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**THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE
EVANGELICAL OUTREACHES OF THE REDEEMED
CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD (RCCG)**

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I. Introduction

This paper examines how the social media have been utilised by the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) to spread the gospel message far and wide and expand within and outside Nigeria. These social media are used in evangelism and follow up, that is, the act of bringing unbelievers to Christ as well as the act of monitoring and mentoring those who have accepted Christ with the aim of ensuring growth in their new found faith. Before delving into the focus of the paper, it is apposite to examine the word 'media' in some details by looking at what scholars have said about the concept.

The word 'media,' according to S. Hassan, refers to those organised means of disseminating fact, opinion, entertainment, religion and other information, such as newspapers, magazines, out-of-home advertising, cinema films, radio, television, the worldwide web, books, CDs, DVDs, video cassettes, video games and other forms of publishing.¹ Academic programmes for the study of mass media are usually referred to as mass communication programme. While cinemas, radio, television, cable and the press can easily be recognised as mass media, the *new media* can be identified as recent technologies, such as pagers, cellular phones, satellites, computers, electronic mail and the internet. In the same vein, P. Levinson has about three different categories: The Old Media – Before 1990s – Newspapers, radio and television. The New Media – Mid 1990s – Phones, satellites, computers, electronic mails and internet.

The *New New media* – 2006/2012 – e.g. Blogging, YouTube, Wikipedia, Digg, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life and Podcasts.² According to him, the *New New Media* is about the advent and impact of media newer than 'new' media – as different from the classic new media of email and websites as those new media are different from old media, such as newspapers and television. New new media are so new that few of them had a major place in our world five years ago. Several did not exist four years ago. Students are conversant and experts in most of them, because they use them all the time. They look at YouTube videos and send them as well as, receive twitters of tweets on iPhones and BlackBerrys while teachers are

lecturing. Let us briefly discuss each of these new social media before we resume our discourse on The Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is our main focus.

1. **Blogging:** The term “blog” is the short form of “weblog” which refers to an online journal. Blogs began as personal mini sites that people used to record their opinions, stories, and other writings as well as photos and videos.

2. **YouTube:** YouTube began in early 2005 and has grown rapidly. YouTube has the second largest search engine in the world, behind Google (which owns YouTube).

3. **Wikipedia:** A 'wiki' is a collection of articles that multiple users can add to and edit freely online. The most famous wiki is called Wikipedia, a massive online encyclopaedia. Wikipedia has become so large (more than a million articles) that you run across it all the time in Google.

4. **Digg:** It is like Slashdot without the editors, bringing a democratic approach to the news submission website. At Digg, the site users make all of the content-related decision. Digg operates under a very simple methodology.

5. **MySpace:** MySpace is a social networking website offering an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profile, blogs, groups, photos, music and videos. It has its headquarters in Beverly Hills, California.

6. **Facebook:** Facebook was originally intended for college students, but today anyone can join the network. Although the site's scope has expanded to include more than just students, its purpose remains the same – giving people a means of sharing information in an easy and entertaining way.

7. **Twitter:** Twitter is an online social networking tool in which users post 140 character updates of what is going on in their lives along with links to things they think are interesting, funny, or useful to their followers. This medium is used, especially in *Christendom* to share powerful testimonies, capable of drawing people to the kingdom of God.

8. **Second Life:** It is an online environment; its influence reaches into the real world, including a virtual economy that is

dependent upon actual money. Second life is a complex environment filled with potential risks and rewards, created by Linden Lab, a company based in San Francisco

9. Podcast: It is downloaded on demand or subscribe via a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed, which automatically downloads the podcast to their computers. It combines the freedom of blogging with the technology of MPES. It covers everything from *news*, *religion* and *politics* to *sports* and *music*. While you have already covered the process of finding, downloading and listening to podcast in how podcasting works, this article will fill you in the other half of the podcasting equation creating your own.

People use podcast for many reasons like Television shows, knowledge about technology or just personality and rumours. This medium is particularly useful in evangelism nowadays.

II. Evangelism and Follow-up

Evangelism involves preaching the gospel of Christ Jesus to an unbeliever with the aim of making him to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. Once an unbeliever who attentively listened to the gospel message accepts Jesus Christ as his Saviour, he is referred to as a convert. To make him have the assurance of salvation and grow in his faith in Christ, there is need for what is called follow-up in Christian parlance. Follow-up is summarised in Apostle Paul's statement to Barnabas in Acts 15: 36:

And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they do.

Follow-up activities involve: praying with the converts, counselling them, teaching the sound doctrines of the Bible, assuring them of the inevitability of persecutions and how to face such, as well as overcome them. Experienced Christians believe that for evangelism, 15% effort is required, whereas follow-up requires 85% effort. Our focus is on both, and we emphasised that the social media are being effectively used in both activities to grow the church this is especially done in the Redeemed Christian Church of God by the Dove Media Group.

III. Theoretical Framework: Connectivism Theory

Connectivism is a relatively new theory developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes sometime in year 2007 in reaction to the insufficient explanations offered by behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism regarding the needs of millennial learners, twenty-first century digital tools, and advancing digital technologies that are influencing learning and development³ (R. Kop and A. Hill).

According to these scholars, Connectivism assumes that *"knowledge is distributed across a network, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and transverse those knowledge"*. Learning occurs when the learner connects to and provides information into the learning community, this is known as "node". Connectivism emphasizes that the 'network' (which comprised nodes and connections) is the critical tool to teach. In other words, a function of learning is how the learner is able to make connections and use the connections efficiently between learning communities.

R. Kop and A. Hill list eight principles for the theory of connectivism:

1. "Learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions"
2. Learning is a process of connecting "specialized nodes", information, ideas and interfaces
3. Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
4. Learning can exist in "non-human appliances" such as hardware or software
5. "Nurturing and maintaining connections are needed to facilitate continual learning"
6. "Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill"
7. "Decision making is itself a learning process"
8. Accurate up to date knowledge is the intent of learning.⁴

Social networking sites tie in strongly with the learning theory of connectivism because the theory emphasizes the importance of technological tools for human learning and how "non-human appliances" can help us understand decision-making based on the continual acquisition and alteration of new information. Applying this theory, whose primary focus is "learning", to the use of the social media in the spread of the Gospel is apposite. R. Kop and A. Hill opine that this theory could be applied to other areas of human endeavours – business, religion, accounting, etc.⁵ Thus, by creating the Dove Media Group, which is in charge of the church's media outreach, the RCCG has effectively, adapted the 'connectivism theory'. We shall see details of how the group operates very soon.

IV. The Redeemed Christian Church of God: The Metamorphosis of an Acorn Seed to an Oak Tree

1. The Genesis

In this aspect of the paper, we rely on works like: B. Rollins⁶, M. A. Ojo⁷, A. R. Oti⁸, Andrews⁹ and J. Atuluku¹⁰. However, our overwhelming source of information is R. Bible-Davids.¹¹

Pa Akindayomi was born on July 5, 1909, at the age of 24 he heard the first call to be God's servant but for seven years, he ignored the call until the Lord frustrated him in his other endeavours. As a result of some strange experiences, he was compelled to yield 7 years later at age 31.

So, On July 10, 1940, Josiah left his native land for another town, Ile-Ife, where God had directed him about 40 miles away. On his journey, he could miraculously read and understand some specific scriptures without any previous knowledge of reading or writing in any language. He encountered many miraculous experiences on the way.

Josiah voluntarily served in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church till 1947 when the church began to go to the cemetery to consult the dead. This was heretical to Josiah so he began to organise Bible study meetings, correcting the members and teaching the truth.

This only lasted till 1952 when he was excommunicated from the church.

2. The Emergence of Enigmatic Successor: Pastor E. A. Adeboye

In the year 1952, when God was preparing Adeboye who was only a ten-year old boy in the backside of a desert, God simultaneously gave Pa Josiah Akindayomi a transforming experience. Josiah's departure from the Cherubim and Seraphim movement was his first salvation decision. Many other sacrifices had to follow, he knew he had met the true and living God so he put away the 'prophet' title he had got from the previous church, he stopped the burning of candles and discarded the white garment.

He continued his small Bible Study at Willoughby Street, Ebute-Meta where only a handful of people came. It did not bother him for the joy he had just received of the true light made him vivacious. He led many that came for the Bible Study to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour since he had done the same. This small Bible study began to grow gradually into a small church. Initially, it was named **The Apostolic Faith Mission of West Africa**. Eventually, God revealed the present name **The Redeemed Christian Church of God** to Pa Akindayomi.

3. Destiny Contact

God had told Pa Josiah Akindayomi about Pastor Adeboye for over twenty (20) years before they met. So he knew him the moment he set his eyes on him, he knew the description God gave him and it fitted perfectly. He knew Adeboye was his successor and the next General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The most commendable aspect was that Pa Akindayomi, for those twenty years did not cease to tell his Pastors, ministers, members and whoever cared to know that there was no need to contend over who would take over from him; because the leader for the church and his successor was not yet among them. God showed him a vision of the

man that would take over the leadership. He had been telling his Pastors that the man would be highly educated, the same height as him, the same stature so much that if he would wear his clothes, it would fit perfectly. God also said his successor would have become vibrant and would take some initiatives about doing spectacular things for God. As this man continued to tell his Pastors, 'The leader of this Church for tomorrow is not yet among us', some of his followers who were power seekers left the Church while some others thought he would eventually change his mind.

Destiny happened on that faithful day Adeboye walked into the Church, desperately looking for a solution to his mountain of problems. He did not know that he was the solution to the mountain of questions in the heart of Rev. Josiah. The moment, their eyes met, *something leaped in Rev. Josiah*, he knew Destiny had just happened, Elisha had just met Elijah. This is parallel to the meeting between Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of Jesus before their births.

This was the reason Rev. Josiah gave the Adeboyes a courtesy visit in their home the first day they came to the church.

4. The Tutelage

In 1975 Pa Josiah Akindayomi travelled to Israel. In the course of this journey, he visited the mount of Transfiguration and there, God told him to start tidying things up because Adeboye, the future Pastor, would soon take over. When he returned he ordained Adeboye as 'Reverend Doctor'.

Pastor Adeboye who now served as the interpreter for Rev. Josiah was still bubbling in the euphoria of knowing God more. He was still eager to learn every little he could. Although he had obtained his doctorate degree, he still had to battle with his full time lecturing job, which was putting 'good food' on his table. As much as Adeboye could not wait to be taught by Rev. Akindayomi, Rev. Akindayomi also could not wait to pour his heart out and mentor Adeboye, since he was aware that Adeboye would be his successor.

As he continued as Pa Akindayomi's interpreter, their relationship increased and they bonded even more as father to son and mentor to protégée. Soon, the old grey-headed prophet could no longer hide the level of authority God was positioning his young prophet into, so Adeboye was drastically promoted to the 'Elders Fellowship'. This position fetched him the title 'young elder', since his age at the time did not qualify him for that fellowship.

Whatever might have transpired leading to the emergence of Pastor E. A. Adeboye, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, an indigenous Pentecostal denomination has since transformed from the status of Africa's most vigorously expansionary religious movement to a global phenomenon. One of the clauses in the vision/mission statements of the Redeemed Christian Church of God is that *in every household there will be at least one member of Redeemed Christian Church of God in the whole world.*

5. Strategies for the Actualisation of Global Evangelism Agenda

Driven by the vision of having a member of the Redeemed Church of God in every house all over the world, the church leadership adopted some strategies to actualise its vision.

The first strategy is the multiplication of the church through planting of branches in Africa and beyond. Statistics have shown that today the Redeemed Christian Church of God has presence in other places in Africa apart from Nigeria such as Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In Europe, the church has its presence in Australia, England, Scotland, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey, Poland, Sweden, Serbia and Switzerland.

In the United States, it has its presence in Arizona, Michigan, Mississippi, Illinois, Texas, Tennessee, Florida, New York, New England District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia,

Maryland, New Jersey, Georgia, Oregon, Minnesota, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Connecticut and Colorado. In the Caribbean, it has presence in Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. In Canada, it has presence in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in the United States and Canada together form the RCCGNA, which has its headquarters in Dallas, Texas.

In Asia and the Pacific it has a presence in Australia (Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Newcastle, Adelaide and Perth), New Zealand, Fiji, Malaysia, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Singapore and in the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. In the Middle East, the church has parishes in Qatar (two parishes), Kuwait, Lebanon and *in all the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates*. The implication of the above is that the global mission of the church has been attained.

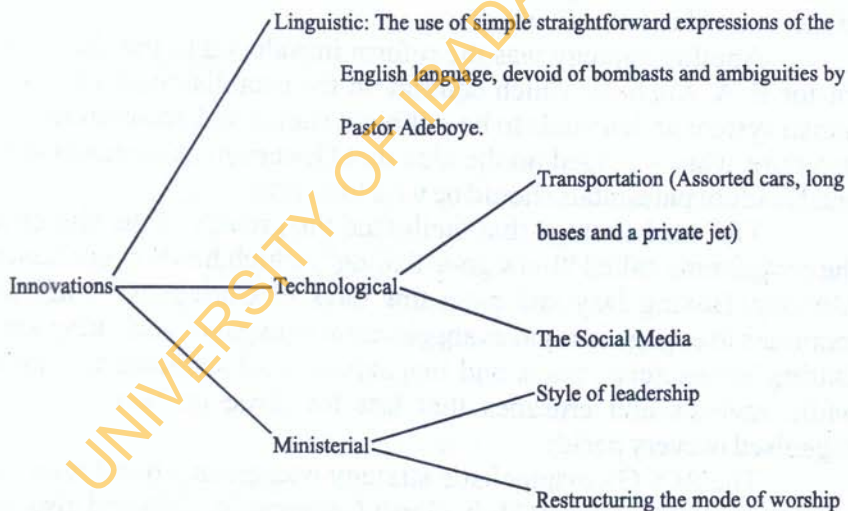
Another strategy was the reform introduced to the church by Pastor E. A. Adeboye which centred on the establishment of model parish system which tends to be of liberal stance and accommodative in nature. This is hinged on the idea that Governors, Commissioners and Heads of parastatals should be won for Christ.

The third strategy that facilitated the growth of the church is the programme called "Let's go-a-fishing", which holds every Easter Monday, Boxing Day and even few days to Christmas. It affords members to engage in rapid evangelisation to expand God's kingdom. During the exercise, tracts and magazines are distributed to people while revivals and crusades that last for three or four days are organised in every parish.

The RCCG's evangelistic strategy was given a boost with the introduction of the annual Holy Ghost Congress in 1986 and also the monthly service programme that holds at its international headquarters. These programmes attract a mammoth crowd from almost all religions in Nigeria and abroad, most of whom are miracle seekers because of their existential challenges. Apart from their spiritual significance, the programmes also have their economic relevance because of multitude of foreigners that attend thereby having positive impact on Nigeria.

Another strategic policy adopted by the RCCG, since the assumption of office by Pastor E. A. Adeboye as the General Overseer, is the various welfare programmes. These include economic empowerment, establishment of educational institutions with endowments, Medicare and healing programmes and establishment of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts in some parts of the country. To facilitate its welfare programmes, the RCCG established what is known as Jubilee Cooperative Society and entered into partnership with Community Banks, namely, Sunrise, Oore-Ofe, New Life and Haggai Community Banks.

The strategies that have led to the exponential growth of the RCCG can be summarised in a tree diagram as shown below:



As indicated by the diagram above, three major factors combined together in the explosive growth of the RCCG. Pastor Adeboye's use of simple, straightforward expressions of the English language, simple and transparent leadership as well as making the mode of worship attractive and more accommodating have contributed greatly to the growth of the church. However, the most significant factor is the effective use of social media, both new and old.

Here, we shall examine use of the social media. It must be noted that the rapid expansion or fame of the RCCG would not have been possible without its effective use of both the print and the electronic media, especially the social media, both the old, and the new as classified¹² by P. Levinson as aforementioned. The RCCG is known to be a church that takes cognisance of advertisements and effective publicity of its programmes through the use of the social media.

V. The RCCG and the Social Media

It all started in 1998, when the RCCG held a programme tagged, 'Divine Visitation', which was attended by over 6 million people. The programme attracted the international media and CNN. The programme was given a live broadcast by all the major television stations in Nigeria, so, several millions of people who could not attend the programme watched the programme in their homes. When the programme was held at another place in 2003, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Cable Network News (CNN) and the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) covered the programme. See R. Andrews.¹³

VI. Redemption Hour

Over two decades ago, televangelism was not very popular in Nigeria. Very few ministries used the power of the media to broadcast the message of the Gospel. Pastor Adeboye was one of the pioneers of televangelism in Africa. He invited members of the church who were professionals in electronic media to form a team that would effectively

run the television ministry of the RCCG. Pastor Synge Wigwe, retired Director General of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), was the pioneer director of the media ministry of the RCCG. The team was responsible for broadcasting the teachings of Pastor Adeboye and all the special events of the church under the platform of the Redemption Hour. See B. Rollins¹⁴

VII. Dove Media Group

The advent of the satellite brought about the need to extend the media outreach of the RCCG to all the nations of the world through satellite television. This led to the birth of the Dove Media. The basic function of this media is to operate a global satellite television, radio, internet, multimedia studio and prints. The Dove Media, under the able leadership of Patrick Abraham, from United Kingdom (UK) has launched a twenty-four-hour satellite television on two channels; Disc Communication, a cable pay TV and HiTV. Two additional channels in Johannesburg, South Africa and Accra have been added. The Dove Media also broadcasts the Gospel through the Internet Radio. Several Gospel movies have been produced by the group. In 2009, during the 5th Annual Convention of the church, signals were transmitted live via five television networks; Disc Communication, HiTV, GTV, MyTV Africa, View Africa Network, and on the Dove Media IPTV at www.rccgdovelive.org to millions of viewers in different parts of the world. The Dove Media now has its headquarters in Lagos, with stations in the UK and the US. It has a hi-tech digital studio that is equipped with state of the art equipment. See R. Bible Davids¹⁵

This media outreach has invested heavily in the production of televangelism, wireless internet link service, video musical productions and promotions of Gospel music in Africa. Most especially, in the use of webs of different kinds: Blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, Digg, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life and Podcasts, etc. (as discussed at the introductory aspect of this paper); the Dove Media Group has excelled. These social media are used:

- (i) In the publicity of the church's programmes
- (ii) Sensational testimonies of miraculous interventions in the lives of members and those who attend the programmes of the church are exhibited
- (iii) In the area of 'follow-up', which focuses on how to monitor, counsel and make those who have responded positively to the Gospel by coming out for altar calls, to stand, the Dove Media Group is allowed to handle all these and provide feedback to the church's leadership. R. Bible Davids¹⁶

This has made the RCCG to be outstanding. The growth the church has witnessed today is the remarkable consequence of the activities of the Dove Media Group.

VIII. The Open Heaven Television (OHTV)

This media outreach was launched by the RCCG in the United Kingdom on Skye Channel 199. It is a 24-hour satellite that broadcasts contemporary Christian programmes, music, movies and shows targeted at the young people. It reaches about 2 million viewers. In addition to the above, Pastor Adeboye has used the printed pages to spread the Gospel through over 150 titles. He also published the Power, Praise and Purity Devotion Bible Commentary. R. Bible-Davids¹⁷

According to R. Bible-Davids, this was the first time an African would publish a Bible commentary.¹⁸ This was followed by the Open Heaven Devotional and E-Open Heaven Compendium. As a Christian Organisation, the RCCG has one of the largest web presences on the internet. It has tons of websites hosted by different parishes and ministries all over the world. There are countless articles, blogs and twitter pages carrying information about the church and its programmes.

From four small parishes in two states in south western Nigeria to over 20,000 parishes in 110 nations; from less than 1,000 memberships to over 30 million is phenomenal. Only the future can tell, because the growth continues unabated.

IX. Amazing Statistics of Geometrical Growth

| Population Ratio | Percentage Increase |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 – 20,000 Parishes | 0.02 – 100% |
| 1 – 110 Nations | 0.91 – 100% |
| Less than 1,000 – 30 million people | 0.003 – 100% |

One of the leaders of the church acknowledged the fact that for every programme of the church:

- 45% effort goes to preparation, which includes planning, publicity, financial and material provision.
- 10% goes into the execution of the programme, for instance, an open crusade, camp meetings and retreats, etc.
- 45% goes into follow-up activities – counselling, prayer, step by step exhortation and feedback.
- 100% Total**

The inference we can draw from this is the fact that the phenomenal growth of the RCCG is the result of combination of factors, especially the effective use of the social media at the three stages outlined above – preparation, execution and follow-up activities. The activities of the Dove Media Group are commendable in this regard.

X. Conclusion

The growth and expansion witnessed by the Redeemed Christian Church of God today would not have been made possible, without the use of the social media, which we have examined in this paper.

O. Johnson, in a live broadcast on NTA opines that, every ministry must go through three stages – revelation, preparation and manifestation in order to succeed.¹⁹ In the case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the revelation came to Pa Josiah Akindayomi several years ago. The preparation stage spanned through his several years of pastoring the church, which eventually culminated in the emergence of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo. The former patiently tutored, monitored and mentored the latter for years. Finally, the last stage began gradually, when Adebayo took over the mantle of leadership in 1980.

Through the introduction of new programmes – musical instruments into worship services, Bible Study, Faith Clinic, House Fellowship, Model Parishes, Holy Ghost Congress, multiplication of church through planting of branches, special programmes (for instance, Let's-go-a-fishing), welfare programmes (for instance, economic empowerment), introduction of educational institutions (nursery, primary, secondary, a college of technology and a university) with endowments, medicare and healing programmes, rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, etc., the church has grown by leaps and bounds.

Most importantly, the church has utilised the social media – 'old', 'new' and 'new new' to further its expansion. Today, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is conspicuously present in the thirty-six states of Nigeria, its Federal Capital Territory – Abuja and virtually in every local government. Also, one can say that the church is global in outreach. All these would not have been possible without the effective use of the social media, especially the new ones. It is claimed that the RCCG has over 30 million membership (this is definitely arguable); but at least, we are sure that *the church operates in millions and is one of the richest churches all over the world*. In addition to this, there was a survey of 50 most influential figures in the world, Pastor E. A. Adebayo was classified as the 49th most influential man globally²⁰ R. Bible-Davids. The RCCG could be likened to the Biblical 'mustard seed'. Finally, we recommend that the social media should be effectively utilised especially in education by teachers and students alike. Ministries and churches that are sceptical about the

social media, especially the new ones should take a cue from the RCCG.

Endnotes

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