

Getting Involved In Ministering to Christian Young People Through Social Media

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Abstract: It is a fact that young people worldwide and even Christians are increasingly using social media. The new norm of our societies is to see young people getting involved in social media platforms' activities. In many parts of the world, church attendance is seriously dropping and church leaders are looking for ways to curb this tendency. Since Christian young people can be found on social media platforms, it becomes a golden opportunity for church leaders to know how to get involved with young people on such platforms. This paper is intended to provide a guideline for pastors, elders, youth leaders, and religious leaders at large, who want to get involved in ministering to young people through social media platforms, thus becoming a Digital Nurturing Agent. The paper outlines the importance of having a digital nurturing program in a church and a step-by-step way to put in place a vibrant digital nurturing program in a local church or a district or even for personal independent ministry.

Keywords: Youth, Nurturing, Social Media, Platform.

I. PURPOSE

This article is to be used as a reference, and it is intended to guide the reader toward implementing a social media platform to nurture Christian. It can be used as a guide or social media ministry handbook. In this paper, I will be referring to the following concept that I design to guide the reader in achieving this goal. They are: "Digital Nurturing", "Social media", "Digital Nurturing Agent" (DNA), and "Social Network" or "Social Networking".

II. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Social Media encompasses many social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and others. This article is not intending to cover how to use all social media platforms to minister to church members. Due to limit of time and space, the paper will focus on general principles guiding social media ministry and will just make reference to few platforms such as WhatsApp, "the most currently used social media platform in Africa," (Social Power, 2018) and the Telegram platform.

III. INTRODUCTION

Social Media platforms can be used to minister to church members, young people especially. They will appreciate seeing church leaders reaching them through this means. Ministering to members through social media demands a know-how and is a skill that anybody can acquire and use easily. This cannot be done without answering the following three questions: Why are young people on social media

platforms? What are the different Social Media Platforms and what are they used for? And How to choose one's social media platform for a ministry to young people?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews related literature on ministering to Christian young people

through social media platforms.

A-Some Definitions to Consider

Digital nurturing in a religious context is a way of using social media platforms or any other digital or electronic means to nurture or take care of church members.

Social media is defined by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary as "websites and software programs used for social networking" ("Social media," Oxford Learner's Dictionary).

A "*Digital Nurturing Agent*" (DNA) is a person who uses a social media platform to nurture a person or a group of people.

Social Network refers to "a website or computer program that allows people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone." ("Social Network" Cambridge Dictionary).

Social Networking is "the creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships especially online." ("Social networking" Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

To nurture in this context is "to take care of, feed, and protect someone or something, especially young children or plants, and help him, her, or it to develop," as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary ("*Nurture*" Definition, *Cambridge Dictionary*).

B-Why Are Young People on Social Media?

Studies reveal that young people today are spending more of their time on social media. Sudhinta Sinha, in an article titled *Social Media And Our Youth*, postulates:

Today, social networking sites have become a part of daily routine, especially for youngsters. "Another study suggests that people spend more than five hours on an average on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter" (Sudhinta Sinha, 2017). The journal *Reach Out* mentions that "the internet and social media provide young people with a range of benefits, and opportunities to empower themselves in

a variety of ways. Young people can maintain social connections and support networks that otherwise would not be possible and access more information than ever before.” (Benefits of internet and social media, 2017) Hadjipanayis et al. view that social media “has become a novel way of interaction among people and influences people's social lives and public opinion as well as people's purchasing decisions and businesses (Hadjipanayis et al., 2019).

Elda Tartari also referenced the result of a study carried out among teenagers between 11-16 years of age in Albania which showed that “children and teenagers were positively affected as social media helped in increasing their communication abilities, getting information, developing their technical skills, and how they can effectively use this recent technology” (Tartari, 2015).

Also, “the communities and social interactions young people form online can be invaluable for bolstering and developing young people's self-confidence and social skills” (*Benefits of internet and social media, 2017*). It is important to note that “Social media use among children in 25 European countries has been 38% among 9–12-year-olds and 77% among those aged 13–16 years. All these children report having their own profile on at least one social network site” (Hadjipanayis et al, 2019).

Contrary to what many think, today, “Social networking services can be used for organizing activities, events, or groups to showcase issues and opinions and make a wider audience aware of them. E.g. coordinating band activities, fundraisers, and creating awareness of various causes.” (*Benefits of internet and social media, 2017*). Likewise, by creating a Facebook Page for a church or a church's youth club, or by creating a WhatsApp platform for a church or a church's youth club, members and the youth of that church can have a virtual church community where they can instantly interact, whenever and wherever needed, with each other, and where activities mentioned above can be carried. Also, “among the benefits are socialization and communication enhancement, improving learning skills, positive impact on education and getting health information” (Hadjipanayis et al, 2019).

Since “social networking services rely on active participation: users take part in activities and discussions on a site, and upload, modify or create content. This supports creativity and can support discussion about ownership of content and data management” (Hadjipanayis et al, 2019). Within the Church context, the church can train appropriate persons who will be uploading and sharing materials that will edify young people on church Facebook pages or WhatsApp platforms such as sermons, music, videos, and training materials. Some churches already do live streaming that allows members who could not attend church services to get connected to their church and get almost the same benefit as others who attended.

Social networks encourage discovery. “If someone is interested in certain books, bands, recipes or ideas, their interest will likely be catered for by a social networking service or group within a service. If users are looking for something more specific or unusual, then, they could create their own groups or social networking sites. Social networking services can help young people develop their interests and find other people who share the same interests. They can help introduce young people to new things and ideas, and deepen appreciation of existing interests. They can also help broaden users' horizons by helping them discover how other people live and think in all parts of the world” (*Benefits of internet and social media, 2017*).

Turkle also observes that “this generation of young people have also had ample opportunity to develop their skills in textual and image-based communication and may feel more at home using these modes of exchange” (Turkle, 2011).

C-Types of Social Media

Anybody who wants to get involved in social media ministry needs to know that there are different kinds of social media, and each social media is designed for a particular purpose. Shayne from InVideo website classifies social media into 13 different groups with are as follows:

1. Social Networks - Connect with people
2. Messaging Apps - Message privately
3. Photo/Media Sharing - Share photos, videos, and more
4. Blogging & Publishing Networks - Long format content
5. Interactive Apps - Connect, create and share content
6. Discussion Forums - Share knowledge, news, and ideas
7. Bookmarking & Content Curation - Discover, save, and share content
8. Review Network - View and publish reviews
9. Social Shopping Networks - Shop online
10. Interest-Based Networks - Explore hobbies and interests
11. Sharing economy networks - Trade goods and services
12. Audio only apps - Join discussions, share ideas and knowledge on audio
13. Anonymous Social Networks - Post anonymously (Shayne, 2022).

1. Social Networks

“The primary goal of social networks is to help you connect with people, build communities and groups, share ideas, interests, and information. What started as simple services have become a mandatory part of any social media marketing strategy. The benefits of using social networks to grow your brand in terms of awareness, relationship building, market research, lead generation et al, are endless!” (Shayne, 2022). Examples of such are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Facebook is a social media platform that helps connect with people and brands, create or join groups, share photos, videos, links, go live and find events nearby. It also has a marketplace that lets people buy and sell locally as well.

Twitter is a type of social media that lets people share text-based content, videos, and images. Over the years, it has become a source to get the latest updates on any current topic, including news, entertainment, sports, and even politics. The real advantage of Twitter is that it lets share content in real-time.

LinkedIn is a professional social media site that lets people share content in the form of text, links, photos, or videos, network by connecting with users and businesses, build one brand and position oneself as a thought leader and authority in his industry.

2. Messaging Apps

These applications have features for calling, creating groups, broadcasting messages to multiple users, exchanging money, and the option of creating chatbots, messaging apps. Some examples of Messaging Apps are *WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *Messenger*, and *WeChat*.

3. Photo & Media Sharing Apps

They are used to share photos, videos, and stories with a myriad of different filters. Some of them are *Instagram*, *Imgur*, *YouTube*, and *Vimeo*.

4. Blogging & Publishing Networks

“Blogging platforms are broadcast-style communications systems that enable authors to publish articles, opinions or product reviews (known as posts), which can be delivered through stand-alone websites, email, feed syndications systems, and social networks” (Blogging Platforms, in *Gartner Glossary*, 2022).

5. Interactive Apps

“These types of social media allow users to share photos and videos with a variety of experimental features that include AR/VR filters, music overlays, and other interactive features” (Shayne, 2022). Some of them are *Snapchat* and *TikTok*.

Snapchat lets a person share pics and short videos known as ‘snaps’, with the peers he or she has added, using multiple filters. A snap a person shares to his/her stories is viewable for 24 hours. Within private messages, the snaps disappear after the person to whom it has been sent has viewed them.

TikTok, in just a few years, has established itself as one of the biggest social media platforms that host over 1 billion monthly active users. Popular among GenZ and Millennials. One can use *TikTok* to create and share less than 60-second videos, ranging from lip-syncing, dancing, fitness, voice-overs, and the ability to collaborate with or comment on other users’ content. Also, *TikTok* is versatile, authentic, appeals to local audiences, and is short. Plus, cashing in on the latest

trends is a good way to improve visibility on the platform (Shayne, 2022).

6. Discussion Forums

Discussion forums are one of the earliest types of social media. These websites are not very welcoming of direct advertising but can become a valuable space to gather market research, build a community, get honest customer feedback, build trust, and generate leads. You will not find brand pages here like you do on other types of social media. You create individual accounts with basic information. Discussion forums like *Quora* and *Reddit* follow a simple Q&A format where answers that are of value to the community get upvoted while unfavorable ones are downvoted (Shayne, 2022).

7. Bookmarking & Content Curation

These types of social media networks help you discover, save and share content and can easily become your go-to channels for ideas, news, hot topics, and trends. The most common among them are *Pinterest* and *Flipboard*.

Pinterest is one of the world’s leading platforms to share ideas and find inspiration, *Pinterest* functions as a visual search engine. *Pinterest* functions using “Pins” that are essentially visual bookmarks that you collect on “Boards” with an interesting UI. A Pin could contain an image, a video, an infographic, or could link back to a source. You can create a collection of Pins or Repins, from another source, on a specific Board, which essentially functions as a category of items or ideas. Boards help you organize your pins and as a business, it makes it easier to help your audience find what they are looking for (Shayne, 2022).

8. Review Networks

These types of social media networks help you find and share reviews on products, services, food, travel and stay, etc. People often check reviews to avoid an unpleasant experience (Shayne, 2022). *ProTip* is an example of that.

9. Social Shopping Networks

These types of social media networks focus on creating a community of individuals who share similar interests, opinions and influence each other's purchasing decisions. Social shopping networks like *Etsy* and *Faveable* take the experience of e-commerce a step further by combining product sales with consumer recommendations (Shayne, 2022).

10. Interest-Based Networks

Unlike other types of social media that cater to a wide variety of topics, interest-based networks focus solely on a single area of interest, be it books, music, or home design. If you have a particular niche, interest-based networks can help you specifically target the right audience. (Shayne, 2022). An example of that is *Goodreads*. Authors and avid readers fuel *Goodreads* content. You can discover, explore, rate, and review books across various categories. By adding friends,

you can explore what they are reading, what they want to read and leave comments. (Shayne, 2022).

11. Sharing Economy Networks

These enable individuals to save money by sharing services. It's a perfect tech-enabled online solution for those wanting to save money and those wanting to make it. For instance, Uber connects drivers to users who need a ride, all from the convenience of a mobile app. You even have the option to share feedback on your ride by providing ratings (Shayne, 2022).

12. Audio Only Apps

As the name of this category suggests, it is audio-only. Apart from your profile picture, your content does the talking for you - literally!

13. Anonymous Social Networks

As the name suggests, anonymous social networks let you post anonymously. Sites like Whisper and 4chan are prime examples. As these sites allow you to post anonymously, there is no accountability for the user and these networks can easily become sites for cyberbullying, to vent, gossip or snoop - all of which don't do much for any business or brand (Shayne, 2022).

Having discussed the various types of social media, a person who wants to get involved in digital nurturing ministry now has a clearer idea of which platform does what?

D-How To Choose Your Social Media Platform For Your Ministry With Young People?

To get involved in digital nurturing ministry one has to answer a fundamental question. Why do I want to get involved in a particular ministry? And what do I want to get achieved with that ministry? The goal of the Digital Nurturing Ministry is to make use of social media platforms to nurture young people, by taking care of their spiritual, social, and physical needs.

It is accepted that Christian young people grow through Bible Studies, prayer, church attendance, witnessing, and socialization. It is also believed that "the five senses are fundamental to learning. And since we all learn differently, certain senses play different roles in the learning processes of different people" ("Sensory Learning, 2022). Hence, the best option in choosing a social media platform for youth nurture is to use one that can help to do more than one thing. In that sense, Social Networks Applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram will be the best, for they help people build communities and groups and share ideas, interests, and information. They can help integrate other social media platforms such as Facebook, and YouTube in the platform's activity. It is important to choose a social media that one is sure of handling.

1. Beginning a WhatsApp or Telegram platform for young people's nurturing

To begin a WhatsApp or Telegram platform to be used for Digital Nurturing, it is good for the person to begin reading and studying about the App and its functionalities. There are many useful links to that effect on the internet.

How to Get Started on WhatsApp Messenger

1. Download and launch the app: Download WhatsApp Messenger for free from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store. To open the app, tap the WhatsApp icon on your home screen.
2. Review the Terms of Service: Read the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, then tap Agree and Continue to accept the terms.
3. Register: Select your country from the drop-down list to add your country code, then enter your phone number in international phone number format. Tap Done or Next, then tap Ok to receive your 6-digit registration code via SMS or phone call. To complete registration, enter your 6-digit code. Learn how to register your phone number on Android, iPhone, or KaiOS.
4. Set up your profile: In your new profile, enter your name, and then tap Next. You can also add a profile photo.
5. Allow access to contacts and photos: Contacts can be added to WhatsApp from your phone's address book. You can also allow access to your phone's photos, videos, and files.
6. Start a chat: Tap or, then search for a contact to begin. Enter a message in the text field. To send photos or videos, tap or next to the text field. Choose Camera to take a new photo or video or Gallery or Photo and Video Library to select an existing photo or video from your phone.
7. Create a group: You can create a group with up to 256 participants. Tap or, then New group. Search for or select contacts to add to the group, then tap Next. Enter a group subject and tap or Create.

How To Get Started Using Telegram

How to create a Telegram account for iPhone or Android?

1. Download the Telegram App.
2. After downloading, open the Telegram App.
3. Now you need to sign up, tap on the Start Messaging button.
4. Next, choose your country and enter the Phone number you want to register for your Telegram account.
5. After entering the phone number tap on the Tick icon given on the right top corner of the app.
6. The Telegram will send an SMS Verification code on the number which you entered to register the Telegram.

7. Enter the verification code in the space of the screen.

Once the group or the platform is created, people need to know about it to join it. Hence the group link has to be sent out to prospective members to join. The group's advertisement is very key to the growth of the platform. Members joining the platform also need to know the rules guiding the platform's functioning. This has to be posted on the platform for each member to read. Administrators of the platform also need to be designated. "A Whatsapp admin is automatically the person who creates the group. But, additional admins can be added, without necessarily agreeing to be one. Group admins then have the ability to control who is invited to, or removed from, the group chat." (Claassens and Govender, 2017).

The nurturing exercise could be done individually or on a group basis. Materials to be shared can be sent to individual persons or all group members at once. The group can also set dates and times when all members can come together to discuss and have various activities together.

The following guidelines can be helpful to all group administrators:

1. Ask yourself what the consequences of the content shared on your WhatsApp group (be it with family or friends, a homeowners' association, school committee, or a company) could be if it was publicly shared. Remember, a defamation claim only requires publication to one other person (including those in the group).
2. Ensure the credibility of the participants of the group. Are all these people personally known to you as the group admin? If a person has subsequently left the organization or circle to which the group pertains, have you removed them from the group?
3. Educate the group members regularly concerning what content is permitted to be shared. For example, company groups should be used only to share information that pertains to groups. No cat videos. And certainly no political commentary. A comprehensive corporate social media policy should address this.
4. Object to content that may be regarded as defamatory or offensive. This should also be followed by taking immediate steps to get a promise not to repeat the behavior and, if not, to remove the content and the person sharing such content from the group. In addition, a message should be shared with the group stating that such behavior is not condoned, and will not be tolerated by other members (Claassens and Govender, 2017).

Paul Armstrong, a former contributor to Enterprise Tech also gives the following 5 top tips to group administrators on how to run a successful WhatsApp group:

- 1) Regularly post community guidelines and notes about the 'reply' functionality. Whether a new group

or an established one it never hurts to post community/group guidelines and names of group admins in case people have questions. Larger and more socially-focused groups especially benefit from doing this (especially reminding people about 'reply' functionality) as it can help topics stay on track and members know when to dip in and out and avoid self-promotional posts.

- 2) Create a recognized post type for important information. The content contained will vary from group to group but if you create an easily recognizable post (image, emoji, ASCII) people are more likely to spot the post in more active groups (plus it's easy to search for).
- 3) Figure out what works (or what's missing) by using a tool like WhatsAnalyzer or ChatVisualizer (check terms and conditions first). A handy tool that completes data visualization on your exported chats. Use the data to determine when to post, topics to post about, and members you might want to contact to be more active or ask if anything different needs to be done.
- 4) Get quick feedback using Google Forms and Doodle. Ask a question or 20 using Google Forms or schedule a meet-up easily with a quick link from Doodle both make running large groups more manageable and fairer. Using bit.ly can also add an extra measurement layer for WhatsApp group admins (and users).
- 5) Schedule discussions. It may sound strange but one of the best WhatsApp groups I am in schedules specific times to discuss topics (similar to Twitter chats or AMA on Reddit). One group even goes further and gets members to help create a Google Doc on the subject that is then edited by admins and then sent to everyone. This is unlikely to work for every group but it could be a good way to limit endless rivers of updates and create something usable faster (Armstrong, 2018).

E-Resources for Nurturing Young People Through Social Media Platforms

One of the challenges that people who get involved in digital nurturing programs on social media platforms is to get enough resources to keep running platform's activities.

As a Christian platform, most of the resources should be Bible-based. The Internet gives many sources of resources. It is a matter of knowing where to go on the net to get the needed resources. It is important as the administrators share things from the internet with group members to acknowledge with group members to acknowledge the sources of the documents to avoid any copyright-related issues that can implicate the group administrators or members.

The following "Do's And Don'ts Of Church Social Media" ideas can be helpful as one engages in social media church ministry or digital nurturing activities, as suggested by V.

Michelle Bernard in Columbia Union page of the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

Do:

- Create Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts for your church, school, and organizations
- Regularly post pictures, quotes, event info, and news on your social media platforms.
- Share moments others will want to share—baptisms, dedications, anniversaries, celebrations, accomplishments, etc. Post about holidays/local events/popular topics of interest, but put your organization’s spin on it.
- Remind people to follow you on social media via the church bulletin, website, announcement slides, and during the announcement period.
- Follow local news and media personalities and share your news with them on social media.
- Follow other social media users and engage with your followers.
- Tag organizations and people featured in your posts. They may share your post if they are mentioned.
- Use quality photos, GIFs, and videos for more engagement.
- #Hashtag your posts so people searching for that topic will see them.
- Think about what types of posts you personally interact with most, and then create those same types of posts for your church/school accounts.
- Be timely! You typically post your personal photos right after (or during events). Update your organization’s accounts in the same way—in “real-time.”
- Think about what makes your organization special. Share/create content that helps tell that story and inspires others to work toward your ministry goals.
- Respond! If someone messages your organization with a question, answer it in a timely manner!
- Study the best times to post. Use your analytics to see when people respond the most (Bernard, 2022).

Don’t:

- Publish songs and videos without making sure you have the license to do so. (This means livestreams of church services and special music too!)
- Post too much. Make your posts meaningful.
- Just publish material. Engage, engage, engage!
- Publish the same information and graphics on all platforms. Consider the platform you’re using. Use beautiful graphics on Instagram, share news/fast information on Twitter, and use Facebook to go deeper in engagement.
- Publish on your personal accounts first. Building your personal brand is important at events (people are doing this anyway), but your organization should be the “source” of news. Share the organization’s

posts to your personal accounts and encourage your leaders to do the same (Bernard, 2022).

F-How to make a sustainable social media platform ministry?

To begin a social media or digital nurturing ministry could be easy, but to make it continue and relevant to the need of the group members is another challenging issue. The Birmingham City Business School gives the following 11 tips to build a social media presence (Birmingham City Business School, 2022). They are as follow:

1. **Ask yourself ‘why am I on social media?’** Setting yourself goals and targets and having a clear idea of the kind of content you want to share is a great place to start. Think about the direction you want your platforms to grow; set yourself SMART targets and gather content ready for posting. This will give you a purpose and stop you from sharing content aimlessly.
2. **Make sure you use the right platforms for you.** Choosing the right platform is just as crucial as setting yourself targets. It’s important not to overwhelm yourself by trying to get famous on every platform going.
3. **Let your audience know you’re on social media.** You can easily link your social profiles to your website or if you’re in a physical location, like a shop or at a festival, you can always put up a ‘Follow us!’ sign.
4. **Optimize your profiles.** Making sure your pages have all the right information filled in and are consistent in their branding is key; a half-completed Facebook page with poor imagery isn’t going to get much traction. It’s important that anyone stumbling across your page instantly recognizes who you are, and thinks ‘these guys look professional and know what they’re doing.’
5. **Keep an eye on algorithms and updates.** For example, Facebook gives priority to visually engaging content over less visual content, such as plain text. Adding a photo to your status update can make a huge difference to how many people see your post. That’s why you see a lot more videos on your Facebook newsfeed than weird status updates from your estranged aunt.
6. **Create an editorial schedule.** Creating a schedule means you can plan exactly what and when you’re going to post, leaving you time to create content and, more importantly, getting on with actually running your business rather than panicking about finding something to post. You can plot key dates, compare different platforms, and see exactly how often (or not) you’re getting stuff out.
7. **Keep it fresh.** Audiences like to see fresh, new, and exciting content that cuts through the noise and competition (and trust us, there is a lot of competition).

8. **Don't push the hard sell.** If there's one thing to keep in mind when posting on social media, it's this: people do not like to be sold to. There are more ways than one to say something.
9. **Jump on the bandwagons.** It's also a brilliant way to get your name out to new followers who may be interested in your company. Consider using popular, specific hashtags to expose yourself to a particular audience like #CharityTuesday or #WorldMentalHealthDay.
10. **Interact with your audience.** Responding positively to comments, answering messages, and encouraging conversation are ways to let your audience know who you are and make them feel like you care about them. If they feel like you're thinking about them, they are more likely to continue interacting with you and even encourage their friends to do so.
11. **Learn from your mistakes and successes.** There's no point repeating the same action if it's not getting the response you want. You may learn that your Instagram audience loves a particular kind of post more than others, so you want to make more of that type of content, or alternatively, you see your Facebook followers interact less with external URL posts than ones to your own website, so you create more blogs. Insights like this will help form the groundwork for deciding on your social media presence's future direction and growth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Getting involved in ministering to Christian young people through social media platforms is doable and achievable through the guidelines outlined in this paper. This Digital Nurturing guidelines have shown the reason and how to get involved in nurturing young people through social media platforms. Through this paper, one can become a "Digital Nurturing Agent" (DNA) by knowing the what, why, and how of social media ministry to church members. This will be beneficial to Christian churches.

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