been using marketing and communication as an effective tool for reaching people all over the world. Facebook has become an avenue where some churches extend their marketing campaigns to a wider range of people. The tools and approaches for communicating with people have changed greatly with the emergence of Facebook.<sup>7</sup>

**Global mission:** Jesus Christ commands His Church to, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The word *preach* indicates that we [Christians] are to announce, publish, make known, and proclaim the gospel.<sup>8</sup> Christians reach the global world with the Gospel through Facebook phenomenon. With Facebook technology, this task has become easier to accomplish. Christians might not need to physically travel from one place to another before they evangelize non-Christians from different communities and nations. Facebook has worldwide coverage with many different languages, and therefore it provides a range of opportunities for cross-cultural evangelistic ministry—global mission.

**Online Prayer Group:** Prayer plays integral part in Christian life and ministry (Luke 18:1-7). To fulfill the biblical command of prayer, Christians create online prayer groups through Facebook medium that allow members to share prayer requests from any part of the world at any time. Online prayer fosters bond love, care, and concern among Christians. Faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ are provoked and activated during such time of prayer. More importantly, online prayer groups intercede for non-Christians to come to the saving knowledge of Christ—the heartbeat of God (Matthew 18:19-20).

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<sup>7</sup>Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein. 2010. “Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media.” *Business Horizons*53: 59-68.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Reising, *Church Marketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth, A Revolutionary Blend of Corporate Marketing Strategy and Biblical Wisdom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 28-29.

**Introduction of New Songs:** Worship and Praise leaders in the Church are always on the lookout for the next song to learn and sing during Church service. Some Worship and Praise leaders post links to YouTube videos of new songs on Facebook. Church members to watch, download and learn them anywhere and at all times.

**Photos and Videos Sharing:** Some Christians do post photos and videos of Church events and tag the people in them. Visitors have access to the church's Facebook page and also share theirs. It is an intelligent way to get the world to know about the church and what it is doing.

**Increase Traffic to Church Website:** Facebook can be used to drive a lot of traffic from followers of a church to the church website. Most of the followers of a church Facebook page are likely to visit the church's website whenever they update their Facebook page with videos that can be streamed online.

**Biblical Counseling:** Christians offer biblical counseling to desperate counselees at any point in time and in any part of the world through Facebook medium.

**Christian Conferences, seminars and workshops:** Christians post dates and places for Christian conferences, seminars and workshops on Facebook platform.

### **Unfruitful influence on Christians**

The researchers concur with Charles Kraft that people die spiritually in seminaries and Bible Colleges (not to mention church) because the relational dimension that is so foundational to Christian experience is submerged, ignored, even spoken against.<sup>9</sup> As a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44c, NKJV), Satan battles his victims in their brain [and heart] through blatant deception, tempts them with sugar-coated lies, and prompts his captors to compromise God, His Word, and His benevolent plan for humanity.<sup>10</sup> Some Christians are swayed away from faith in Jesus Christ through Satan-initiated information on Facebook. The devil throws his fiery darts in the mind and hearts of Christians through

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<sup>9</sup>Charles Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity*, (Pasadena, William Carey Library Publisher, 2005), 103.

<sup>10</sup>David K. Okai, (2017) *The Concept of Spiritual Warfare in the Context of Christian Theology: Combatants, Armor, and Two Human Anatomic Combat Zones*. (American Journal of Biblical Theology 2017), 18(15) 12.

Facebook with the ultimate aim to paralyze their relationship with Jesus Christ—the foundation of Christian life and ministry.

Although Facebook is a very great platform for fruitful Christian life and ministry, Satan programs his deadly armor to entice, deceive, tempt, and shatter the God-initiated dream for humanity [Christians].<sup>11</sup> The following are few examples.

**Short attention span/limited learning style:** For folks who can absorb information at the rate of a short text message or “tweet,” it’s difficult to imagine them sitting through a 35 minute sermon and being able to engage in a sustained manner. Does this mean we [preachers of the Holy Bible] shorten our sermons ... Or does this mean we have to work harder to train our congregations in the way they learn?<sup>12</sup>

**Low view of authority/over-focus on equality:** One of the most oft-overlooked impact of social media [Facebook] is the effect it has on the way we view authority figures... This presents problems for a biblical ecclesiology that understands the church and the pastors to have real authority in the lives of its people.<sup>13</sup>

**“Shallow” interactions/artificial relationships:** People might feel more connected, but they can really be more distant, at least from who they really are. In contrast, true Christian fellowship requires that we engage with people as we really are, so that we can honestly face our sin and grow together in Christ.<sup>14</sup>

**Lack of physical presence:** Modern technology [Facebook] can create an almost non-physical, quasi-Gnostic existence... Christianity’s earliest enemy was Gnosticism, which held the belief that the physical world was inherently evil and that salvation was largely a release from the physical body. In contrast, biblical Christianity has always had a robust and positive view of the physical.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>David K. Okai, (2017) *The Concept of Spiritual Warfare in the Context of Christian Theology: Combatants, Armor, and Two Human Anatomical Combat Zones*. (American Journal of Biblical Theology 2017), 18(15) 10.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Kruger, 5 Ways Facebook May be Harming Your Christian Life  
<http://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/5-ways-facebook-may-be-harming-your-christian-life.html>  
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<sup>13</sup> Michael Kruger, 5 Ways Facebook May be Harming Your Christian Life  
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(accessed on June 10, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.,

**Low commitment/accountability:** Facebook-style of communication requires very little of us. It is a low-commitment and low-accountability type of interaction. Users control—and entirely control—the duration, intensity, and level of contact. At any moment, users can simply stop. But the Christian life and real Christian relationships don't work like this.<sup>16</sup>

**Social Isolation:** Social isolation is lack of physical contact with other people in normal daily living. Too much use of Facebook sends Christians into a world of social isolation where the internet becomes their only friend. Christians can spend hours on Facebook ignoring their families, friends and church members. Facebook has become more important for them than spending time with their loved ones and fellow believers. Christians should not isolate themselves from fellow believers. Isolation is dangerous and makes it impossible for Christians to advance the Kingdom of God. All Christians are part of the body of Christ and are to have fellowship with one another.

**Poor Sleeping Habits:** Facebook has caused many Christians to have very bad sleeping habits. People who are too much addicted to Facebook are unable to sleep as they keep spending time online overnight. Some Christians get involved in Facebook activities that keep them up too late and the constant stream of information can make it difficult to have adequate sleep.

**Deceit:** Facebook usage has brought deception into the life of many Christians. In Facebook environment, it is much easier to tell a lie. In face to face conversation, body expression might give a pretender up when telling a lie, unlike online conversation.

**Immorality:** Facebook usage can corrupt the moral values of some Christians. As a huge platform containing all sorts of digital data, Facebook medium shares horrible information on sexual promiscuity like pornographic images and LGBT issues. Satan infuses fierce lust in the hearts and minds of Christians who spend time watching such abominable praxis. With time such Christians fall victim to the enemy's deadly trap (James 1:13-15).

**Spread of Fake News:** Facebook technology enables some Christians to spread fake news about people and organizations with ease. Facebook users tend to read, like, and share stories that they find interesting...Facebook's news feed

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.,

algorithm is bound to spread lies, especially those that serve to bolster people's preconceived biases. And these falsehoods are bound to influence people's thinking.<sup>17</sup> Fake stories are not likely to go away as they have become a means for some writers to make money and potentially influence public opinion. Different interest groups use fabricated news to try and swing public opinion to their favor.

**Vulnerable to scam:** Criminals use Facebook medium as a hunting ground for personal information, resulting in huge rise in identity theft. Identity theft is a crime in which an imposter obtains vital personally identifiable information, such as social security or credit card numbers, in order to impersonate somebody. Identity fraud happens when a criminal pretends to be an innocent individual in order to take out a financial product, such as a loan or credit card, in their name. Fraudsters often scan Facebook site to find personal information, such as user's name, date of birth, address and name of their bank. They use social media to put the pieces of someone's identity together<sup>18</sup> Christians can easily fall prey to these scammers through Facebook platform.

## CONCLUSION

The article is a review of the influence of Facebook on Christians. The researchers advocate that contemporary Christians will accomplish less in their Christian life and ministries without Facebook technology. Hence, this revolutionized platform is a catalyst for Christians to fulfill their respective calling in this technological age. The spread of the Gospel is more rapid than a century ago. Diverse ministries of the Christian Church are experiencing fruitfulness in the area of communication and information sharing through Facebook platform. Spouses, family members, friends, fellow ministers of the Gospel and their congregations, among others have easy access to share and receive information from all parts of the globe.

The study also established that Christians who do not discern between what God approves and , disapproves stand the risk of falling prey to worldliness and sin

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<sup>17</sup>Will Oremus, The Real Problem behind the Fake News, [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/11/the\\_problem\\_with\\_facebook\\_runs\\_much\\_deeper\\_than\\_fake\\_news.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/11/the_problem_with_facebook_runs_much_deeper_than_fake_news.html). (accessed: May 2, 2017)

<sup>18</sup>Tara Evans, The Telegraph, (2016), Sharp rise in identity fraud as scammers use Facebook and other social media sites to hunt for information, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/sharp-rise-in-identity-fraud-as-scammers-use-facebook-and-other/>. (accessed: May 3, 2017).

through satanic enticements on Facebook technology. Satan assaults the human mind with continual lies. People [Christians], thus being deceived, in turn become deceivers (2 Tim. 3:13). They spread Satan's lies on a worldwide scale as they unwittingly assume the nature of their deadly enemy.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Christians who receive and share information on Facebook should be aware of the tendency of being easily influenced by evil.

The paper concludes that Facebook is not devilish itself, but Satan uses this platform in

promoting his deadly agenda. Hence Christians must be extra circumspect in the usage of Facebook technology.

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<sup>19</sup>Ed Murphy, *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare, Revised and Updated*, (Tennessee, Thomas Nelson Inc. 2003), 29.

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