

Social Media Use for Evangelization and Vocational Discernment by Priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa

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How to Cite: Kimbio, J. M., Eleanor, G., & Mbugua, D. K. (2024). Social Media Use for Evangelization and Vocational Discernment by Priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious Studies*, 4(6), 45-57.

Abstract

Purpose: This study explored how priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa utilize social media for evangelization and vocational discernment. Adopting a descriptive research design approach, the research sought to establish the extent of priests' engagement on social media for evangelization and vocational discernment, discover strategies employed on social media that enhanced faith sharing and building communion, examine the appropriate use of social media for catechesis and vocational discernment and identify factors that hindered priests from effectively using social media for evangelization and vocational discernment.

Methods: The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The target population comprised of 97 diocesans and 22 religious. Using the Krejcie and Morgan formula of sample size determination, a sample size of 91 respondents was selected. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. A pilot study was done to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaires. Data was analyzed quantitatively. For the quantitative data, descriptive and correlation analysis were used.

Results: The study findings revealed that while many priests are active on social media, their engagement levels vary significantly. However, challenges such as lack of training, digital literacy, and concerns about online behaviour hinder optimal use. Moreover, technology competency and years of service as priest significantly influenced the use of social media for evangelization and vocational discernment by priests.

Conclusion: The research gap is, despite the growing use of social media, there is limited research on its specific impact on vocational discernment and the unique challenges faced by priests in this context. The following recommendations were made: a need to implement comprehensive training for priests on digital literacy and effective social media use, establish support systems to assist priests in managing their social media presence, and address challenges.

Keywords: Social Media Use, Evangelization, Vocational Discernment, Priests, Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Mombasa

Received: 21st October 2024

Revised: 8th November 2024

Published: 13th November 2024

1. Introduction

The world today is experiencing a technological revolution. Social media has become a platform for the dissemination, processing, and access of information that varies from one field to another. Connecting billions of people worldwide, the internet is a core pillar of the modern information society. “The mission of the Church today takes place in a world that is constantly evolving because of innovations in technology. The challenge of the church today is how to use these new products of civilization to replenish our generation with the authentic message of faith (Dankasa, 2017).” As of January 2023, there were 5.16 billion internet users worldwide, which is 64.4 percent of the global population. Of this total, 4.76 billion, or 59.4 percent of the world's population, were social media users (Anni, 2023). The digital network or social media has provided a wide range of avenues for communication and sharing of information that has impacted various aspects of contemporary society intensively, bringing a new digital culture, and a new digital community altogether. With these rapid and drastic changes, young people have been immersed in a whole new world set of ideas and values. When Pew Research Center began tracking social media adoption in 2005, just 5% of American adults used at least one of these platforms. By 2011 the share had risen to half of all Americans, and today 72% of the public uses some type of social media to connect, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves. For many users, social media is part of their daily routine. Seven in ten Facebook users and around six-in-ten Instagram and Snapchat users visit these sites at least once a day (Pew Research, 2021). The Catholic Church has been a great proponent of the use of the means of social communication in its evangelical mission. There are major documents, themes, and topics on social communications that have been developed for some years in the history of the church. The development of Catholic media tradition can be categorized into four phases, birth, development, institutionalization, and application to new technologies (Caccamo, 2008). While Pope John Paul II was referred to as the “Media Pope,” Pope Francis has been named the “Digital Pope” because they understood the power of the most influential media in their respective papacies.

During the first and second Special Assemblies for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome in 1994 and 2009 respectively, there was an urgent appeal for the Church in Africa to utilize effectively the new forms of social media for evangelization if the Church is to be enriched by the innovative media and be relevant to the new generation of digital technology. Addressing the topic of the Means of Social Communication in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Synod paid great attention to the mass media under two important and complementary aspects: as a new and emerging cultural world and as a series of means of serving communication. Firstly, they constitute a new culture that has its language and above all its own specific values and counter values. For this reason, like any culture, mass media needs to be evangelized. Reflecting on the new media culture in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), John Paul II (1995) emphasized the need for the heralds of the gospel to engage with social media to sow the seeds of the gospel. The heralds of the Gospel must therefore *enter this world to allow themselves to be permeated* by this new civilization and culture to learn how to make good use of them. The Pope saw in social media a new village equivalent to the first Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles ripe for the dissemination of values and practice of faith. “The first *Areopagus* of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a ‘global village’. The means of social communication have become important as to be for many

the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in the behavior as individuals, families and within society at large.” (Benedict XVI, 2011).

The Post-Synodal apostolic exhortation *AfricaeMunus* of Pope Benedict XVI presented numerous discussions on the aspect of using means of social communication for evangelization especially in chapter II section IV dedicated to the world of information technology and communications (AM142-146). The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* saw the modern media not only as a means of communication, but themselves a world to be evangelized (EA no. 124). The media should stand at the service of authentic communication, which is a priority in Africa since they are a significant force for the development of the continent and for evangelization (A.M no. 142) (Benedict XVI, 2011). The Church needs to be increasingly present in the media to make them not only a tool for the spread of the Gospel but also for educating the African people. In East Africa, Archbishop Gervas of Mbeya Tanzania, shares the sentiment saying that the Catholic Church should value social media for evangelization. In a recent event, while launching a new film dubbed *Chozi* a production of Lwanga Communications Centre Mombasa, Most Rev. Archbishop. Martin Kivuva Musonde applauded the role of filmmakers in educating society. Speaking during the launch, the Archbishop affirmed that film production has the power to play a formation role in society as well as engage the youth to realize their potential. “Our young people are radicalized because they are not busy, this film engaged around 30 young people across the coast and beyond” (AMECEA, 2022). *Chozi*, a Kiswahili word that means ‘a tear drop’, is a film that highlights the importance of marriage as a sacrament in the Catholic Church’s teaching. There are indeed immense values offered by the social media platform which the church can appropriately utilize for Evangelization and vocational discernment while journeying with the youth.

“We are in a different century; the number of Catholics has increased, and we have modern communications technologies that are accessible to many, especially the youth, we need to use them to meet the people and tell them the good news.” He added that the Catholic Church exists in a modern world where no one can escape social media. The church cannot avoid media if it wants to be efficient in the mission of conveying the Gospel to the people. People are not in the sacristy; they are in the world of social media. Otherwise, we shall be left behind (Karombo, 2019). Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of social media use on evangelization and vocational discernment by priests in the Catholic Diocese of Mombasa.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. This theory was developed by Everett Rogers in 1962 and explains how innovations spread within a social system over time. It identifies five main stages through which an innovation passes: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. The theory also classifies adopters into five categories based on how early or late they embrace innovations: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 2003). The theory assumes that the adoption of an innovation is influenced by factors such as the innovation’s perceived advantages, compatibility with existing values, complexity, trialability, and observability.

One of the key advantages of DOI theory is its ability to explain how innovations, including social media, can spread through hierarchical structures like the clergy. For example, priests in leadership positions (early adopters) are more likely to influence others in the church to embrace social media for evangelization and vocational discernment. However, a disadvantage of the theory is that it may oversimplify complex social systems, assuming that innovation

spreads uniformly, while in reality, cultural, technological, and individual factors may create significant barriers to adoption (Straub, 2009).

DOI theory was significant in this study because it highlights how early adopters within the clergy can drive the broader acceptance of social media as a tool for ministry. As priests with higher technology proficiency (innovators and early adopters) demonstrate the effectiveness of social media for outreach, others may follow suit, aligning with the theory's assumptions. By understanding how different categories of adopters respond to social media innovations, church leaders can strategically target training and awareness programs to enhance adoption rates (Rogers, 2003).

3. Methodology

This research on the utilization of social media for evangelization and vocational discernment adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design involved the systematic collection and analysis of data to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon. Moreover, its importance lies in providing a clear understanding of the current state of social media use by priests for evangelization and vocational discernment, forming the foundation for further research or decision-making.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa is made of twelve deaneries in general, Taveta, Bura, Voi, Taita, Giriama, Kilifi, Mombasa North, Mombasa South, Mombasa West, Mombasa Central, Kwale and Shimba Hills deaneries and fifty-seven parishes in general. This target population focused on the members of clergy working in these deaneries summed up to 119 priests (97 diocesans and 22 religious).

The desired sample size (nf) was thus 91 from the target population (N) of 119. The sample constituted of 91 respondents. The sample was considered to be representative as it cuts across the different members of the clergy in the Archdiocese. The study used a stratified sampling strategy to group the respondents into four strata in accordance with age in the ministry as follows; priests with ordination years of 5 and below, those between 6 and 10 years, those between 11 and 24 years and those above 25 years. This technique enabled the study to attain the preferred representation from different sub-categories.

For this study, structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the clergy members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa. The questionnaires contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. By so doing, they were able to express their opinions, experiences, and different views and perceptions concerning the utilization of social media platforms for evangelization, faith formation, and vocational discernment in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya.

Reliability and validity are important aspects of selecting a survey instrument (Statistics Solution, 2024). In terms of validity, the content and face validity of the research instruments were ascertained through the help of research supervisors and experts in research. The content-related technique measured the degree to which the question items respond to the research questions. The face validity measured the extent to which the questions asked in the research instrument measured the characteristics and traits contained in the research questions.

The reliability of the data collection instruments was done to determine the consistency in testing what they are intended to measure. Cronbach Alpha method was used which according to George and Mallery (2003), if a value between 0.7 and 0.9 is obtained, the instruments are

considered reliable. In the case of this study, the instruments had a Cronbach Alpha Value of 0.85. Hence, the questionnaires were considered reliable.

The collected data was organized and analysed using both quantitative approaches. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were coded, analyzed, and presented using frequencies and percentages; and presented in tables and figures. Moreover, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was utilized in the analysis. Moreover, correlation analysis was further done to assess the relationship between technology proficiency, years of service as a priest, and social media use for evangelization and vocational discernment. This information was further used for drawing the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study targeted a sample size of 91 clergy members from the Archdiocese, with 52 participants responding, resulting in a response rate of 57%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and inference, 60% is good, and 70% and above is excellent. Therefore, the response rate of 57% in this study was considered good.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The study sought to determine the number of years the respondents have served as priests. In response, majority of respondents (42.4%) had served as priests for 6-10 years, followed by 25.0% who had served for 1-5 years. This indicated a relatively experienced group of clergies, which may influence their perspectives on the use of social media for evangelization and vocational discernment.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Technology Proficiency

In assessing the influence of social media use on evangelization and vocational discernment, this study was interested in checking on the technology proficiency of the priests. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Technology Proficiency Levels among the Priests

Proficiency level	Frequency	Percentage
None	2	3.8%
Poor	5	9.6%
Very poor	3	5.8%
Adequate	12	23.1%
Good	22	42.3%
Very good	8	15.4%

The majority of respondents (42.3%) reported being good at information technology or computer studies. This was further supported by 15.4% who rated their levels as very good and 23.1% as adequate. On the other hand, those with no knowledge of information technology were the least (3.8%), 9.6% were poor and 5.8% very poor. This implies that as much as most of the priests have a good proficiency in technology, there are still some priests struggling in technology use and this may have an effect on their use in evangelization and vocational discernment.

Use of social media for evangelization

Having examined and established the technology proficiency levels of the priests, the respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used social media for evangelization. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of Social Media Use for Evangelization and Discernment

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	7	13.5%
A few times a year	10	19.2%
Monthly	20	38.5%
Weekly	9	17.3%
Daily	6	11.5%

As shown in Table -, 38.5% used social media for evangelization on a monthly basis whereas 17.3% and 11.5% used it on a weekly and daily basis respectively. A few (19.2%) indicated that they used it a few times a year whereas the remaining 13.5% never used social media for evangelization purposes. This implies that whereas a majority made an effort to utilize social media for evangelization, there is still a gap that needs reinforcement to encourage more social media utilization for evangelization and vocational discernment among all priests.

4.3.3 Importance of Social Media for Evangelization

The respondents were further asked to rate the importance of social media for evangelization. From the responses shown in Table 3, 34.6% considered social media use for evangelization as important and 17.3% indicated very important hence recognizing its efficiency in reaching diverse audiences worldwide. On the other hand, 23.1% found it to be relatively unimportant, while 17.3% considered it as unimportant and 7.7% indicated not very important.

Table 3: Importance of Social Media Use for Evangelization

	Frequency	Percentage
Unimportant	9	17.3
Relatively unimportant	12	23.1
Not very important	4	7.7
Important	18	34.6
Very important	9	17.3

Influence of Social Media on Vocational Discernment among the Youth

The study also sought to explore the respondents' views on the extent to which they thought that social media influenced vocational discernment among the youth. In response, majority of the respondents (50%) think that social media has a great influence on vocational discernment among the youth. In support, 17% and 8% further indicated to a very great and moderate extent respectively. The remaining 25% however felt that social media use had a small influence on the vocational discernment among the youth. This implies that there are still a few priests who

do not agree that social media use could have a significant influence on vocational discernment among the youth.

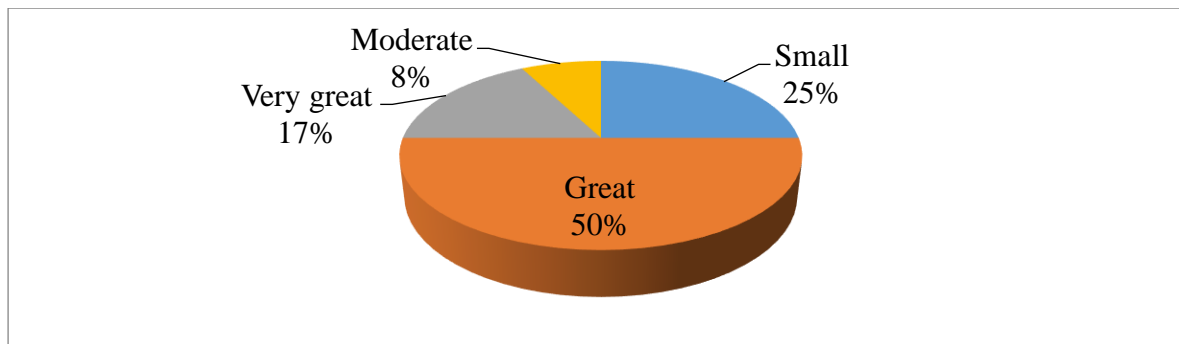


Figure 1: Influence of Social Media on Vocational Discernment among the Youth

From the analysis, this study observed that social media was of great importance when it comes to evangelization. Moreover, the findings also highlighted that social media use had a positive influence on vocational discernment among the youth. In light of this finding, various authors such as Ogola (2021) observed that social media is vital for evangelization as it enables churches to reach a global audience efficiently, particularly the youth. Similarly, Herring (2020) emphasized its role in fostering virtual communities of faith and creating a space for interactive religious engagement. However, some researchers have critiqued its effectiveness. For example, Mwangi (2019) found that despite its wide reach, some believers still perceive social media as impersonal, with challenges in translating online engagement into offline participation. Dube (2023) argued that while social media allows for global outreach, it may dilute the depth of spiritual connection, leading some to view it as less significant. These findings align with the mixed responses in the statement above, reflecting both its recognized importance and the skepticism regarding its deeper impact.

Social Media Platforms for Evangelization

This study further explored the social media platforms used for evangelization. In assessing this observation, there are several areas examined. In terms of social media classification awareness, it was noted that majority of respondents (65%) were aware that social media is classified into different platforms. However, 35% were not aware. This could imply that there are quite a number of priests who do not keep themselves abreast with the changing technological environments and this could therefore be limiting them from diversifying their use of technology and social media for different purposes including evangelization and vocational discernment.

Most Commonly Used Social Media Platforms

The respondents were asked to indicate the most commonly used social media platforms. From the responses shown in Table 4, it was revealed that 32.8 percent of the respondents are on community media sites, while 21.2 percent are on blogging platforms, 23 percent on Short Message Service (SMS) based messaging platforms, 19.2 percent on social curation and 3.8 percent on social networking sites. This indicates the widespread usage of these sites is based on an individual's preference and familiarity with the platforms. It also suggests that WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms. However, Tarimo (2016) indicated in his study that Facebook is top of the list of the most used social media among the youth in Moshi, Tanzania. Besides being in a different country, this difference

in results may be attributed to the fact that Tarimo (2016) carried out his study four years before the present study.

Table 4: Most Commonly Used Social Media Platforms

	Frequency	Percentage
SMS-based messaging platforms	12	23
Blogging platforms	11	21.2
Community media sites	17	32.8
Social curation sites	10	19.2
Social networking sites	2	3.8

Use of Social Media for Evangelization

The respondents were given some statements on the use of social media for evangelization and asked to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement. The responses are given in Table 5. Key: SA- Strongly Agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree.

Table 5: Use of Social Media for Evangelization

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
a. Social media and technology are new platforms that can be utilized for evangelization in the contemporary world	51.9%	13.5%		15.4%	19.2%
b. Social media can be used for teaching catechesis and promoting vocations.	25%	19.2%	28.9%	13.5%	15.4%

Whereas 51.9 % and 13.5% strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that social media and technology are new platforms that can be utilized for evangelization in the contemporary world, 15.4% and 19.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This implies that most of the priests who participated in the study were positive that social media platforms can be utilized in promoting evangelization in the contemporary world. These findings also agree with those of Ndlela and Mulwo (2017) whose study indicates that the increase in accessibility to smartphones and mobile internet has led social media in Kenya to be part of everyday life for the youth, hence forming a conducive environment to evangelize to them.

The majority of respondents (44.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that social media can be used for teaching catechesis and promoting vocations. However, a significant portion remained neutral (28.9%). On the other hand, another 28.9% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This implies that a divided attention among the priests regarding the utilization of social media for teaching catechesis and promoting vocations.

Social Media Platforms Most Appropriate for Catechesis and Vocational Promotion

The respondents were further given some social media platforms and asked to indicate the ones that they felt were most appropriate for Catechesis and vocational promotion. The platforms included YouTube, WhatsApp, Zoom, Facebook, and Pinterest. From the responses shown in Figure 2, the most preferred combination of social media platforms for catechesis and vocational promotion is Facebook, WhatsApp, and Pinterest (42.3%). This suggests that these platforms are perceived as more effective or accessible for the target audience. Additionally,

this further implies a positive inclination towards using social media for catechesis and vocational promotion, with a preference for specific platforms.

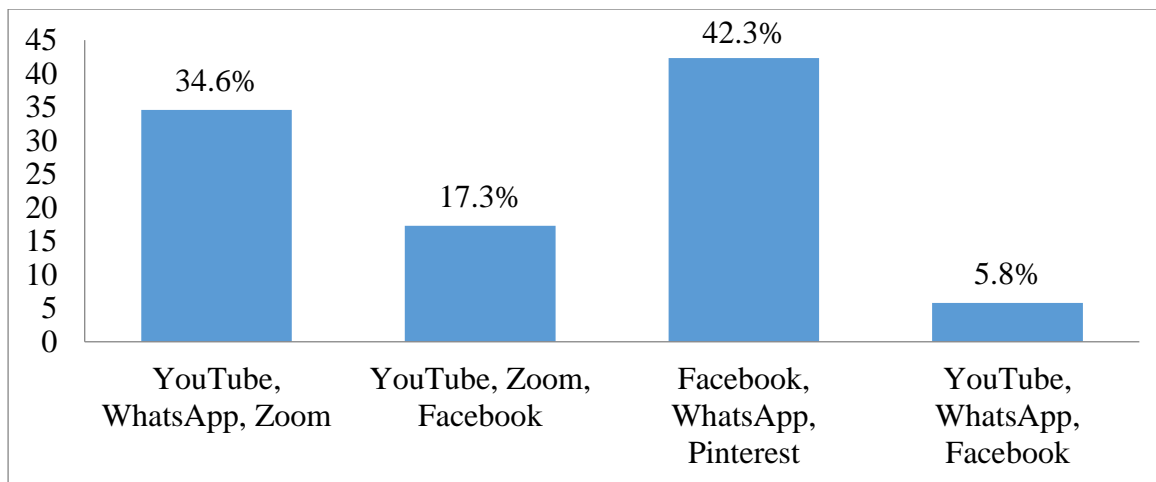


Figure 2: Most Appropriate Social Media Platform for Catechesis and Vocational Promotion

Online Following Audience Size

Lastly, the study assessed the demographic following of the online audience to understand the extent of social media use for evangelization. From the findings, it was observed that the largest group of respondents (69.2%) has an online following audience size of 100 to 1000 members. Additionally, 21.2% had an online following audience of between 1000 and 50,000 with only 3.8% having an audience of 100,000 online followers. Only a few (5.8%) have an online audience of below 100. Overall, these findings show that a significant portion of priests have a considerable online following, which can be leveraged for effective evangelization. The varied audience sizes suggest different levels of influence and engagement, which can be strategically utilized to maximize outreach efforts.

Table 6: Distribution of the Online Following Audience Size

Audience size	Frequency	Percentage
Below 100	3	5.8
Between 100 - 1000	36	69.2
Between 1000-50000	11	21.2
Above 100,000	2	3.8
Total	52	100

4.4 Correlation Analysis

To understand the relationship between social media use for evangelization and vocational discernment among priests, several correlational analyses were done. First, the study assessed the correlation between the number of years served as a priest and their attitudes toward using social media for evangelization and vocational discernment. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation Results for the Number of Years Served as a Priest and Their Attitudes towards Social Media Use for Evangelization and Vocational Discernment

		Years Served as a Priest	Attitude Towards Social Media Use
Years Served	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Attitude Towards Social Media Use	Pearson Correlation	.450	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	52	52

It was observed that a number of years served and the attitudes towards social media use for evangelization and vocational discernment had a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.45 at a significance level of $0.010 < 0.05$. This indicates a moderate positive and significant correlation between the number of years served as a priest and their attitudes toward using social media for evangelization and vocational discernment. This finding implies that the number of years served as a priest did have an important role in the utilization of social media platforms for evangelization purposes. Previous studies have shown that experience within religious vocations can shape one's openness to modern tools such as social media. For example, Duffy (2020) found that more experienced clergy were increasingly integrating digital platforms into their ministries, as they recognized the need to reach younger generations. Similarly, Friese (2019) noted that priests with longer service were more likely to see social media as an extension of their evangelistic mission, even if they were initially hesitant. However, younger clergy often adapted faster, as they were more familiar with digital tools (Hernandez & Lopez, 2021). These studies affirm that experience enhances the willingness of priests to embrace social media for religious purposes, although generational factors also play a role.

Secondly, to understand the relationship between technology proficiency and the use of social media for evangelization, a correlation analysis was conducted. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated and Table 8 shows the results that were obtained.

Table 8: Correlation Results for Technology Proficiency and Social Media Use for Evangelization and Vocational Discernment

		Technology Proficiency	Social Media Use for Evangelization
Technology Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Social Media Use for Evangelization	Pearson Correlation	.520	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	52	52

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.52 indicates a moderate positive correlation between technology proficiency and the use of social media for evangelization. The significance p-value

($p = 0.005$) is less than 0.05, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant. The findings suggest that priests with higher technology proficiency are more likely to use social media for evangelization. This could be due to their comfort and familiarity with digital tools, making it easier for them to integrate social media into their evangelization efforts. Previous studies have highlighted the growing importance of technological skills in modern religious practices. For instance, Mensah (2019) found that clergy with higher digital literacy were significantly more inclined to integrate social media into their evangelization efforts, recognizing its potential to reach broader audiences. Similarly, Pereira and Santos (2020) observed that priests proficient in technology were better equipped to use digital platforms effectively, tailoring their messages for various online audiences. On the other hand, Moyo (2022) noted that priests with lower technology proficiency tended to rely on traditional methods of ministry and were more hesitant to adopt social media. These studies suggest that technology proficiency is a key driver of social media use in evangelization, making it essential for clergy to develop digital skills to stay relevant in contemporary ministry.

5.0 Conclusion

From the study findings, this study concludes that social media use positively influences evangelization and vocational discernment among priests. Precisely, it has been concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between technology proficiency and the use of social media for evangelization. These findings support the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which posits that individuals' adoption of new technologies is influenced by their proficiency and comfort with these technologies. The study further concludes that the number of years served as a priest and their attitudes towards using social media for evangelization and vocational discernment are positively correlated.

6.0 Recommendations

The current study recommends the incorporation of criticism mechanisms such as follow-up questions on the faith messages shared on social media. Ultimately and importantly, the content of evangelization should be packaged interestingly and appealingly. Priests should be encouraged to create engaging and evangelistic content tailored for social media platforms. The Church should implement training programs to enhance priests' skills in using social media for evangelization. The aspect of monitoring and evaluation is to be considered; regular assessment of the impact of social media activities on evangelization efforts to identify areas for improvement is necessary.

This study further recommended that all Catholic Priests in Archdiocese of Mombasa should receive formal training in the use of social media. There is a need to introduce comprehensive training for priests on digital literacy and effective social media use. Once trained, they could eventually help the Christian in packaging faith content on social media in a manner that captivates the audience. Formal training in the use of social media could also enable Catholic Priests in the Archdiocese of Mombasa to be effective in ministering to the members who are generally social media enthusiasts. Above all social media guidelines and policies are necessary, the diocese must develop clear guidelines for appropriate online conduct and content sharing. Most important is laying solid support system, the diocese ought to establish support systems to assist priests in managing their social media presence and addressing challenges.

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