



Digital Inclusion and Intergenerational Participation in Online Parish Communication in Selected Parishes of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri

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Abstract

Unequal access and different patterns of engagement may limit participation even where parish communication is available online. This study examined digital access, platform adoption and engagement with Church content across age, education and urban, peri-urban and rural location groups in eight parishes of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya. Church content included liturgy, catechesis, prayer, youth programmes, Small Christian Community updates and notices. Multistage sampling selected one parish from each of eight deaneries, followed by age-stratified selection. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design combined questionnaires from 389 parishioners with 34 interviews involving clergy and lay ministry leaders and 14 focus groups involving 105 youth and older parishioners. Frequencies, percentages and chi-square comparisons described survey patterns; thematic analysis examined participants' explanations of access, learning and parish relationships. Utu relational philosophy guided interpretation. Reported regular internet access was 81.8% among urban, 80.2% among peri-urban and 61.0% among rural respondents, and ranged from 40.7% with primary education to 89.2% with university education. WhatsApp adoption was high across age groups (88.2%–94.2%), while Instagram and TikTok showed greater age differentiation. The youngest adults did not report the highest Church content engagement. Qualitative accounts identified affordability, learning, generational separation, continuity and recognition of digital service as concerns. The cross-sectional findings support an interpretation of inclusion encompassing material access, practical capability and relational recognition. A coordinated approach combining digital channels, offline communication, youth contributions and local Small Christian Communities merits evaluation.

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Introduction

Prayers, homilies and parish notices circulate through social media as part of everyday Catholic life. During COVID-19, restrictions on gatherings intensified the relationship between mediated participation and physical religious presence (Parish, 2020). Continued digital communication raises questions about who can receive information, respond and contribute. Access to an online message requires more than its publication: devices, connectivity, skills and membership of the relevant communication channel can shape whether it reaches its intended participants (Campbell, 2023).



This study concerns both official parish channels and horizontal networks, including Small Christian Community (SCC or Jumuiya) groups. It examines general adoption of WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram alongside engagement with Church content; it does not evaluate M-Pesa contributions, payment systems or the effectiveness of a particular livestreaming service. Participation means receiving and engaging with online parish communication and opportunities for contribution across generations, rather than a direct measure of sacramental attendance or overall religious commitment.

Catholic parish relationships extend through worship, SCCs, associations and charitable service. Utu provides a framework for asking whether members are recognised and can participate reciprocally (Waitherero, 2021). Unequal access can therefore carry relational consequences when members miss opportunities to receive information or contribute. This is an ethical concern about communal responsibility, not an empirical claim that parish leaders have deliberately excluded rural or less-educated members.

Research has identified uneven African connectivity, capability barriers in Kenyan public services and opportunities for intergenerational learning in Ghanaian churches (Agyekum et al., 2023; Malephane, 2022; Onyango & Ondiek, 2023). The specific knowledge gap concerns how access, platform adoption and Church content engagement intersect across generations, education and location within a Kenyan Catholic parish setting, and how participants explain the resulting opportunities and barriers. The practical problem combines unequal opportunities to connect with the possibility that shared platforms retain existing generational separation.

The objective was to examine differences in digital access, platform adoption and Church content engagement across age, education and location groups in eight parishes, and to interpret participants' accounts of inclusive communication through Utu. Three questions guided the study: How do access and use vary across these groups? How do generations engage with platforms and Church content? What practices and relationships do participants identify as necessary for inclusion?

The study is significant for pastoral planning because a widely adopted channel may still leave some members without workable access or a recognised contribution. Combining survey patterns with accounts of parish life helps identify where assistance, alternative channels and shared responsibilities deserve evaluation. The evidence supports contextual planning rather than an archdiocese-wide estimate of exclusion or a causal assessment of digital ministry.

Literature review

Digital inclusion research distinguishes connectivity, skills, use and benefits. Digital religion scholarship adds questions about embodied community and meaningful participation. Read together, these strands help examine parish communication without equating device ownership with inclusion or transferring findings between national and religious settings uncritically.

Digital access and capability

Hargittai (2002) demonstrated differences in online search skills among internet users in a United States county. Access alone therefore concealed unequal practical ability. Although search tasks differ from parish messaging, the study supports distinguishing technological availability from the ability to find and use information. It also cautions against treating frequent use as evidence of competence in every digital practice.

Van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) extend physical access to material access, including device opportunities, diversity and continuing maintenance costs. Their Dutch study associates these resources with skills, uses and outcomes. Its highly connected setting differs from rural Kenya, but



the distinction is relevant: owning a smartphone need not mean being able to sustain data subscriptions or access every form of parish content.

Malephane (2022), drawing on surveys from 34 African countries, distinguishes phone ownership from internet-enabled devices and actual use. Differences by age, education and rural residence make ownership an incomplete inclusion indicator. This continental evidence gives regional grounding to the distinction between devices and connectivity, while leaving the distribution and local meaning of parish inequalities to contextual investigation.

Onyango and Ondiek (2023) examine older people's digital capabilities in Kenyan social safety net programmes, connecting infrastructure, affordability, usability and support. Although public services differ from ministry, the study directs attention to the resources required to use digital provision. Campbell (2023) adds technological inaccessibility, hesitancy and reluctance within churches. Together, these studies discourage explaining every participation barrier through either connectivity or age alone.

Generational support and unequal participation

Friemel (2016), studying Swiss adults aged 65 and above, identifies differences within the older population and the relevance of encouragement from family and friends. Private learning settings were preferred to professional courses. The findings support examining social support alongside skills, but neither the national setting nor the age definition maps directly onto this study's broader category of respondents aged 36 years and above.

Helsper (2012) proposes that social and digital exclusion connect through corresponding economic, cultural, social and personal resources. Access, skills and motivation mediate these relationships; the quality and sustainability of engagement also matter. This theoretical model helps explain why inclusion cannot be reduced to platform membership. In parish research, it prompts questions about assistance and opportunities to contribute without presuming that social exclusion has already been demonstrated.

Scheerder et al. (2017) distinguish access, skills and uses from the tangible outcomes of internet use. Their systematic review identifies limited attention to outcomes and heavy reliance on demographic and socioeconomic explanations. This challenges parish studies to specify what participation means. The present study examines access and reported engagement; it does not establish that digital use produces improved relationships, spiritual growth or other pastoral benefits.

Digital religious presence and communal participation

Parish (2020) examines physical absence and virtual religious community during COVID-19. For Catholic communication, online contact must be understood alongside embodied worship and care. Evolvi (2022) similarly relates digital religious practices to material and physical spaces, using cases across religious traditions. Their approaches support examining how parish messages connect with existing communal practices, rather than treating online and offline belonging as independent spheres.

Agyekum et al. (2023) examine online worship, well-being and intergenerational learning in Ghana. The study brings assistance and learning into religious relationships, complementing Friemel's (2016) attention to social support. However, Ghanaian online worship and Kenyan Catholic Small Christian Community communication differ institutionally. The comparison supports investigating reciprocal assistance without assuming identical meanings of elderhood, authority or religious participation.



Platform choice and the remaining gap

Across these studies, availability, use and contribution remain distinct. A parishioner may use WhatsApp without receiving parish information, receive a notice without responding, or contribute technical labour without recognition. Material access research identifies resource constraints; capability research highlights assistance; digital religion scholarship situates communication within religious relationships. No single strand explains all three dimensions, and foreign evidence cannot establish their distribution in Nyeri.

The remaining gap concerns how access, platform adoption and Church content engagement vary together across age, education and location in selected Kenyan Catholic parishes, and how participants explain opportunities for inclusion. The study combines survey comparisons with accounts of affordability, learning, continuity and recognition. Utu provides an ethical interpretation of these relationships, while the cross-sectional design limits claims about causes or demonstrated pastoral outcomes.

Theoretical framework

Utu is the principal interpretive framework. It situates inclusion within the recognition of persons and responsibility for relationships, rather than measuring success solely through digital reach. This framework guides interpretation of participants' experiences; the survey did not construct an Utu index or test an Utu-based intervention.

Waitherero (2021) connects Utuism with affirmation of the human person. Nyoni and Rutalamulwa (2024) discuss dignity and an interconnected understanding of life, while cautioning that cultural practices require ethical appraisal. These ideas support asking whose voice is heard, whose contribution is valued and who needs assistance in parish communication. They do not justify treating established hierarchies or generational customs as inherently inclusive.

Seehawer (2023) develops relational concerns within an Ubuntu research paradigm. Utu and Ubuntu have distinct linguistic and cultural histories; the comparison concerns their attention to relationships and responsibility. In this study, Utu is applied through three interpretive questions: Can members obtain essential communication? Can they use available channels or receive appropriate assistance? Are their contributions recognised within shared parish responsibility? These questions connect material access, practical capability and relational recognition without presenting them as a validated scale.

Method

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Survey comparisons first identified patterns in access and use; interviews and focus groups then explored affordability, learning, platform choice and parish relationships. Comparing the two forms of evidence contextualised statistical patterns without treating participants' explanations as verified statistical causes.

Study setting and sampling

Research took place in Our Lady Consolata Cathedral Parish in Nyeri, Gatarakwa, Karatina, Mukurwe-ini, Nanyuki, Narumoru, Othaya and Tetu parishes. Cathedral refers specifically to the archbishop's cathedral parish in Nyeri (Archdiocese of Nyeri, n.d.-b). The Archdiocese's territorial jurisdiction covers the whole of Nyeri County and part of Laikipia County; Nanyuki Parish belongs to its Nanyuki Deanery (Archdiocese of Nyeri, n.d.-a, n.d.-c). The study concerns that territorial jurisdiction rather than all dioceses of the wider ecclesiastical province.



Multistage sampling selected one parish from each of eight deaneries, followed by age-stratified selection within sites. The recorded site categories were urban (Cathedral, Nanyuki and Karatina), peri-urban (Mukurwe-ini, Othaya and Narumoru) and rural (Tetu and Gatarakwa). These are contextual fieldwork classifications of the selected parish settings. They are not presented as a verified KNBS classification or as categories derived from a specified population-density, municipal-distance or network-coverage threshold.

The target survey sample was 400 and the final analytical sample 389, equivalent to 97.25% of the target. Adults aged 18 years and above participated voluntarily. Youth aged 18–35 numbered 192 (49.4%); respondents aged 36 years and above numbered 197 (50.6%). Five age groups remain visible in detailed comparisons so that the broad older-generation category does not imply that all its members are elderly.

The qualitative sample comprised 34 purposively selected clergy and lay informants and 105 focus group participants. Informants had active parish membership, knowledge or use of parish social media, a relevant ministry role and willingness to be interviewed. Fourteen focus groups were conducted in seven parishes, with seven youth groups and seven older-generation groups. Mukurwe-ini contributed five key informant interviews but no focus group. Key informants were distinct from focus group participants; overlap with the survey is not assumed.

Data collection and measures

A structured questionnaire was administered through KoboCollect, with research assistants providing respondent support and offline entry where connectivity was unreliable. Questions covered demographic characteristics, device use, internet access, general social media use, platform adoption and interaction with Church content. A pilot at St. Jude Parish, outside the main sample, assessed question clarity, Kiswahili translations and KoboCollect usability. Interview and discussion guides explored access, learning, generational relationships and communication support.

Internet access was recorded as Yes, Sometimes or No; Yes is interpreted as reported regular access, not independently measured connection quality or affordability. General use and Church content interaction were recorded separately as daily, weekly, monthly, rarely or never. Platform adoption referred to general use of WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. Church content encompassed livestreamed Mass, homilies, prayer, Scripture, youth programmes, SCC updates and parish notices. Multiple content types, purposes and platforms could be reported, so those percentages are not mutually exclusive.

Analysis and ethics

Frequencies and percentages summarised the survey. Pearson chi-square tests examined bivariate group differences and Cramér's V described association strength. These exploratory comparisons do not separate the independent contributions of age, education and location. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke (2006), with NVivo supporting transcript organisation. Themes were compared with survey patterns, then interpreted through Utu's emphasis on assistance, reciprocity and recognition. No new inferential analyses were estimated for this revision.

Ethical review was sought from Tangaza University's Institutional Ethics Review Committee, alongside NACOSTI research authorisation. Participants were informed about voluntary participation and withdrawal, and consent preceded collection. Personal identifiers were removed from the analytical dataset and stored data had restricted access. Broad role descriptions accompany



quotations to reduce identification risks. Respondent assistance and the researcher's pastoral role required attention to comprehension and freedom to decline.

Results

The results first describe the survey sample, then compare access, engagement and platforms before presenting qualitative explanations. Urban respondents numbered 176 (45.2%), peri-urban respondents 131 (33.7%) and rural respondents 82 (21.1%). Secondary education was reported by 134 respondents (34.4%). These marginal distributions do not establish whether the rural sample was older or less educated than the urban sample; no age-by-location cross-tabulation is reported.

Table 1: Characteristics of survey respondents

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	219	56.3
Gender	Male	170	43.7
Gender total	All respondents	389	100.0
Age	18–24 years	106	27.2
Age	25–35 years	86	22.1
Age	36–50 years	105	27.0
Age	51–65 years	75	19.3
Age	66 years and above	17	4.4
Age total	All respondents	389	100.0
Education	Primary education	27	6.9
Education	Secondary education	134	34.4
Education	Certificate	50	12.9
Education	Diploma	95	24.4
Education	University	83	21.3
Education total	All respondents	389	100.0
Location	Urban	176	45.2
Location	Peri-urban	131	33.7
Location	Rural	82	21.1
Location total	All respondents	389	100.0

Note. N = 389 in each characteristic. Percentages are calculated from counts; rounding may affect displayed sums. Location summaries reproduce the reported survey coding and are not a cross-tabulation of parish membership and residence. Source: Study survey.

Internet access and engagement

Smartphone use was widespread, but differed by age, education and location. It was reported by 98.1% of respondents aged 18–24 and 98.8% of those aged 25–35, compared with 86.7% of those aged



51–65 and 88.2% of those aged 66 years and above. Among respondents with primary education, smartphone use was 70.4%, compared with 100.0% among university-educated respondents. The reported education association was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 34.39$, $p < .001$, $V = .297$.

Internet access showed greater variation than smartphone use. Overall, 299 respondents reported Yes to internet access, 58 reported Sometimes and 32 reported No. Regular access was highest among respondents aged 25–35 and lowest among those aged 66 years and above (Table 2). The reported association between age and access was $\chi^2(8) = 24.00$, $p = .002$, $V = .176$.

Table 2: Reported internet access by demographic group

Group	n	Yes %	Sometimes %	No %	Total %
18–24 years	106	77.4	18.9	3.8	100.0
25–35 years	86	89.5	8.1	2.3	100.0
36–50 years	105	74.3	15.2	10.5	100.0
51–65 years	75	70.7	13.3	16.0	100.0
66 years and above	17	52.9	29.4	17.6	100.0
Age total	389	76.9	14.9	8.2	100.0
Primary education	27	40.7	18.5	40.7	100.0
Secondary education	134	69.4	23.1	7.5	100.0
Certificate	50	78.0	12.0	10.0	100.0
Diploma	95	86.3	8.4	5.3	100.0
University	83	89.2	9.6	1.2	100.0
Education total	389	76.9	14.9	8.2	100.0
Urban	176	81.8	14.2	4.0	100.0
Peri-urban	131	80.2	13.7	6.1	100.0
Rural	82	61.0	18.3	20.7	100.0
Location total	389	76.9	14.9	8.2	100.0

Note. $N = 389$. Each row represents a three-category access distribution within the named group. Overall totals use 299 Yes, 58 Sometimes and 32 No responses. Rounded row entries may total 99.9 or 100.1; Total denotes the underlying 100% distribution. Source: Study survey.

Educational differences were substantial: reported regular access rose at each successive level of education, from primary to university (Table 2). The full three-category access distribution differed by educational level, $\chi^2(8) = 60.10$, $p < .001$, $V = .278$. Reported regular access was similar in urban and peri-urban parishes and noticeably lower in rural parishes. The corresponding test was $\chi^2(4) = 24.41$, $p < .001$, $V = .177$.

The difference between smartphone use and internet access deserves attention. Among the oldest respondents, 88.2% reported smartphone use, yet 52.9% reported regular internet access. A device therefore offers only part of the picture of digital participation. The survey cannot identify the precise



constraints behind this difference, while the interviews offer context about affordability and the practical demands of staying connected.

Daily general social media use differed by age, education and location. It was reported by 95.3% of respondents aged 25–35, compared with 82.1% of those aged 18–24 and 52.9% of those aged 66 years and above. Daily use was also more common among university-educated respondents, at 97.6%, than those with primary education, at 55.6%. Across locations, the corresponding percentages were 88.1% for urban, 83.2% for peri-urban and 72.0% for rural respondents.

Engagement with Church content showed a different pattern. Daily interaction was reported by 47.2% of respondents aged 18–24, 62.8% of those aged 25–35 and 64.8% of those aged 36–50. Among respondents aged 51–65, 58.7% reported daily interaction, compared with 35.3% among those aged 66 years and above. The reported age association for the full interaction-frequency distribution was $\chi^2(16) = 44.14$, $p < .001$, $V = .168$.

General platform use did not correspond uniformly to Church content engagement. Respondents aged 18–24 frequently used social media, yet fewer reported daily Church content interaction than those aged 36–50. This comparison concerns a specific digital practice. It cannot be used to judge the depth of faith or wider parish participation of either group.

Location also mattered for Church content engagement. Daily interaction was reported by 61.9% of urban respondents and 58.8% of peri-urban respondents, compared with 43.9% of rural respondents. Among rural respondents, 11.0% reported never interacting with Church content, compared with 1.1% among urban respondents. These differences suggest uneven opportunities or practices, but the study cannot isolate whether access, preferences, content availability or other conditions explain them.

Platform adoption and content interests

WhatsApp was used widely across all five age categories (Table 3). The reported age association was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 1.22$, $p = .875$, $V = .056$. This supports its consideration as a common communication channel within the sample, while leaving open questions about active participation, accessibility and group management.

Table 3: Platform adoption by age group

Age group	WhatsApp %	Facebook %	TikTok %	Instagram %
18–24	90.6	57.5	74.5	69.8
25–35	94.2	83.7	84.9	41.9
36–50	91.4	86.7	61.9	21.0
51–65	90.7	77.3	46.7	10.7
66 and above	88.2	41.2	5.9	5.9

Note. $N = 389$. Multiple platforms could be reported. Each percentage is the proportion of the named age group using that platform; percentages across platforms must not be summed to 100. Source: Study survey.

Other platforms showed greater age differentiation. Facebook adoption was highest among respondents aged 36–50 and lower among the youngest and oldest groups. TikTok adoption was highest among respondents aged 25–35 and very low among those aged 66 years and above, while Instagram use declined steadily with age. The reported age associations were $\chi^2(4) = 38.11$ for Facebook, $\chi^2(4) = 56.84$ for TikTok and $\chi^2(4) = 91.50$ for Instagram, all $p < .001$.



These patterns matter when a parish chooses where to communicate. A platform can be popular with one age group and rarely used by another. Its suitability depends on the audience the parish hopes to reach. Even a widely shared channel provides only an opportunity for contact; relationships depend on how members are invited to respond and take part.

The two broad generational categories shared several religious interests. Spiritual growth and personal devotion were reported as purposes of Church content engagement by 86.5% of youth and 86.3% of older-generation respondents. The reported difference was not significant, $p = .962$. This provides evidence of common stated motivations despite differences in platform use.

Engagement with youth programmes was reported by 49.0% of respondents aged 18–35 and 10.7% of those aged 36 years and above, $\chi^2(1) = 68.49$, $p < .001$, $V = .420$. Conversely, Small Christian Community updates were reported by 22.9% of youth and 41.1% of older-generation respondents, $\chi^2(1) = 14.77$, $p < .001$, $V = .195$. Parish announcement engagement was also higher among the older-generation respondents, at 40.6%, than among youth, at 26.0%, $\chi^2(1) = 9.27$, $p = .002$, $V = .154$.

Engagement with parish content appears to follow some existing generational interests and organisational patterns. Age-specific material can serve useful purposes. The pastoral question is whether it also leaves room for activities shared across generations. Common devotional motivations offer one possible starting point for such work.

Qualitative accounts of inclusion

The 34 interviews and 14 focus groups contextualised the survey through accounts of cost, learning, communal participation and recognition. Table 4 shows the achieved coverage. The excerpts below illustrate these themes and a contrasting account of unused infrastructure; they do not establish how frequently each view occurred.

Table 4: Qualitative participants by parish

Parish	Key informants	FGD participants	Total
Cathedral	6	15	21
Gatarakwa	5	13	18
Karatina	4	15	19
Mukurwe-ini	5	0	5
Nanyuki	4	18	22
Narumoru	2	16	18
Othaya	4	18	22
Tetu	4	10	14
Total	34	105	139

Note. Fourteen focus groups comprised 46 youth and 59 older-generation participants. Key informants and FGD participants were distinct. Source: Study interviews and focus groups.

Affordability remained a concern after obtaining a device. An SCC leader proposed parish-based connectivity:



“If they can provide Wi-Fi for about three hours when people come to the parish, people can access the internet and see what is being done. That would be good because some people cannot afford data bundles all the time.”

SCC leader, key informant interview

Participants also described basic-phone users who relied on SMS and calls. The account contextualises the access differences without proving that affordability caused any specific survey association. Conversely, an association leader described available infrastructure that did not attract sustained use:

“We have a Youth hub, with Wi-Fi, computers, and internet, but you will never find a single youth there. It is about interest.”

Catholic Women Association leader, focus group discussion

This contrasting account suggests that equipment and connectivity alone may not secure participation; programmes, interest and follow-up also deserve attention. Learning sometimes brought generations together. A choir leader described younger members helping others approach technology differently:

“The Youth are changing the mindset of the old and making them realize that things can be done easily through technology than the way they were used to traditionally.”

Choir chairperson, key informant interview

Training needs extended beyond operating a device. Participants described needs for responsible sharing, misinformation awareness and appropriate presentation of Catholic liturgical material. These accounts support reciprocal learning rather than an assumption that competence follows age automatically.

Generational distance was also situated within established parish organisations. A youth member described SCCs as associated with older members:

“There is no connection. When I was growing up, we have never mixed at all, because you hear people saying Jumuiya is for the elders. It is now a mental picture that it is for the old.”

Youth member, focus group discussion

The account points to an existing social boundary rather than evidence that WhatsApp created the separation. Platform choice also mattered to perceived reach:

“If you want to reach the older and the Youthful, they are both in WhatsApp. Others are in Facebook. But if you take it now to TikTok, you will not get the older.”

Catholic Women Association leader, key informant interview.

A youth participant linked engagement to continuity rather than platform choice alone:

“Church social media pages are very active during big events like Easter, Christmas, or a Feast Day, and then they go completely silent for months.”

Youth participant, focus group discussion

These accounts provide possible explanations for engagement that differs from device ownership, but they are not linked analytically to the 18–24 subgroup. Finally, a youth participant questioned the recognition given to digital service:



“Right now, the media team is just seen as 'the youth holding phones.' The Archdiocese needs to make an official commissioning for them, like they do for altar servers and choirs, so that the old people know that managing social media is also a valid service to the church.”

Youth participant, focus group discussion

The request concerns the standing of a contribution within parish life. It supports examining recognition alongside access and skills, while leaving the effectiveness of formal commissioning to future evaluation.

Discussion

The findings suggest that digital inclusion in parish communication involves material access, practical capability and relational recognition. These dimensions connect the survey patterns with participants' accounts while remaining an interpretation rather than a validated inclusion scale. They also qualify a simple progression from device ownership to meaningful participation.

Smartphone use coexisted with uneven regular internet access. This converges with Malephane's (2022) distinction between ownership and use and with Onyango and Ondiek's (2023) emphasis on capability conditions. The data-cost account gives this distinction pastoral context. The unused youth-hub account, however, prevents a purely infrastructural explanation: access may be available without a programme or sustained interest. Utu adds the ethical question of how the parish shares responsibility for enabling members to participate, without making technology the sole explanation of exclusion. The distinction also accords with van Deursen and van Dijk's (2019) material-access approach; device ownership does not establish sustainable access.

The youngest adults reported high smartphone use but lower daily Church content engagement than respondents aged 36–50. This is compatible with treating technological familiarity and religious engagement separately. Participants' accounts of seasonal communication, platform audiences and SCC boundaries identify plausible conditions for further enquiry. They do not demonstrate that 18–24-year-olds were alienated by language, undergoing a particular life transition or responding to authoritarian moderation; these subgroup explanations were not tested.

The learning accounts complement Agyekum et al.'s (2023) attention to intergenerational support. Under Utu, younger members' assistance and older members' experience can be interpreted as reciprocal contributions. Recognition matters because technological labour may be present while its pastoral status remains uncertain. Assistance should therefore avoid reducing younger members to operators or presuming older members are incapable. This interpretation extends the discussion from individual skill to the relationships through which capability becomes usable. Friemel (2016) similarly directs attention to support networks, although the Swiss findings cannot establish the effects of parish mentoring in Kenya.

WhatsApp's broad adoption offers a potential common channel, but is not proof of equal voice. Parish's (2020) distinction between virtual and embodied religious community is especially relevant to SCCs: digital coordination can support meetings, prayer and care, while offline routes remain necessary for members outside the group. The youth account of Jumuiya as an elders' space suggests that digital communication can carry established social boundaries. Utu makes reciprocal recognition an evaluative requirement; the evidence does not establish that clergy systematically silence younger members or that all groups operate through top-down control.

These interpretations support a coordinated hybrid approach connecting parish communication teams, SCC networks and offline contact. Campbell's (2023) attention to inaccessibility and reluctance



reinforces the need to examine who receives support and how. The contribution of Utu is to frame inclusion as a responsibility of parish relationships and governance, alongside technical provision. The proposed arrangements remain recommendations for evaluation, not findings of proven administrative failure or demonstrated intervention effectiveness.

Implications for pastoral practice

The Archdiocese can establish minimum communication-access and safeguarding expectations while parishes and SCCs adapt delivery to local needs. A shared parish communication team should formally include youth contributors, catechists, SCC representatives and other generations, with defined roles, oversight and routes for feedback. Essential notices should reach members through workable digital and offline channels, with named responsibility for those routes.

Reciprocal mentoring can combine practical skills with responsible sharing, consent and information verification. Text, audio and locally appropriate languages deserve assessment alongside SMS, calls, printed notices and in-person announcements. Evaluation should examine receipt, understanding and opportunities to contribute, rather than views alone. Formal recognition of digital service may support collaboration, but commissioning, mentoring and content changes require local evaluation.

Conclusion

Across the surveyed parishes, widespread platform use coexisted with unequal access and differing Church content engagement. The youngest respondents were not consistently the most engaged, and broad generational categories concealed differences. Qualitative accounts connected participation with cost, learning, communication continuity, existing SCC relationships and recognition of digital service.

Interpreted through Utu, inclusion is an ecclesial responsibility to enable members to receive information and contribute with dignity. Technical provision remains necessary but does not establish reciprocal participation. A coordinated hybrid model linking recognised youth contributions, local SCC relationships and offline routes offers a practical direction to evaluate, without attributing the observed gaps to a single cause.

However, cross-sectional self-reports cannot establish causation, pandemic-related change or observed improvements in parish relationships. Bivariate comparisons do not disentangle age, education, location and related circumstances. The oldest group contained only 17 respondents; sparse expected cells and multiple comparisons warrant caution and checks using exact or simulation-based alternatives where appropriate. Such reanalyses were not undertaken here.

Recruitment through parish structures and screening for previous digital experience may underrepresent completely excluded or weakly connected members. The sample was 11 below its target, and Mukurwe-ini contributed interviews but no focus group. Uneven qualitative coverage limits comparison between sites. Contextual location categories also require caution because formal thresholds and their correspondence with individual residence were not established in the reported analysis.

Future studies should recruit through offline household sampling within defined geographical areas, including non-users and people outside organised parish groups. Probability-based household selection would support population estimates more clearly than an unstructured random walk. Researchers should document settlement criteria, assistance and consent languages, examine demographic intersections, and observe communication directly. Longitudinal evaluation could then



test whether mentoring, recognition and alternative channels improve access and shared participation.

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