

Missions and Digitally Empowered Ministers in the Anglican Church of Uganda

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Abstract

This article examines the role of new online ministers in the Anglican Church of Uganda, focusing on how they negotiate authority between digital and institutional settings and how this shapes their relationships with other institutional actors. It demonstrates how competition hinder digital missions while accelerated through collaboration. Additionally, a historical analysis of key intersections between missions and technology in the history of the Anglican Church of Uganda serves as foundational in stressing the present role of digital technology and revealing the conflicting impact of technological advancements on the missional efforts of the Church of Uganda.

Keywords: *Anglican Church, Missions, Empowered Ministers, Uganda*

Introduction

As seen in the last four years, the unprecedented surge in the adoption of digital technologies has generated intense and often concealed power struggles in some of the traditional churches in East Africa. On-line church ministers have faced criticism from their less tech-savvy counterparts, with the former accused of inappropriate behaviour, such as violating ecclesiastical boundaries to draw the flock to themselves. Although digital technology affords new ways of interaction and unleashes fresh possibilities for Christian ministry, the internet also tends to flatten the hierarchy and create new centres of power. This phenomenon could affect the missional context of traditional churches in East Africa and can either upend or accelerate gains in missions.¹

In July 2021, Archbishop Stephen Kaziimba of the Anglican Church of Uganda² launched a digital ministry radically different from any other media outreach in the history of the Church of Uganda.³ Christened the “Online Church of Uganda,” this digital ministry displayed the capability of presenting a unified strategy for online media ministry in the Church of Uganda, whose lack was apparent in the disparate digital ministries created by several churches in the province before and during the COVID-19 global pandemic. In addition, in contrast to other online church ministries in the province, the Online Church of Uganda (OCOU) assumed a unique status in two ways. One was in the manner of branding in which the logo of OCOU reflected the official logo of the Church of Uganda.⁴ The other was the personal involvement of Archbishop Kaziimba, whose image became synonymous with OCOU.⁵ Taken together, the preceding two ways in which OCOU gained unique status also meant that the digital ministry received religious endorsement and thus did not appear to conflict with the institutional structures of the Church of Uganda. Moreover, the innovation of OCOU was due to a group of clergy within the Church of Uganda who had embraced digital technology in church ministry. Due to their hybrid position between the institutional sphere of the Church of Uganda and the digital sphere of OCOU, these new online ministers⁶ quickly emerged as potential rivals to other institutional actors, including fellow clergy, Church workers, and Church leaders, a situation that could potentially disrupt the Church's digital mission efforts. Thus, the need to understand how the new online ministers explain, defend, or justify their use of digital technology in their religious work.

The organization of this article is as follows. First, a brief overview of digital technology use in African churches. Followed by a historical survey of key intersections between missions and

technology at various points in the Church of Uganda's history. Next, the theme of authority in digital religion studies, analyzing the role of new online ministers based on Heidi Campbell's categorization of "religious digital creatives" (Campbell, 2021:197). It becomes clear that these ministers fit the category of digital strategists, whose authority stems from their constant and sometimes tense navigation of digital and institutional settings.

Following this, the technological apologetic of these new online ministers is examined, to understand their motivations and how they perceive and position themselves relative to other institutional actors in the Church. The technological apologetic presents these online ministers as collaborators rather than competitors, a dynamic that has the potential to accelerate digital missions within the Church. Furthermore, these new ministers resemble earlier institutional figures in Church history who used technological advantages to advance missions.

However, it is also evident that the new online ministers must continually demonstrate how their integration of technology aligns with Church goals to maintain their status as collaborators. Otherwise, they risk being perceived as competitors, which could disrupt digital missions.

The insights from this article may encourage further exploration of the intersection between technology and power in mission history, particularly in the African context. Additionally, these findings could inspire studies on the particular work of new online ministers in the Church of Uganda or other mainline churches in Africa.

Digital Technology Use in African Churches

The integration of digital technology in African churches has grown significantly, particularly through social media and mobile applications. This research highlights different levels of engagement across the continent, influenced by social, cultural, and infrastructural factors. For instance, Chilwa (2012) observed Nigerian Christian communities adopting virtual worship early on, with some reporting supernatural experiences, indicating the foundational presence of digital ministry well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, White et al. (2016) noted Ghanaian pastors utilize platforms like Facebook for outreach, signalling an increased embrace of digital tools for religious purposes.

In Zimbabwe, Magezi's (2021) research classified pastors into three distinct groups regarding their stance on digital ministry: receptive, restrained, and resistant. This classification reveals the spectrum of attitudes towards digital platforms within religious practices. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly bolstered the reliance on digital technology. For example, in South Africa, pastors leveraged affordable mobile applications such as WhatsApp to stay connected with their congregations, despite obstacles like poor internet connectivity and electricity shortages (Knoetze and Mkhize, 2023).

The pandemic also accelerated digital worship adoption among African immigrant communities abroad. Addo (2021) found that an African Christian community in Italy preferred video conferencing tools like Zoom over social media since it proved a favorable alternative to in-person church services. Hirome and Kim (2024) presented an African diasporic perspective from Asia where East African pastors leveraged excellent social media connectivity to minister to Christians back in Africa and other diaspora locations.

The foregoing literature demonstrates that digital technology has become an essential component of religious practice in African churches, driven by opportunity and necessity. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend highlighting both the successes and challenges associated with the use of digital technology in these contexts.

Mission history provides a foundation for understanding the conflicts associated with the use of digital technology in church ministry. Historical insights reveal links and gaps between modern and earlier societies regarding media and religious scholarship (Lundby, 2013). It has also been shown that “a historical perspective on the relationship between media technologies and religious traditions is crucial to understanding fascinating present-day phenomena” (Lövheim and Campbell, 2017:12). The following section surveys key intersections between missions and technology at diverse times in the history of the Church of Uganda, identifying how certain institutional insiders leveraged technological advancements for missional purposes. This historical overview is foundational for exploring the emergence of new online ministers in the Church of Uganda, whose novel authority appears to place them in tension with other institutional actors.

Technology and missions in the history of the Church of Uganda

Technological innovation has frequently accompanied the spread of Christianity, with the result that “technological progress has generally been understood in mission history as a handmaid to Gospel advance” (Martin, 2019:151). Dana Robert notes how a variety of technological innovations were utilised by missionaries to spread the gospel (Robert, 2009). Missionary appropriation of technology promoted the advance of Christianity, and this was vital in places such as Africa. For instance, “Christian missionaries served as ‘the foremost innovators’ of technological change, including literacy” (Good, 2004: 22). In the case of East Africa, missions have often intersected with technological development in interesting ways that may help enrich our understanding of present use of technology in the Church of Uganda. Four key intersections are evident between missions and technology in the history of the Church of Uganda⁷. The first concerns the missionary Alexander Mackay of the Church Missionary Society. Mackay introduced the modern technology in Uganda. He set up a printing press in Buganda in the latter part of the nineteenth century and printed the first translated portion of the Bible in 1885 (Tuma and Mutibwa, 1978: 94). The Anglican missionaries later employed print technology to produce the first English newsletter, followed by a local language newspaper (Stremlau, 2018:30). Hence, “the colonial missionaries realized early the importance of this medium and its potential for propagating their work in Uganda” (Ssali, 1987:167). Printing technology furthered the missionaries’ earlier efforts to introduce literacy in Buganda. The ability to read became a valuable skill as people gathered to listen to a newspaper reader, and this aided the newspaper industry to flourish (Mawby, 2020:110). Furthermore, some Anglican converts such as Apollo Kagwa used their status as the literates to emerge as important power brokers during and after the Buganda religious wars (Parker and Rathbone, 2007: 102). Kagwa, who later owned a printing press, published local language materials molded upon Christian values (Ward, 2006:167-168). Thus, the early missionaries and converts in Buganda utilised the affordance of print technology to spread the Christian faith.

The second key intersection between missions and technology in the history of the Church of Uganda occurred at the height of the religious wars in Buganda.⁸ These religious wars involved a series of military conflicts among religious groups, initially pitting Christians against Muslims and later Catholics against Protestants, with technology playing a decisive role in securing Protestant victory. In 1892, military technology in the form of Captain Fredrick Lugard’s Maxim gun was brought to the aid of the Protestants, who had been outnumbered by

the Catholics, with the former group emerging victorious (Low, 2009:144-145). The Anglicans assumed the political leadership of Buganda, and this affected significantly the church's mission with the result that "Ugandan Anglicanism tended to spread top-down. The chiefs in Buganda became agents of conversion among their people" (Ward, 2006:167). Thus, Lugard's superior military technology afforded advantage to the Anglican chiefs who also gained considerable influence as church insiders since "most of the chiefs combined the roles of church leadership and chieftainship" (Niringiye, 2016:42). But in this advantaged status, the nascent Church of Uganda was susceptible to several compromises which would drain the church's impetus for mission and lead to a revival (Ward and Wild-Wood, 2012:3).

A third key intersection between missions and technology in the history of the Church of Uganda goes back to the East African Revival. The genesis of this important African movement is linked to the internal "dissatisfaction with the spiritual state of the Native Anglican Church of Uganda," and the missionary work of a group of Ugandans at a hospital in Gahini, present-day Rwanda (Ward and Wild-Wood, 2012:3). The Revival was met with concern by the traditional church leadership who found that "the preaching of a radical equality between clergy and laity, between Europeans and Africans, was threatening" (Ward and Wild-Wood, 2012:5). However, the Revivalists were also a people often on the move and thus leveraged modern forms of transport technology, bicycles particularly. The Revivalists "were often the first owners of bicycles within their neighborhoods, travelling to nearby fellowship meetings, or faraway conventions over national borders" (Ward and Wild-Wood, 2012:108). Relatedly, Jason Bruner notes that "revivalists travelled because to live the life of salvation was to live peripatetically" (Bruner, 2017: 87). He adds that in addition to transport technologies, the revivalists also utilized print technology through letters, and the postal system to stay in communication with one another (2017: 87). Thus, the urge to stay connected together, whether through bicycle or post mail (that combines print and transport technology) characterized the revivalists as a unique group of insiders who leveraged the new technologies of transportation for missions at a time of rapid technological developments.

The fourth key intersection between missions and technology in the history of the Church of Uganda begins with the increased technological development in the run-up to the country's independence. The colonial government established Uganda's pioneer broadcasting service in 1953, which featured a radio service (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:13). The founding of the national television followed in 1963 (Jenga, 2017:56). Radio and television was thus the key

broadcast media technology in the new state of Uganda, although firmly controlled by the government (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:14). However, Jenga notes that this accommodated the Anglicans, Catholics, and Muslims on the national broadcasters with slots to communicate their religious messages (2017:56). The liberalization of the media industry in the early 1990s freed the Church of Uganda to fully utilize the technology of broadcast media in missions. However, the liberalization process also called for significant financial outlay by the church to establish broadcasting stations. Thus, the appropriation of media broadcasting technology for missions was related to church finances, and wealthier Anglican dioceses⁹ exerted their presence on the airwaves, radio particularly. Even then, the Church of Uganda lagged as Pentecostal churches dominated the Christian presence on the electronic broadcast media scene (Jenga, 2017:62). However, the Church of Uganda entered into a strategic partnership with an international media ministry, and this enabled it to greatly utilize radio technology for missions.¹⁰ Two Church of Uganda clergy, alumni of Western Theological Seminary, who envisioned a new way that the church would engage in radio ministry, initiated the church's partnership with Words of Hope (WOH). The two clergy, "students Titus Baraka and Stephen Kaziimba, became involved with WOH while studying at Western and advocated for the organization to expand to Uganda" (Rice, 2020). The Words of Hope radio ministry in Uganda has now expanded to include content in 13 local languages (Words of Hope, 2021). The radio broadcasts also reach several dioceses in the Church of Uganda. Thus, even when the economics of electronic broadcast media appeared to hinder the Church's missional efforts over the airwaves, a pair of local clergy developed a strategic plan of harnessing the technology of radio for missions.

Regarding television, the church was only able to enter into a partnership to establish a television station a few years ago.¹¹ Nonetheless, the Church of Uganda's efforts to fully embrace radio and television in missions are occurring in a time of rapid advances in digital technology, which has necessitated several radio and television broadcast stations to incorporate digital technologies. The church's gradual acquisition of the technologies of radio and television for missional purposes has thus blended with its uptake of digital technology in Christian ministry.

The above review attempted to trace four major points in the interface between missions and technology in the history of the Church of Uganda. Four technologies are critical in the history of the institution. Print, military, transport, and electronic broadcast media featured prominently in the Church of Uganda's efforts to advance Christianity in the country, and thus,

technology is vital in the Church's missional activities. The printing press, Maxim gun, bicycle, and radio appear as respective representations of the aforementioned technologies. However, it also emerges that these technologies privileged certain groups of actors in the Church of Uganda and highlighted differences between these actors and the others who were either unable or had not yet seen the need to embrace technology. Print technology privileged the literate converts in late nineteenth-century Buganda, such as Apollo Kaggwa, who later attained considerable influence in church and state (Parker and Rathbone, 2007: 102). The advantages afforded by superior military technology to Protestants in the aftermath of religious wars in Buganda were utilized by Baganda Anglican chiefs who gained considerable influence as church insiders since 'most of the chiefs combined the roles of church leadership and chieftainship' (Niringiye, 2016:42). New transport technologies, bicycles particularly, were utilized by members of the East African Revival to spread the revival and to stay in communication with other revivalists (Bruner 2017: 4, 90). Bicycles characterized the revivalists as embracers of something new (Bruner 2017:87). This characterization synchronized with the revivalist's confrontation with the traditional church leaders to repent of their sins, and thus, the bicycle highlighted the differences between the former and the latter. The technologies of electronic broadcast media emerged about the same time as an independent Uganda, and the Church of Uganda got its share of airtime on national radio and television along with Catholics and Muslims (Jenga, 2017:56). However, the liberalization process of the early 1990s in the country meant that only those Church of Uganda dioceses that possessed economic power would utilize the technology of electronic broadcast media, especially radio for missions. Also, in successive years, a pair of Indigenous clergy strategized how the Church of Uganda could utilize radio for missions, and this resulted in a partnership with Words of Hope, an international media ministry. The Church also later entered into another partnership and launched a television. However, these strategic partnerships also signified that the utilization of technology for missions depended on partnerships with powerful external organizations or other influential actors in the country. However, by this time, digital technology had spread in the country. Even more, digital technology promised the Church of Uganda a new way to overcome its limitations associated with economics and strategic partnerships regarding electronic broadcast technology. It is observable that "in every field of communication, the move to digital technologies lowers the threshold for access" (Martin, 2019:153). Thus, digital technology was timely in the missional efforts of the Church of Uganda.

Digital technology begun to feature prominently in the Church of Uganda's missional agenda in 2016 when the church's 10-year master strategic plan spelled out that, "the church shall embrace social media to enhance her visibility and use it to advance the gospel and Christian values" (Church of Uganda, 2016:14). The church's intention to incorporate social media in the strategic plan came due to its concern about the "negative attitude towards social media" (Church of Uganda, 2016:14). In addition, in comparison to mass media, social media is valued in digital missions for its ability to enable spiritual transformation through the personal connection with people (Terry and Payne, 2013:173). Terry and Payne's observation goes hand in hand with a study of two churches in the Church of Uganda's Kampala diocese that indicated social media's ministry potential in enabling the spiritual development of youth (Hirome, 2019:66). Indeed, Kampala diocese ranks far ahead of the rest of the dioceses in the embrace of social media for ministry.¹² Yet the Church of Uganda faces the need to develop specific strategies to engage all other dioceses as a way of achieving the church's set vision of leveraging social media for missions by 2025. Social media technology has also been characterized by a tendency to breach institutional boundaries (Hutchings, 2017: 257). Thus, in developing strategies for how churches can utilize social media, the theme of authority begins to feature prominently since the internet has the potential to undermine top-down authority in religious institutions (Baker, 2005).

Theme of religious authority in studies of digital religion

The rise of digital media has fundamentally altered numerous facets of contemporary religious observance, particularly in how religious authority is expressed and negotiated. Traditionally, religious authority rests with the institutions, sacred texts, and recognised leaders, such as clergy or religious scholars, who have served as gatekeepers of spiritual knowledge and practice (Euben, 2013:184). However, the web offers a decentralized platform where laypeople, influencers, and digital creators can challenge these structures, contributing to the emergence of a "democratizing space" on the internet (Teusner, 2013:182). Religious organisations often attempt to navigate this landscape by creating official online presences that offer doctrinally correct information, as well as by using digital tools to engage younger audiences. However, they face challenges from both individual users and religious leaders who operate outside these institutional frameworks. The OCOU is an example of a digital presence that arose from within a traditional religious organization, in this case, the Church of Uganda, whose new online ministers quickly appeared as possible rivals with other institutional actors, with this subtle rivalry related to the issue of religious authority.

Pauline Cheong (2013) evaluates the understanding of religious authority within the digital environment. Cheong points to three logics that explain how religious leaders respond to digital technologies. She observes that the first two logics represent broad concepts of how religious authority interacts with the internet. These include “the logic of disjuncture and displacement, and the logic of continuity and complementarity” (Cheong, 2013:74). In the former case, the internet has come to be “seen by some offline leaders as disruptive or destructive” (Cheong, 2013:78). While the latter case approaches the internet as “supportive and complementary of religious authority” as it is gradually and systematically integrated on a personal and institutional basis (Cheong, 2013:74). Cheong frames the third logic around the tension religious that leaders face in navigating both online and offline worlds, which manifests as “the logic of dialectics and paradox” (Cheong, 2013:82). This logic suggests that the internet simultaneously undermines and reinforces religious authority, presenting avenues for conflict while also fostering opportunities for mutual understanding and adaptation. (Cheong, 2013:82). The logic is also key in Heidi Campbell’s (2021) categorisation of specific authority roles that appear in online contexts and is thus important in understanding the authority of the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda.

Campbell’s typology of new religious authorities in Christian communities

Campbell offers a typology of an emerging type of religious authorities in Christian communities, whom she terms religious digital creatives (RDCs), and their specific roles in the online environment (Campbell, 2021). Campbell explores the relationship between this emerging type of religious authorities “and recognized religious leaders of the communities in which they seek to operate” (2021:41). The relationship between these emerging religious authorities and traditional leaders according to Cheong’s “logic of dialectics and paradox” (Cheong, 2013:82). This, particularly how the internet “challenges AND empowers emerging and established authorities simultaneously, but in different ways” (Campbell, 2021:41). This implies a complex and double-sided affordance of digital technology and hence the need to categorise digital authority in religious communities.

Campbell categorises the emerging types of religious authorities in Christian communities as “digital entrepreneurs, digital spokespersons, and digital strategists” (Campbell, 2021:49). Unlike the other two categories of emerging religious authorities, digital strategists have “institutional affiliation and digital influence” (Campbell, 2021:197). Hence, the category of

digital strategists fits the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda. Campbell also describes digital strategists as “individuals with a foot firmly planted in two worlds” (Campbell, 2021:128). She further notes that online ministers represent a form of digital strategist employed by the church to perform ministry functions within an institutional setting but also engage online technology to further their work in new ways (Campbell, 2021:143). Their roles may be “as a priest or pastor, and they choose to use digital media in creative ways to facilitate new forms of engagement with their members” (Campbell, 2021:144). She also notes that for the digital strategist, “one foot rests in the religious organizations to which they are committed, and one foot stands in digital culture where they see the importance of adapting their work and official calling to the tools and opportunities it provides” (Campbell, 2021:128). Thus, in the straddling between their institutional and digital spaces, digital strategists find themselves “at odds with their institutions, which may view technology as suspect, or balk at the idea of altering established communication practices or ministry processes” (Campbell, 2021:128). Furthermore, the authority of digital strategists is “based on institutional expertise combined with digital experimentation that raises the profile and impact of their work in their sphere of religious influence” (Campbell, 2021:52). This implies that digital strategists must undertake a delicate balancing act, which “requires them to carefully frame their digital work in distinct ways in relation to their religious communities or institutions” (Campbell, 2021:195). She observes that a framing suggesting a conflict with traditional beliefs or structures positions digital strategists as competitors, whereas a presentation that aligns with their institution’s “core mission or structure” portrays them as collaborators (Campbell, 2021:195-196). Thus, conflict between digital strategists and other institutional actors depends a lot on how the former frame their technological activities.

The technological apologetic of new online ministers

According to Campbell, “the technological apologetic is a story RDCs tell in order to frame their digital-creative work, perceived authority and religious affiliations in a distinctive light” (Campbell, 2021:170). In this regard, examining the technological apologetic of new online ministers aids in understanding their motivations and the way they perceive and present themselves in relation to other institutional actors in the Church of Uganda.

Methodology

The methodology for identifying the technological apologetic of digital strategists involves a three-step process: first, identifying the motivations behind the work and its potential impact, and then analyzing these factors using relational dialectic theory (Campbell, 2021:171). The

relational dialectic theory draws from Cheong's "logic of dialectics and paradox" (Cheong, 2013:82), which was reviewed previously. Accordingly, the new online ministers, who are a type of digital strategists, are analyzed under the relational dialectic theory category of "stability vs change" (Campbell, 2021:171). Furthermore, due to the focus of this study, the technological apologetics of new online ministers are analyzed with regard to their relationship with the Church of Uganda and specifically with other institutional actors or "those they work with and institutional or organizational leaders" (Campbell, 2021:188).

The three-step process to identify the technological apologetic of new online ministers

1. Identifying the motivations for their digital work
2. Identifying how they frame the impact of their work
3. Analysing the motivations and impact of their work using the "stability vs change" (Campbell, 2021:171) category of the relational dialectic theory.

OCOU has a media presence across five social media platforms including, X (Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. The YouTube channel was chosen for this study given the global popularity of the platform and the regular frequency of OCOU video postings that run from Monday to Saturday. The data collection was in September and October 2024.

Some of the key considerations in researching on YouTube include determining the study design, research strategy, measurement and limitations (Sui, Sui, & Rhodes, 2022: 4). In terms of study design, this study aims for qualitative outcomes and is interested in certain creators and videos on the OCOU channel. However, a limited quantitative analysis of the YouTube statistics as provided on the channel homepage helps offer a general understanding of OCOU's YouTube activity.

Regarding research strategy, this study is interested in only new online ministers. Ten of these ministers were selected according to the sampling criteria below.

1. Have been active on the OCOU YouTube platform since its year of inception.
2. Attached to a COU parish or chaplaincy, namely, an offline community.

For measurement, this study is interested in textual context obtained from the video transcripts of content featuring the sampled new online ministers. Finally, with regard to contextual limitations, the data gathered was limited to OCOU YouTube platform. This translates into

contextual concerns such as videos removed but which may have proved beneficial to understanding more about the technological apologetic of OCOU clergy.

Findings and discussion

A query of the channel information from the YouTube page indicated that as of October 2024, the OCOU YouTube site (www.youtube.com/@onlinechurchofuganda9532) had 4,450 subscribers, 3,183 uploaded videos, and 186,370 total views since joining YouTube on 28 Jun 2021. This means the channel averaged approximately 1,400 subscribers per year, around 1,000 video uploads per year, about 62,000 views annually, and roughly 170 daily views.

The content on OCOU's YouTube channels falls into three main categories: morning prayers, lunch-hour services, and extra programs. The first two categories run from Monday to Friday, with morning prayers scheduled from 5:30–7 AM and lunch-hour services from 1–2 PM. The extra programs vary and, appear during the weekends. Examples include Women Connect on Monday, men on Tuesday, Family Life Hour on Thursday, Friday overnight prayers, and Children and Youth Lounge on Saturday. Occasionally, OCOU also relays content from in-person services of the Church of Uganda (COU), such as the consecration of a new diocesan bishop.

The content on OCOU either streams YouTube channels live, via the dedicated OCOU Zoom sessions, or is recorded and uploaded later. OCOU has a dedicated team handling the streaming and uploading of content to the YouTube channel. As a result, OCOU clergy are not directly involved in technical operations; instead, they log in to the Zoom platform from their locations at the appointed time. However, there have been instances where clergy recorded their sermons beforehand, which were then played back by the technical team at the scheduled time during a Zoom session while simultaneously streamed on YouTube.

Feedback tends to be immediate on Zoom, where more people log in for sessions. However, the permanence of OCOU content on YouTube, compared to Zoom, makes the latter a not appealing medium for research purposes. For OCOU content on YouTube, feedback is commonly provided through likes or thumbs-up reactions. Comments are another form of feedback, although less frequent. One of the most commented-on YouTube videos is from July 2021, introducing OCOU. It has received 79 likes and 12 comments so far. Some comments are from three years ago, such as:

- “This is great. Let's continue to pray and support God's work” (enockmusasizi2923, 2021).
- “We bless the Lord's name for this new initiative to reach out to the world online and beyond” (queenakankwasa4840, 2021).

Comments from two years ago include:

- “Our God has remembered the Church of Uganda. We hope to use it. May God guide you” (dorothymigadde3822, 2022).

More comments that are recent include:

- “Glad to be here” (lyndanabayiinda1722, 2024).
- “I love you, I’m in Rwanda” (TuyizereFrorantine-d3x, 2024).

This variation in comment timing highlights an advantage of YouTube over Zoom: it allows viewers to interact with content and provide feedback as long as the content remains available. While YouTube is not ideal for instant two-way interaction, its perpetual public record of OCOU content and viewer feedback makes it a valuable platform. It is good for understanding the motivations of OCOU’s online ministers and their work.

A search was conducted on the OCOU YouTube site to locate videos featuring each of the ten new online ministers sampled in this study. There were approximately 200 videos featuring the sampled ministers. The analysed content from 200 videos covered all three main categories: morning prayers, lunch-hour services, and extra programs. The type of extra program selected for analysis was the Saturday overnight prayers. The ten sampled online ministers feature in the above three types of video content involving prayer and worship services, thus making these videos a suitable data set for this research, since the aim is to understand the motivations of these ministers and how they frame their work.

Thereafter, the search terms 'digital,' 'internet,' and 'technology,' were used to narrow down the selection to 35 videos. This was because the research aimed at understanding the online ministers’ motives and presentation of their digital work. The videos were transcribed, allowing for a textual analysis to aid in identifying the ministers' motivations and how they framed their work. The guiding queries were; why do they do their digital work? How do they explain the impact of their digital work?

Motivations: Two key themes emerged to highlight the motivation of new online ministers: discerning boundary-breaking connections and emphasizing their task to spread the gospel.

These themes suggest that online ministers go to their digital work to proclaim God's message to a broad audience.

In introducing the OCOU, Rev. Lydia Kitayimbwa states, “the online church is a place set apart for you and me to meet in the media space and form a community of believers” (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 0:25). This implies that the boundary-breaking capabilities of the OCOU as aided by digital technology, enable reaching a broad audience, fostering the inclusion of new members as the gospel spreads and leading to the formation of digital communities. Relatedly, Rev. David Asiimwe asserts, “Imagine how many people will hear the gospel” (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 28:25). An imagination is driven by the boundary-breaking attribute of digital technology.

The broad audience Rev. David Asiimwe envisions is implied by Rev. Benjamin Muhereza to transcend tribal affiliations and social status. Rev. Benjamin recognizes the power of digital technology to cut across social stratifications as he challenges the faithful to “always invite a friend to also share the blessings of being with one another, regardless of your education background, regardless of the job that you do” (Online Church of Uganda, 2024, 31:02).

Rev. Hillary Jaffu sees this broad audience to be reached by the gospel as including youth, stating that “we expect that this will impact many lives, especially the youth” (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 0:30). For Rev. Hillary, digital technology is an enabler that allows access to young people who may be difficult to reach in physical worship spaces but can be easily engaged through digital platforms.

The boundary-breaking concept is carried further by Rev. David Munobwa envisions a gospel reach extending to the diaspora, stating, “thousands of people are being reached; we have brothers and sisters in the Arab world, and this is the only platform they have to hear the word of God” (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 0:30).

The aim of harnessing digital tools to proclaim the gospel is also evident in Rev. Gillian Okello’s prayer “Father, I pray that you will take the online Church of Uganda to another level of proclaiming the Gospel digitally through digital means” (Online Church of Uganda, 2023, 1:04), and in Rev. Paul Wasswa Ssembiro’s plea, “let us reach the world through any gadget God has given us as we proclaim the gospel” (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 28:54). A similar sentiment is expressed by Rev. Alex Kamoga when he says, “we are thankful especially for the way God continues to work through this ministry.” (Online Church of Uganda, 2022, 0:14).

Thus, the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda demonstrate a motivation to use digital media to effectively proclaim the gospel to a wide audience.

Framing their work: A key theme that emerged in identifying how the new online ministers framed the impact of their work is affirmation and adaptation the Church of Uganda. The new online ministers affirmed their religious work in alignment with the Church of Uganda while also advocating for the adaptation of technology to innovate religious practices within the institution.

Rev. Lovincer Katana Kanyike's plea for sound biblical teaching affirms the idea of religious work. She states, "But like faithful biblical Scholars that we are at the online Church of Uganda permit me kind of lay for us a background to what is happening in the second letter to the Corinthians" (Online Church of Uganda, 2023, 1:10). Rev. Lovincer affirms the sound biblical teaching that should characterize ministers of the Church of Uganda, particularly in digital spaces where individuals can easily access a variety of biblical hermeneutics, including some that may be questionable.

Affirming religious work also appears in Rev. Lydia's characterization of her digital work. She states, "The online church of Uganda is allowing us to meet with our leaders, to meet with our bishops, to meet with our reverends, to meet with our archbishop" (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 0:38). Rev. Lydia's appeal to the religious hierarchy of the Church of Uganda affirms her alignment with the institution.

At the same time, her invitation to both the religious hierarchy and lay Christians to engage in the digital space advocates for adapting technology to innovate religious practices within the institution. Similarly, Rev. Damba Simon Peter extends this call to lay Christians, stating, "I want to encourage everyone, please subscribe let's keep on growing in the Lord even in this realm because our God is not limited by anything" (Online Church of Uganda, 2021, 0:38-1:06). The idea of adapting technology to innovate religious practices is also evident in Rev. David Munobwa's perspective on how technological innovation can renew the Church through technologically awakened church leaders. According to him "for some good time, the Church of Uganda was a sleeping giant. And one of the areas where we were even snoring in sleep is in the digital migration but I want to thank God for COVID-19, with all the challenges that it posed to us it came with the advantage of opening the eyes of our leaders to the digital world" (Online Church of Uganda, 2023, 27:28).

Thus, the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda frame their use of digital media to affirm alignment with traditional religious work, while also advocating for the adaptation of technology to innovate practices within the institution.

Analysing the motivations and framing of their work: In applying relational dialectics theory to understand digital strategists' technological apologetics, Campbell highlights the key tension as one between stability and change. This tension arises from “balancing static, prescribed institutional roles with changes technological integration introduces into their work practice” (Campbell, 2021:188). Such tension is revealed in an analysis of the themes that characterise how the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda present their motivations and frame their work.

Their motivations reveal that new online ministers leverage digital technology's boundary-breaking capabilities to reach a broad audience, while consistently emphasising their task of advancing the gospel, which underscores their institutional role. The tension between stability and change is evident as new online ministers balance their institutional role of proclaiming the gospel, representing stability, with their strategic use of digital technology in religious practice, representing change.

The way they frame their work shows that new online ministers affirm their alignment with the Church of Uganda while advocating for the adaptation of digital technology to innovate religious practices within the institution. By affirming that their digital work aligns with the Church of Uganda, they at the same time emphasise that adapting digital technology is simply a means to accomplish their religious mission. In this way, they assert their belief “that technology can enhance institutions rather than destabilise them” (Campbell, 2021:188).

Thus, the technological apologetic of new online ministers as framed regarding the institutional actors of the Church of Uganda, including their fellow clergy and leaders, emphasizes stability in their religious work in alignment with the Church, even as certain qualities of this work evolve with the adaptation of digital technology. This positions the new online ministers as collaborators rather than competitors in advancing missions in the Church of Uganda.

Conclusion

The stability in their religious work, even as certain qualities of this work evolve with the adaptation of digital technology, presents the new online ministers in the Church of Uganda as collaborators with other institutional actors in furthering digital missions in the Church. This also relates them to earlier institutional actors in the history of the Church of Uganda who used

technological advantage to advance missions. Yet, the new online ministers' continued articulation of how their integration of technology into ministry concurs with the goals of the Church of Uganda is vital to maintain their status as collaborators; otherwise, they may appear to compete with other institutional actors, and this upends potentially the Church's digital missions. Indeed, it is observable that the OCOU "was never designed to replace the local church; it is a supplemental ministry" (Hughes, 2022). A continued articulation of the same can serve to project the new online ministers as collaborators rather than competitors.

Furthermore, the new online ministers' integration of social media technology in ministry appears positive for the missional agenda of the Church of Uganda since "much advantage to mission lies with a technology that readily adapts to local expression" (Martin, 2019:153). The technological activities of the new online ministers appear to add a smartphone to the printing press, Maxim gun, bicycle, and radio in the history of missions and technology in the Church of Uganda. But history also reminds us that "technologies do not arrive by themselves or develop uniformly across populations. Along the way to widespread usage, they highlight and exacerbate inequalities of status and economics" (Martin, 2019:155). Thus, the conflicting situations that accompany the use of digital technology in missions should keep us reflecting on how best to lessen the associated inequalities.

Notes

¹ We understand mission as 'the total calling of the church to make known the Gospel in life, word, and deed in a local place as it participates in God's mission' (Goheen, 2022: 192). Conversely, missions are 'particular enterprises within the total mission which have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective' (Newbigin, 1982: 149).

² This article will use "Church of Uganda."

³ The Online Church of Uganda (OCOU) was officially launched on July 4th 2021 across five social media channels (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTeCTqnf8-I>

⁴ The logo of the OCOU like that of the Church of Uganda (COU) has the image of a miter hanging above the intertwined images of a bible, cross and dove. The logos also share the same purple background color. The difference is that the images in the logo of OCOU are encircled while those in the COU are placed upon a shield.

⁵ Archbishop Kaziimba is an avid supporter of the utilisation of technology in church ministry and often communicates on twitter. He also appeared regularly in the one of the major programs of OCOU

⁶ "New online ministers" is used to differentiate the clergy affiliated with the OCOU from other online ministers in Church of Uganda.

⁷ The institution traces its history to the 1875 arrival in Buganda of missionaries from the Church Mission Society. The Church of Uganda became a self-governing institution in 1961

and the first native archbishop was installed in 1965. The province of the Church of Uganda is currently comprised of 37 dioceses.

⁸ The period in Buganda kingdom following the 1886 martyrdom of Christians and leading to the 1900 advent of British colonialism has often been referred to as the period of religious wars.

⁹ For instance, Namirembe FM, launched in 2011 belongs to the oldest and one of wealthiest dioceses in the Anglican Church of Uganda.

¹⁰ The partnership with the words of hope ministry also includes Uganda Christian university and this joint venture begun in 2006. <https://churchofuganda.org/local-partners/>

¹¹ Family television was launched in 2019. <https://coufamilytv.co.ug/page/about-us>

¹² For example, All Saints Cathedral Kampala, has the highest number of Facebook likes (over 15,000 as of September 01, 2024) of all the Facebooks pages of churches in the entire Church of Uganda.

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