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Using social media to Teach Religious Studies during Covid-19 Pandemic: The Question of Sustainability

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Abstract

The study examined the use of social media to teach religious studies during the covid-19 pandemic along with the sustainability question. Christian religious (CRS) teachers across secondary schools in Lagos State Nigeria constituted the population of the study. Precisely, two teachers were purposively selected from ten schools; giving a total of 20 CRS teachers representing the sample for the study. An interview guide in form of an open-ended survey was mailed to the respondents. Collected data were analysed based on the themes in the objectives of the study. The findings generally reveal that CRS teachers created an account on Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom to facilitate their teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and Facebook is the social media used by the majority of the respondents. Some of the social media accounts created for teaching CRS during Covid-19 by CRS teachers are still active, valid, and relevant; others are now being used for social personal matters, while others have been deactivated due to lack of motivation for the continuous use. There is currently no sustainability for the social media account since the teachers cannot afford to buy data to keep the account running from the little salary they are earning per month. Motivational strategies suggested are that a certain amount should be added to the salary to be used for data for managing and sustaining the social media account created for teaching CRS during Covid-19, making funds available to each school to finance the various social media accounts, and networking the schools based on direct funding from the governments. Based on the findings, it was recommended that to sustain all the social media accounts created by CRS teachers during Covid-19; all secondary schools should be networked, and the government should be made to pay the network service providers or better still add some amount to teachers' salary for purchasing data.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Social media, Virtual Learning Platforms, Teaching, Christian Religion Studies/Knowledge.

Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus towards the end of 2019 in China and the eventual spread of the disease to the whole world is one of the global ugly experiences so far. Activities the world over have been standstill and there has been disruption since the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province in China towards the end of 2019 (Li, Guan, Wu, et al. 2020;

Huang, Wang, Li, et al, 2020), where few cases of pneumonia of unknown origin emerged. Several of the patients reported exposure to Seafood wholesale markets selling many species of live animals. The diseases later rapidly spread domestically and to other parts of China, and to across the six continents of the world (Dong, Mo, Hu Y, et al. 2020). Beginning on the 3rd of January 2020, several envelope RNA coronaviruses was identified in a sample bronchoalveolar lavage fluid from a patient in Wuhan and thereafter confirmed as the cause of this disease by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) (Tan, Zhao, Ma, et al., 2020; Zhu, Zhang, Wang, et al., 2020).

Beginning in January 2020, many governments of the world have declared lockdown so that people can work from home to reduce the spread of the virus. The educational sector is not left out. Most schools worldwide from primary to the university were officially closed down. In the midst of the global coronavirus lockdown and social distancing, we are moving to online learning. But there can be a sense of isolation felt by students. It is also a new experience for many teachers and students. These problems can be solved by engaging online students and making learning interactive. Consequently, many schools have completely migrated to teaching online so that the students can benefit. According to Bhat (2020 there are many challenges that students face when learning online, such as distractions, being out of one's comfort zone, and less personal interaction between teachers and students. Tadas (2020) posited that the Coronavirus has brought many challenges before us. It is how we rise to the challenge, how we analyse the situation and rethink our strategies that define our perspective.

 It is no longer news that the pandemic disrupts the global systems and causes much havoc which many countries are still battling today. Education is one of the sectors that were grossly affected by the pandemic because it led to the closure of many schools and the disruption of many tertiary institutions' education calendars. For continuity and guidance against total disruption and causing decay in academic activities, many schools provided alternatives to physical teaching and learning. This resulted in the adoption of virtual teaching and learning where platforms like Zoom, Google classroom, Microsoft Team, social media, and others were used. Social Media such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and blogs were used by institutions who could not afford to subscribe to those sophisticated platforms, particularly for teaching subjects like religious studies/knowledge. Now that the lockdown and spread of the coronavirus are easing,

the question of sustainability of those platforms particularly social media platforms that were created for that purpose become an issue of concern. Are those platforms still relevant? Are the teachers still using them? If they do, how sustainable are the platforms? These and other related questions are what this study seeks to provide answers to. In light of this, the study examined the use of social media to teach Religious Studies during the Covid-19 Pandemic vis-à-vis the sustainability of the created platforms

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the use of social media to teach Religious Studies during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the consideration of the sustainability of the created platforms. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the social media from which Christian Religious Studies (CRS) Teachers created an account to facilitate teaching and learning Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Determinants whether the various account created for teaching CRS by the teachers. Whether they are still in use, valid or relevant.
3. Determine the sustainability of the platform in view of the ease of Covid-19 and the new normal era.
4. Find out the motivational strategies needed for the sustainability and enhancement of the use of the platforms for continuing teaching of CRS.

Research Questions

To achieve the developed objectives, the following research questions were answered.

1. What social media were created by the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) Teachers to facilitate teaching and learning Covid-19 pandemic?
2. Were the various accounts created for teaching CRS by the teachers still active and relevant?
3. What is the sustainability of the platform in view of the ease of Covid-19 and the new normal era?
4. What are the motivational strategies needed for the sustainability and enhancement of the use of the platforms for continuing teaching of CRS?

Literature Review

Social media

Social media are **interactive technologies** that allow the creation or sharing/exchange of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. ... Users create service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social-media organization. Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is Internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications (Dollarhide, 2021). There are various types of social media. These are classified as:

Social Networks: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn.

Media Sharing Networks: Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube.

Discussion Forums: Reddit, Quora, Digg.

Bookmarking & Content Curation Networks: Pinterest, Flipboard.

Consumer Review Networks: Yelp, Zomato, TripAdvisor.

Social media and Teaching during Covid-19

The mission of education has changed, and everything is just a click away. Hence, there has been a redefinition of many countries' national educational objectives in terms of establishing new goals that are aligned with the new norms of Covid-19. Musawi and Baktash (2021) have added that during the Covid-19 lockdown, face-to-face learning has been limited and e-learning started in public and private universities. More importantly, the increased SM use during the pandemic, reported by Limaye et al. (2020), is perceived to have positively influenced teachers' attitudes towards SM use in online learning.

In view of the above, there are some studies that focused on teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic through social media. Jogezai et al. (2021) conducted to explore the possibility of SM use in online learning by exploring teachers' attitudes in relation to the effects of physical distancing and increased SM use, SM knowledge, and religious leaders' SM use. In a quantitative investigation method, the researchers used a questionnaire as a primary tool to collect the data

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from 252 teachers of both public and private schools. Partial Least Square Structural Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used as an analysis method to assess and measure the proposed model. The findings are significant to inform how physical distancing amid the pandemic has influenced teachers' attitudes to opt for social media use in online learning. The findings have implications for teachers worldwide, particularly in developing countries, to switch to online learning using SM under challenging situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Rahim and Ali (2021) examine the effect of using social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram) on the academic performance (Mean Scores of GPA) of Afghanistan faculty members who are pursuing their postgraduate studies at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The participants are (N=103 male and female) who are randomly selected. The data is collected through a structured survey google form. Frequency and percentage statistical analysis,

Independent-Samples T-test and Independent Measures ANOVA are performed as data analysis techniques. The results show a large number of WhatsApp users in terms of frequency and percentage among faculty members of Afghanistan who are using social media. The findings also examine that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of GPA in the academic performance of faculty members using different types of social media. In conclusion, the study contributes to establishing an in-depth understanding of the effect of using social media on the academic performance among faculty members based on the new policies of e-learning implementation by the Ministry of Higher Education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Makki (2021) investigated the teachers' and students 'perceptions regarding these concerns by adopting a survey method through an online questionnaire using 'Google forms' (N= 2010) with responses from teachers and students of universities and high schools and parents of students of basic schools. This study revealed that less than half of the respondents were in favour of using social media in the learning process. The findings suggested that the educational level, age, geographical hierarchies, and jobs of respondents are also correlated with using social media and e-learning.

Considering these studies, it is clear that none of them directly focused on using social media to teach CRS as a subject, particularly at the secondary school level; similarly, most of these studies were conducted abroad outside the sore of Africa. In the light of this, conducting a related study

in Nigeria will make data available on the subject of using teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic using social media.

Methodology

Design

This section detailed and discussed the method adopted to carry out the study. It includes the design, population, sample, instrument for data collection, the procedure of administration, data analysis, and presentation of results. The study adopted a purely qualitative method. The qualitative method focuses on obtaining data through an open-ended survey. Qualitative methods usually give room for in-depth and additional probing and questioning of respondents based on their responses, where the respondents and or researcher try to understand their motivation and feelings. Understanding what the respondents in this study (Religious teachers) perceived as the use of social media to teach Religious Studies during the Covid-19 Pandemic vis-à-vis the sustainability of the created platforms will help to derive a conclusion in the study. A qualitative method was chosen because it is assumed to help reveal the perception and CRS teachers on the matter of the study which focuses on the use of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, the design was chosen because the results are usually more descriptive and the researcher can draw inferences from the data obtained from the respondents.

Population and Sample: The population for the study comprised religious teachers in secondary schools in Lagos State. From this population, a sample of 20 teachers was selected from ten schools in Lagos. Two respondents were purposively taken from each of the ten schools and those 20 teachers represent the sample for the study.

Instrument: An open-ended survey that featured performed questions relating to the four objectives of the study was developed. The survey featured instructions on how to respond to the items. The items in the open-ended survey are those that are relevant in capturing data on the four variables focused on the objectives of the study.

The Procedure of Administration: Initially interview was to be conducted by the researcher. However, this could not happen to observe the protocol of the COVID-19 which restricted the researcher from moving around each of the schools to administer the instrument. Instead, an alternative arrangement was made which resulted in preparing an open-ended questionnaire (survey) which was mailed to the respective respondents. The respondents were asked to fill out

the survey and return it to the researcher at the earliest possible time. Out of the 20 copies of the survey mailed to the respondents, 17 were returned filled and good for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: Identify the social media from which Christian Religious Studies (CRS) Teachers created an account to facilitate teaching and learning Covid-19 pandemic.

To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to indicate the social media platforms they created to facilitate their teaching of CRS during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results generally indicate that respondents all consented that they created social media platforms to teach their classes during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was to assist the learners in not forgetting all they learned before the outbreak of the pandemic. Out of the 17 respondents that turned in their responses, the results indicate that 10 of the respondents (59%) percent indicated they created an account on Facebook. Five (5) respondents (29.4%) indicated they created an account on WhatsApp; 2 respondents (11.8%) created an account on Telegram, while the remaining two (2) (11.8%) created an account on zoom. This result generally reveals that CRS teachers created accounts on Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom to facilitate their teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and Facebook is the social media used by the majority of the respondents.

Objective 2: Determinants whether the various accounts created for teaching CRS by the teachers are still in use, valid, or relevant.

To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to indicate whether the social media accounts created during Covid-19 to teach CRS are still in use, valid, and relevant. The result here is mixed. While some of the respondents 8 (47.1%) indicated that they still maintain the accounts and that the accounts are still active, valid, and relevant. Some others 7 respondents (41.2%) explained that the accounts are active and valid. However, they are no more being used to teach the classes again but they are now been used for their private social issues. The remaining 2 respondents (11.8%) emphatically stated that the accounts are no more valid, useful, or relevant, and of course, the account has been deactivated because there has been no motivation to continue using them. Besides, continuing using them will mean one will have to be finance account using personal purchased data which they consider to be too expensive for them to bear considering the little salary earn as monthly income. This implies that some of the social media accounts created for teaching CRS during Covid-19 by CRS teachers are still active, valid, and relevant; others are

now being used for social personal matters, while others have been deactivated due to a lack of motivation for the continuous use.

Objective 3: Determine the sustainability of the platform in view of the ease of Covid-19 and the new normal era.

To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked to indicate the sustainability of the social media accounts created. Generally, the results indicate that the accounts are not at all sustainable. It was explained that sustaining the account will mean one will have to finance it personally. A respondent indicated that "*I don't think it is necessary to continue with the account because the motivation is not just there any longer. Continuing using the thing will mean one has to bear the responsibility of finance....this may not be good enough considering the meager salary we earn per month*"

Another respondent added that *"it would have been good to continue using the accounts because it is observed that learners respond well and they seem to like and enjoy the platform for teaching and learning; however, the user cannot just continue because teachers will be at the loose end in terms of buying data"*

The result here means that there is no sustainability for the social media account since the teachers cannot afford to buy data to keep the account running from the little salary they are earning per month.

Objective 4: Find out the motivational strategies needed for the sustainability and enhancement of the use of the platforms for continuing teaching of CRS.

To achieve the objective, respondents were asked to indicate what they think could be done as motivation strategies to sustain the account. Generally, the respondents express their delight in using social media accounts to facilitate the teaching of CRS during the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, they frown at financing the accounts from their purse. A respondent explained that "it is a noble idea to keep the accounts but it is just beyond the teachers because such cannot be added to our expenses which the salary we earning cannot take care of, we cannot afford to add more to our problems. Parts of some of the strategies suggested include that, the government should think of adding a certain amount of money to their monthly salary. Through this, they will be able to individually finance the social media accounts individual has created. Alternatively, each school should be allocated some found for taking care of the internet facilities in each

school. Another suggestion is that the government should make sure that each school is properly networked since we are now in a global village and globalized education is what the world is an advertising and emphasizing. Therefore, the government should be ready to give it what it takes to make education a global affair in the country. Summarily, the finding here implies that motivational strategies include adding a certain amount to salary to be used for data to manage and sustain the social media account created for teaching CRS during Covid-19, making funds available to each school to finance the various social media accounts, and networking the schools based on direct funding from the governments.

Conclusion

The study has examined the use of social media to teach Religious Studies during the Covid-19 Pandemic vis-à-vis the sustainability of the created platforms. The purpose has been to Identify the social media from which Christian Religious Studies (CRS) Teachers created accounts to facilitate teaching and learning Covid-19 pandemic; Determinants whether the various accounts created for teaching CRS by the teachers are still in use, valid or relevant; Determine the sustainability of the platform in view of the ease of Covid-19 and the new normal era, and Find out the motivational strategies needed for the sustainability and enhancement of the use of the platforms for continuing teaching of CRS. Generally, reveals that CRS teachers created an account on Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom to facilitate their teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and Facebook is the social media used by the majority of the respondents. Some of the social media accounts created for teaching CRS during Covid-19 by CRS teachers are still active, valid, and relevant; others are now being used for social personal matters, while others have been deactivated due to lack of motivation for the continuous use. There is currently no sustainability for the social media account since the teachers cannot afford to buy data to keep the account running from the little salary they are earning per month. Motivational strategies suggested are that a certain amount should be added to the salary to be used for data for managing and sustaining the social media account created for teaching CRS during Covid-19, making funds available to each school to finance the various social media accounts, and networking the schools based on direct funding from the governments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that to sustain all the social media accounts created by CRS teachers during Covid-19; all secondary schools should be networked, and the government should be made to pay the network service providers or better still add some amount to teachers' salary for purchasing data.

Alternatively, funds should be made available for all secondary schools for paying their network providers by themselves regarding the amount of data used per month.

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