

THE USE OF ICT AND SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES AS A TOOL FOR EVANGELISM: THE ROLE OF DIVISION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Social Networking Websites have become forces to reckon with in the task of information dissemination in the 21st Century. Having a divine mandate to evangelize the world as pre-pointer to the second advent of Jesus Christ, these two forces have become tools of invaluable worth for the Christian who realizes and believes this mandate and is committed to active participation towards its realization. This study revealed that the Division of Spiritual Life in Babcock University have been able to effectively use ICT and Social Networking Sites as a tool for evangelism with over Five hundred thousand (500,000+) views on our social networking sites and over two thousand (2,000+) online members all over the world and the radio broadcasting outreach have been able to reach-out to the entire university and the hostile environment (15,000+) through its evangelistic programmes. The google plus page has had more than four hundred thousand views and over four thousand visit on YouTube. The study further opined that there is more to be done and achieved. Just as the name implies – social networking, which connote individuals connected by common interest or community. Members of the church have a greater role to play by inviting and encouraging their families, friends, colleagues and associate to visit pages read posted messages and comment, commend or share the ones that have touched their inner most needs.

***Index Terms:* ICT, Evangelism, Social Network, Spiritual life.**

INTRODUCTION

Being able to constantly stay in touch with the rest of the world by whatever means possible is unarguably one of the desires of humanity, regardless of status or beliefs. This has consequently made Information and Communication Technology (ICT) a tool of choice in the hands of every individual towards salvaging this desire. It is no more news, however, that we are in the final days of earth's history, as many notable scholars of theology and religion continue to emphasize (Bolu, 2011); and the sacred duty of evangelism to the world given by Jesus Christ Himself to every believing Christian as one of the pre-pointers to His second advent (see Matthew 24:14) has become more important now than it has ever before been. It thus becomes necessary to focus evangelism efforts towards where people would most always be found (social networks); and to use the most formidable tool to reach out to them in this zone(s) (ICT). Information and Communication Technology can be used in many ways to spread information within and outside the church. In Nigeria, young people are turning to the internet to find personal, [professional], social and religious information and ecclesiastical institutions are devoting more resources to improve their presence on the web (Bolu, 2011).

“The great commission of Jesus Christ is that the gospel should be taken to the ends of the earth through various evangelistic activities (Bible, Matthew 28: 19 – 20, c.f. 24:14). Today, however, the Social Networking Websites and the Internet have emerged as utilities that can be tapped into, providing a method of communication that is fast, powerful, and interactive. Today, the world is shrinking into a global village through the Internet and the outreach strategies used by Apostle Paul of old can now be achieved through effective use of the worldwide web. In order to capture the potential of the Internet in evangelizing, Christians and churches must learn to use the power of these new Information and Communication Technologies to propagate the everlasting gospel, (James Nored, 2009: Ogu E.C., Ogbonna A., Omotunde A., Izang A., Ajike E.O. 2014).

Murray, J. (2011). defined Information and Communication Technology as “a term that stresses the role of unified communications (achieved by synergizing telephone and computer networks) and the integration of telecommunications (cable and wireless communication media), computer systems and enterprise software, middleware, storage, and audio-visual systems, in enabling users [or clients] to access, process, store, transmit,

and manipulate data and information.”

According to Asserman, Stanley; Faust, Katherine (2014). “a Social Network Websites is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (usually individuals and organizations / brands) and a set of the dyadic [two-way interactions] ties between these actors.” Popular examples of Social Network Websites platforms as at the time of this research include: Google+, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Email platforms, Blogs, LinkedIn, Vimeo, Flickr, Tumblr, Skype, Myspace, hi5, Digg, Orkut, Friendster, to mention but a few.

Babcock University emanated from the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA), which was established on September 17, 1959. And Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) in 1975. It became known as Babcock University by virtue of Decree 9, of 1993 when the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999 issued it the certificate of registration as a private university. Babcock University is the Premier Private University in Nigeria and a Faith Based institution.

Babcock University Division of Spiritual Life (DSL) comprises of eight (8) units manned by volunteers, students, full-time and part-time workers: University Pastor’s Office and administration; Chaplaincy; Missions and Outreach; Stewardship and Development; Worship Centers Administration; In-reach and Prayer; the University Church; Church-District Affairs and SDA Church organization Liaison.

The Division of Spiritual Life is an extension of the compassion, care, and concern of our Lord Jesus Christ to all. It seeks to help students, staff, faculty, and their families develop genuine Christian character motivated by love and self-discipline, and establish a mature relationship with God, humankind, and the entire creation. DSL aims at affirming Christ on campus through holistic spiritual caregiving and enhancing spirituality. DSL teaches and encourages the internalization of Christian doctrines, modesty, and moral behavior as believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventist Church. DSL fosters a spiritual environment through prayers, Bible studies, stewardship, community outreaches and various dynamic Christian programmes and seminars. The division is made up of fourteen chaplains, thirty pastors serving in the university and three from the university high school. There are seven adjunct staff serving in the area of ICT and social networking in promoting evangelism, (2014-15 DSL Report).

literature review

Study Objective

The general objective of this study is to appraise the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as Social Networking Websites via the internet as tools for evangelism in Babcock University.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- I. Investigate the various evangelistic approaches used by the Division of Spiritual Life in Babcock University.
- II. To determine the ICT and Social Networking Websites Evangelistic Platforms used by the Division of Spiritual Life in Babcock University.

Evangelism in Babcock University

Evangelism is the proclamation of the Good news of the salvation in Jesus Christ with a view to bringing about the reconciliation of sinners to God the Father through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. It is derived from the Greek noun *euangelion*, Good News, and verb *evangelizomai* meaning to announce or proclaim or bring good news. Good news can be told in a variety of ways. This includes using various media in spreading the gospel, basically evangelism seeks to people into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Elwell, Walter A, (1984). According to Ministry Magazine, (2015). citing the work of Ellen G. White (1952) Evangelism has always been the compelling motivation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Evangelism is essential for the growth and survival of the church. It is said that if the church ceases to evangelize, it is just a generation away from extinction. "Rescue the perishing" is the watchword of evangelism; it is also the ultimate objective of Adventist education, for education's ministry is designed to "restore in man the image of his Maker."

The division of spiritual life is the spiritual chair of evangelical affairs of the University and also plans the Spiritual care of the University in line with the world Seventh day Adventist calendar. Adventist schools are evangelistic centers where the administrators, faculty, and students, whatever their academic discipline, can function as evangelists. These institutions are fountains of spiritual inspiration that awaken in the youth a strong desire for a relationship with Christ.

Babcock University seeks to accomplish what is comprehended in the great gospel commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). It is no coincidence that the goals of Adventist education are

inseparably linked with the goals and purposes of the church, because "in the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one." Ellen White made this observation: "It is the degree of moral power pervading a school that is a test of its prosperity. Students in Adventist schools represent a wide range of religious beliefs, attitudes, and concerns. This mixture presents an evangelistic challenge that must be met with the power of the Holy Spirit. The great challenge to the Adventist members of the school family is to exemplify the life of Christ to non-Adventist students, who are measuring their words against their actions. They must know Him, the Author of eternal life.

Evangelistic Approach Used by Babcock University

- **Classroom Evangelism**

Babcock University have been able to include the following compulsory courses into their curriculum; (Life and Teaching of Christ (GEDS102) which is to be offered by 100 level students, Chapel Seminar (GEDS 011-012) which will be offered every semester from 100 level – Final year, Fundamentals of Christian Believes (GEDS 205). Babcock University students are expected to offer this at the 1st Semester of their 200 level. The classroom offers the best opportunity for the Adventist Pastors and Chaplains to impart the knowledge of God to students, which will serve as a Spiritual Nuggets in their daily life activities within and outside Babcock University.

- **Worship Centre Allocation**

The university has 21 worships centers within the school premises. Students are been assigned to a worship center by the Chaplaincy Unit of the Division of Spiritual Life within and outside the campus to worship. Through Preaching, Bible study, worship, and music during church service periods, Students will be introduced to Christ, who is their best Friend and Saviour. Paul cautioned that we have to preach the Word "with all long-suffering" (2 Tim. 4:2).

- **Hall Worship**

The University Student Development in conjunction with the Chaplaincy Unit structured this programme with the objectives of building an egalitarian citizen of the University and the nation, through health talks, prayer sections, social matters, exams and success tips etc. it has helped to establish a bond of friendship between the 16 hostels Hall Administrators and Students to address social and spiritual issues that will enhance their relationship with Christ.

- **Hostel Visitation.**

The best evangelistic approach in winning souls is the one-to-one approach. Which has been the key routine of the Division of Spiritual Life through visitation of the 16 hostels located within the two campuses in Babcock University. The university chaplains visit at least twice a week to pray with students who needs counselling and prayer request. The Division also have trained student chaplains who also reside in this hostels to serve as a middle man between the Division and the students on cases that requires pastoral intervention. And also assist the hall administrators during hall worships.

- **Radio/TV Ministry**

The Division of Spiritual Life also have a dedicated hour/sections in the Babcock University Radio Station called “HOPE FM” and HHHtv programme (Hi TV) to broadcast live steaming and recorded evangelical series to spread the message across and beyond Babcock being a medium that can be used to get the mass due to the range of the radio and TV station. In conglomeration of (Bible, Matthew 28: 19 – 20, c.f. 24:14). To spread the message.

- **Week of Prayer and Spiritual Emphasis**

During the beginning/closing of every semester (Summer Inclusive) of the school calendar year, the Division of Spiritual Life holds a power filled week of prayers and Spiritual Emphasis, through the invitation of international and indigenious Seventh day Adventist Church pastors and ministers in various fields of interest and profession to minister to the students and staff of the university, with the aim of reviving and reforming the spiritual life of the staff and students. The Week of Prayer and Spiritual Emphasis contributes to the spiritual life of the students and staff through sermons, musical presentations, drama, and health talks. This Outreach/In-reach has led to the conversion of students into the “Adventist faith” through baptism.

- **Training disciples for service (chaplaincy training)**

An Educated Ministry is an honor to God. Because of the diverse groups that a modern witness for the gospel has to face, formal ministerial training is necessary. Study should be given to the best methods for fitting consecrated young men and

women to bear responsibility and to win souls for Christ." Ellen G. White (1943) *counsels to Parents and Teachers*. Babcock University Division of Spiritual Life in conglomeration and affirming to this statement has been organizing an annual Chaplaincy Preparatory Training for new and old Students who have taken interest in Student Chaplaincy. Non-Adventist students have also expressed great interest in partaking in the exercise/training of chaplains by the division.

- **Drama Ministry**

Division of spiritual life is partnering with various drama group within the campus as a medium of evangelism. Some of the drama group in campus includes the following; *Xpression Concept Drama Group, Babcock University Literary Arts Society (BULAS), Pioneer Church Drama* etc. The Division is now in partnership with *Brain Child Movie Revolution*; to produce campus life movies that will serve as a spiritual nuggets to the students.

- **Community and Outreach Center**

The Division of Spiritual Life have been able to implement a community and outreach center, which is located within the hostile community (Ilishan-Remo). The main purpose of establishing this evangelistic strategy is to bring the gospel directly on a one on one personnel ministry with the community members who come to collect clothing's, money, food items, home electronics, counselling and Christian literatures. The concept has been able to meet the spiritual and welfare needs of the parent institution.

III ICT AND SOCIAL NETWORKS EVAGELISM

It is true that Great Commission evangelism may not be the primary reason a church gets involved in social networking. The goal may be more about in-reach than about outreach. There are many ways and many areas in which pastors and congregations could use social networking sites: bulletin announcements, sermon postings, youth group planning, small and large group Bible studies, and even some degree of counseling. David Hansen, a church media blogger, boils these down effectively: "Social media is both a stethoscope, magnifying your ability to listen to your congregation and community, and a megaphone, magnifying one's ability to proclaim God's word to your community." David Hanson, quoted in Gould, *The Social Media Gospel*, Foreword, x. In a similar vein, Richard Vosko, (2011). writes, "The primary purpose of using social networking is to establish and maintain relationships, to

connect with and stay connected with members of the congregation. The added feature is the possibility of attracting someone who is searching for new spiritual affiliation.” The purpose of this paper is to explore how a church can use ICT and social networking websites, as a megaphone for evangelism—that added feature—in the context of the Great Commission.

In order to be able to use Information and Communication Technology and Social Networks as a tool or platform for evangelism, the ability to learn to use the power of these new technologies must be paramount. Unfortunately most churches who have been able to fully incorporate the social networking Websites in their evangelistic activities are under utilizing the main intentions of this platform, with most churches using their websites as little more than easily accessible church brochures and location. Recently, however, technology and social networking can combined in powerful ways, that will enabling churches become virtual through skypes, Facebook, Google plus, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, flicker, Soundclouds, Myspace, Slideshare, Hangout etc.

[7, 8] opined that for centuries, the gospel of Jesus Christ has preached via the social networking sites. Hence mass media have allowed this “good news” to be propagated within and outside the circles of Social networking sites in recent decades, surveys indicates that majority of today’s Christians still come to faith in Christ because of a friend or relative. [7] Presently, the convergence of Internet has provided a medium of communication that is faster, virtual, interactive and easily accessible. The Internet have been able to reduce the gap between the user of information and the means of acquiring such information needed. Research shows “that churches of various theological persuasions that are using Internet-based technology are the churches that are most effective in reaching young adults, a key group for evangelism and a group that has been raised in postmodern culture. The new social networking technologies of the Internet have caused these postmodern values to be brought out even more by increasing the ability and ease of Internet users to communicate and collaborate”. [8]

IV INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKING EVANGELISM OF DSL, BABCOCK UNIVERSITY

It was sometime in June 2012 that it was impressed upon the heart of Pastor Tunde Ojewole, the Associate Vice President Spiritual life that there is the need for the Division to launch a

holistic campaign, awareness and of course join in the effort of evangelizing to not only Babcock community but indeed the world using internet and social networking technologies. A team of dedicated, trained and talented individuals from various fields were brought together to brain storm on how best to establish ICT and Internet Ministry. Volunteers from various churches in Babcock District were brought together to kick-start the following units: Audio-visual Unit, PowerPoints and Multimedia Unit and Internet and Social Networking Unit. These units were headed by Ishaya Zakariah, Raymond Okoro, John Henry Chukwudi and Micah Ehud Monday.

The synergy that exist between these units is such that the Audio-visual unit carries out the video recording sermons, PowerPoints unit put image effects and the internet and social network unit upload and manage the uploaded content.

AS of January 10, 2016 these units have achieved so much to the glory of God. The use of ICT and social networking has been able to bridge the gap. Thousands are been ministered to on daily bases, many of whom it would has been impossible to reach. Below is a summary of the internet unit's activities

❖ Web pages:

1. Facebook Official Page:- Babcock Pioneer SDA Church
2. Facebook Fan Page:- Babcock University Pioneer Church Page
3. Google plus:- Seventh-Day Adventist Church Babcock University
4. YouTube Channel:- Seventh-Day Adventist Church Babcock University
5. Twitter:- bupioneerchurc1

Activities:

- Daily posting of verse of the day on Facebook, twitter and Google plus
- Daily posting of birthday congratulatory messages Facebook and Google+
- Weekly posting of Foot-Print article
- Periodic uploading video of sermons on YouTube channel

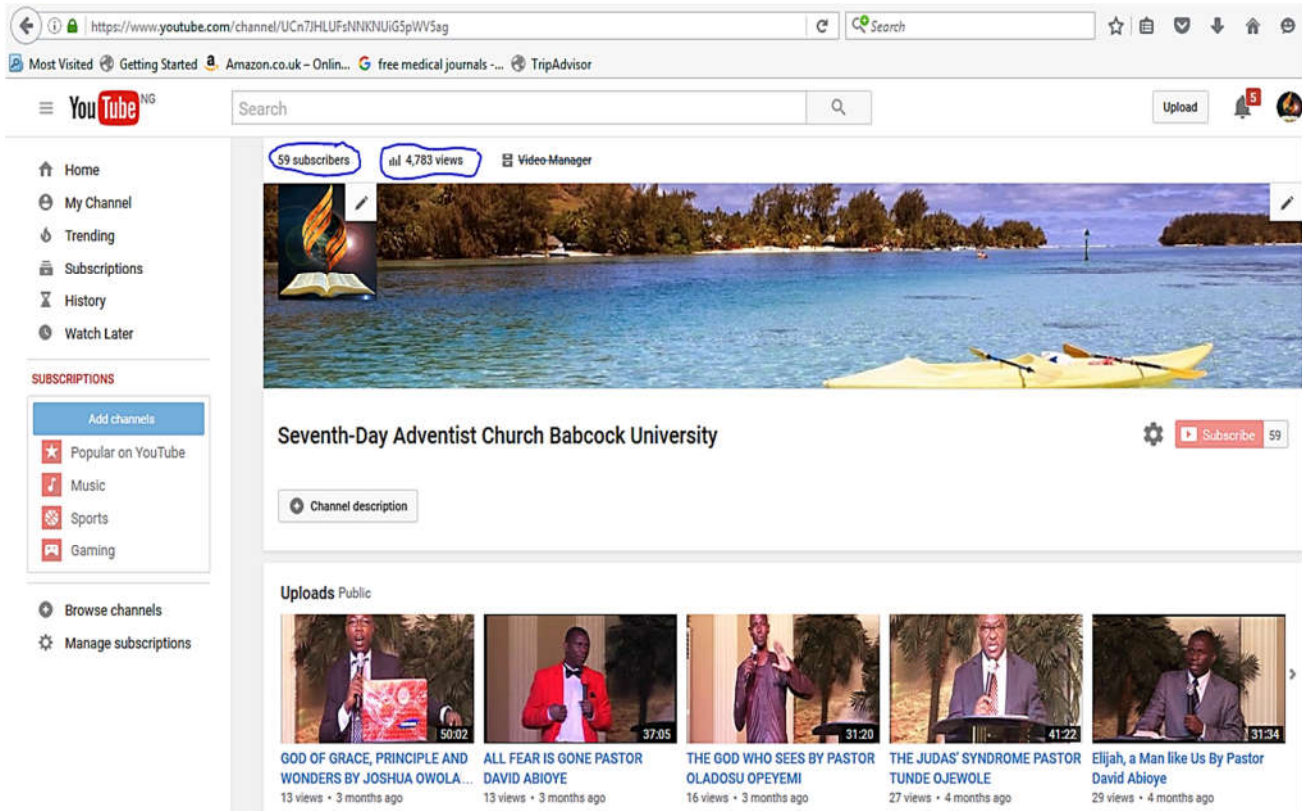
- Periodic uploading of pictures on Facebook and Google plus
- True life stories(Mission Stories)
- Thought Nugget of the week
- Providing Audio Sermons to AWR/Hope FM 89.1
- Online correspondence

Radio Broadcasting



The Division of Spiritual Life also have a dedicated hour/sections in Babcock University Radio Station called “HOPE 89.1FM” for daily bible readings, announcements on church calendars, sermons playback, talk shows on religious issues, Bible studies, and youth and family counseling etc. reaching over 10,000 Babcock University community and far beyond signal range of the radios frequency across Ogun State. Which is in conglomeration of (Bible, Matthew 28: 19 – 20, c.f. 24:14). To spread the message.

Figure 1: YouTube Channel views



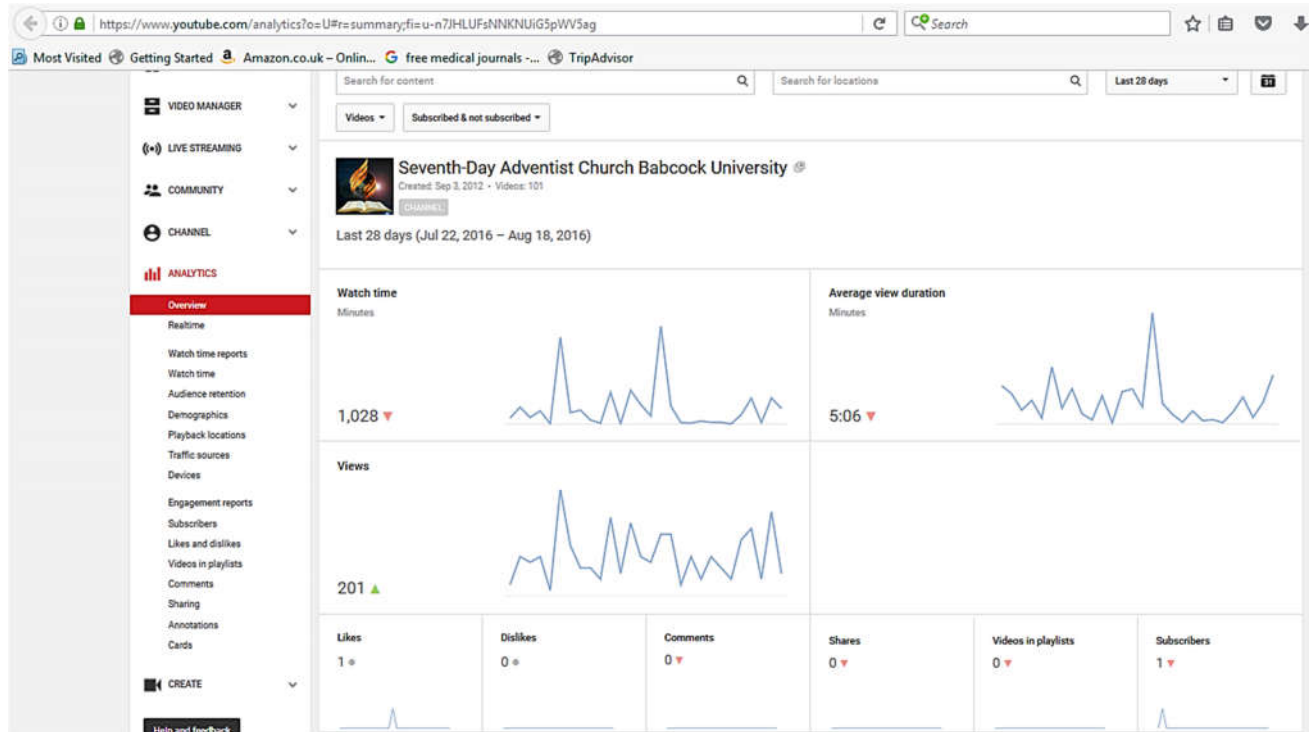


Figure 1 &2 - YouTube Channel Views

Figure 1 above shows that our YouTube Channel: has 59 subscribers.

- Over 4,783 views [August 2016]
- 101 video sermons posted [August 2016]
- Total subscribers, friends and followers: 11745

Within July 22- August 2016

- *Watch time – 1,028*
- *Views – 201*

Figure 2: Google+ Page views

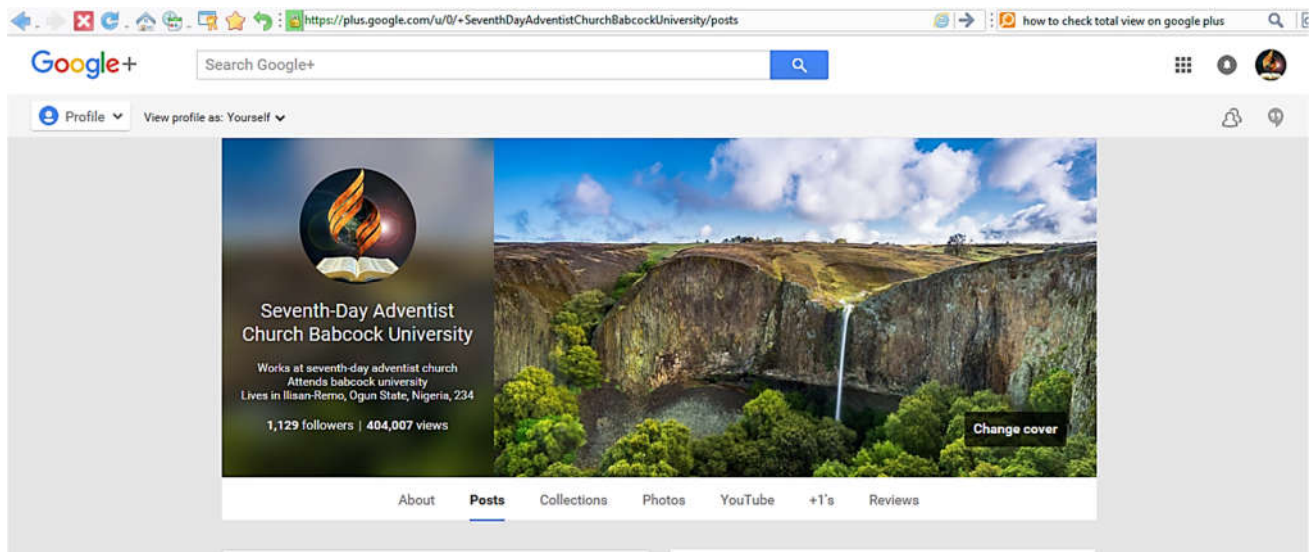


Figure 4: Google+ Page Followers

In less than two months of creation, the page have been able to reach the following;

4931, Family:

16, Acquaintances:

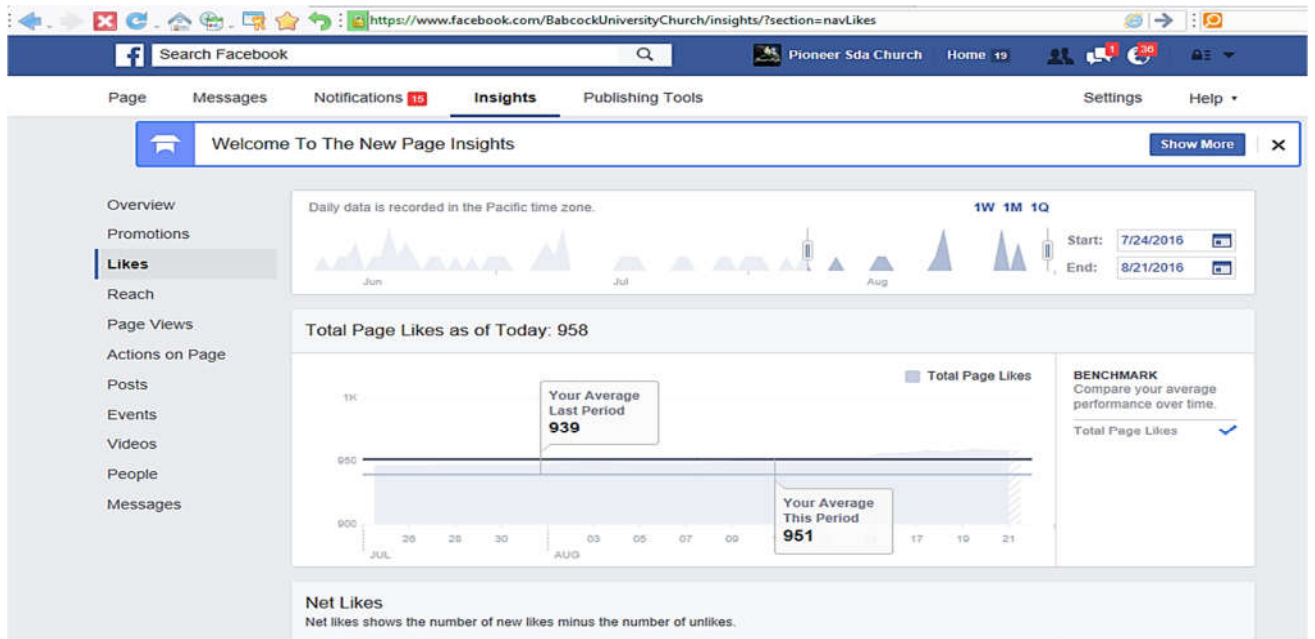
1 following: 28 Followers: 1,128

404,007 views

Followers which allows us communicate with our members. We post key religious and educative topics/contents (text, links, photos, and videos) thereby creating a forum whereby ideas and views of our followers can be harnessed for the benefit of evangelization.

This social networking platform helps us have direct mailing list with our followers e.g. Gmail

Figure 3- Facebook Page



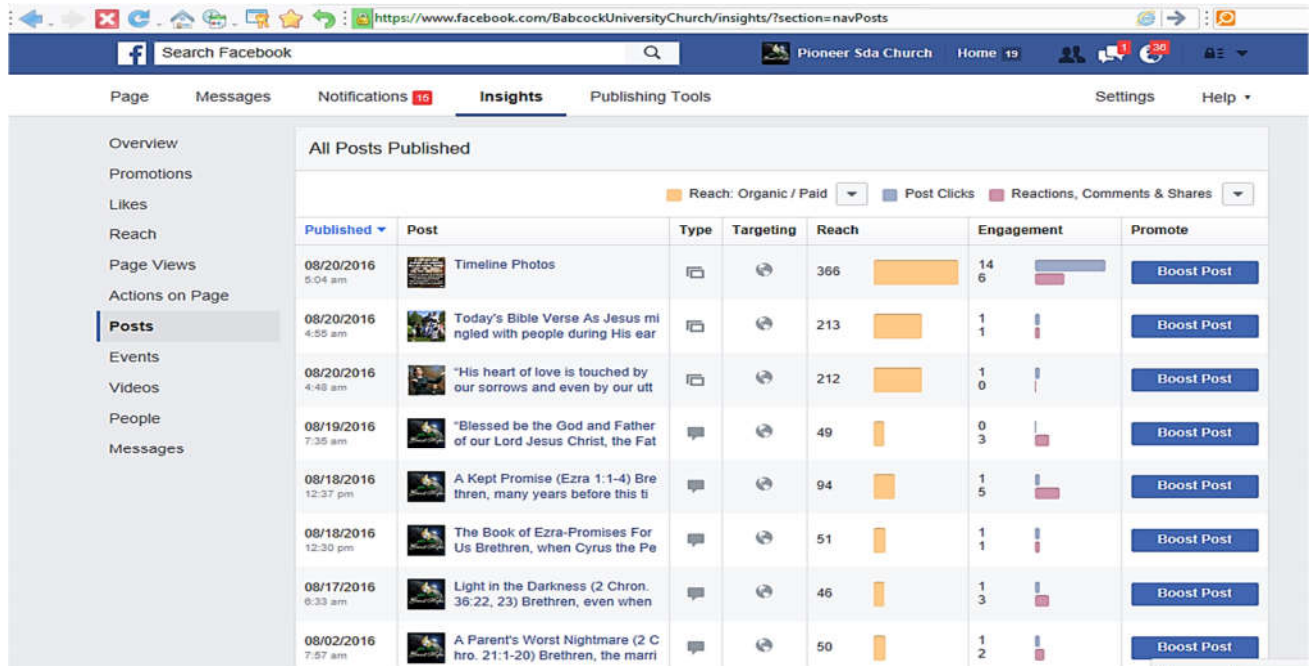


Figure 3, 4 &5: Facebook Page

- Our Facebook in less than 8 months of account creation (January –August, 2016) we have gotten over 939 likes.
- In last 12 days (August 8 – August 20th, 2016), the page have been able to reach over 1,081 members.
- And have posted over 300 pictures, Bible verses, motivational write-ups, Trending issues in the world church (Adventism) and open discussion issues related to Christianity and mission on our timeline.

We can come to ascertain that there is continues improvement and more are expected to still like/join our online community.

Yet to Commence

- Church website
- Live streaming of worship, and sermons

Challenges:

- Shortage of Content developers
- Unstable availability of internet
- Unavailability of office space
- University restriction of social network sites.
- University new policies on network authentication

*** Projects:**

- Banners/posters/stickers
- Monthly News letters

*** Running Expense**

- 2,500 per month MTN 5GB Data Bundle

IV. CONCLUSION

This research has indicated increase in the use of ICT (Social Networking Sites) as a tool for evangelism with over Five hundred thousand (500,000+) views on our social networking sites and over two thousand (2,000+) online members all over the world and the radio broadcasting outreach have been able to reach-out to the entire university and the hostile environment (15,000+) through its evangelistic programmes. The google plus page has had more than four hundred thousand views and over four thousand visit on YouTube. Nonetheless, there is more to be done and achieved. Just as the name implies – social networking, which connote individuals connected by common interest or community. Members of the church have a greater role to play by inviting and encouraging their families, friends, colleagues and associate to visit pages read posted messages and comment, commend or share the ones that have touched their inner most needs.

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