

**THE COVID 19 DISRUPTION AND CHANGING RELIGIOUS  
PRACTICES IN UGANDA**

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## DECLARATION

I, Kyasiimire Angel, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work written with the Best of my knowledge and understanding. It has never been presented anywhere in partial Fulfilment for any award of degree in arts in social sciences.

Signature



Kyasiimire Angel

Student

## APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation has been submitted in fulfilment for the award of a Bachelor's degree in arts in social science at Makerere University for Examination with the approval of the following supervisor.

Signed



MR ISAAC TIBASIIMA KIIZA

Makerere University

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to the Almighty God above in whom we live and move and have our being and without whom this wouldn't be possible. To my family for the provision and love through this education journey. To friends I can now deem family for the love and support they invest in my life. I appreciate you all and Lastly to my research supervisor for being a patient, a very supportive, available and always willing to help. God bless you ITK

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am so thankful to the Almighty Lord for the gift of life, knowledge, wisdom and Understanding, and the good health plus protection he gave to me while carrying out my Research, glory back to Him.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates and describes communication and how COVID 19 as a pandemic disrupts the religious practices and rites in Uganda.

It also presents the significance of the study which helped to find out the effects of the pandemic on how people communicate in their religions.

The dissertation further presents the reviews of different authors about COVID 19, the emerging issues in the literature in that the literature ignores the Islamic faith and focuses mainly on Christianity. So the literature review mainly entails the Christian faith and bits of the Islamic faith.

The third chapter presents the methodology of the study which took a qualitative research using the key informant interviews, the case study and in-depth interviews, ethical considerations where the researcher had to seek informed consent of the respondents, ensuring that they are not harmed and their information is kept with the highest level of confidentiality.

And Chapter four presents the analysis of data and interpretation discussion and findings where respondents provided their views of the effect of the pandemic on the different religions:. And the last chapter presents the summary of findings and discussion and the limitations the researcher faced while carrying out the research and references.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The study intends to explore the different religious rites and practices in the three main religions that is Anglicans, Catholics and the Islamic faith. Before Uganda as a state was hit by the pandemic, the religions mentioned each had their own rites and how they communicate to their masses. However after the pandemic hit in the year 2020 and places of worship were among those sectors that were closed down from physical gathering and this forced them to adjust on their practices. This thesis also seeks to understand the different ways in which religion has adopted to the pandemic disruptions on the religious practices.

This chapter lays out the background, the problem statement, the general objective and specific objectives, research questions.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

This section explains why this particular research topic is important and essential to understanding the main aspects of the study.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan, China, in 2019, and subsequently spread globally to become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. Uganda embarked on preparations for prevention of Corona virus disease as soon as it was declared by World Health Organisation as an International Pandemic in January 2020.

The Government of Uganda developed guidelines in Consultation with World Health Organisation. The first case of COVID-19 in Uganda was confirmed on March 21, 2020 and a country wide lockdown was declared a day later. The President of Uganda gave directives to implement the lockdown. The key measures included closing of the country's borders to incoming

and outgoing passengers in the bid to stop the importation of the disease into the country. The President also banned all public gatherings and closed schools, public and private transport. Social distancing was emphasized to curtail the spread of the disease. These measures worked well.

This study shows that communication was slightly affected during the pandemic, especially the non-verbal kind, with verbal communication maintained and, in some occasions, strengthened. Communication in general deteriorated during the pandemic, especially during the initial waves. Non-verbal communication was more affected due to the use of personal protective equipment and the fear of infection. The coronavirus pandemic has affected the way we communicate and its critical impact on our daily communication skills. The most obvious changes were that most of us had less face-to-face, in-person interaction with others, and when we were face to face, we wore masks. There was less interaction with people outside of the people we live with, and we spent more time on Zoom, Whatsapp and other media platforms. A positive is that many became better at using communication technologies, which may be more beneficial moving forward.

The practice of religion and communication are profoundly connected with one another. Religion makes use of different forms of communication, aimed at disclosing reality and creating community: prayer and preaching, worship and witnessing, reading and listening to sacred texts, singing and sharing, prophetic discourse, ritual practice, and theological reflection. This study looks at how these communication practices have changed over the outbreak of the pandemic in Uganda and how the pandemic influenced the adoption of other forms of communication in regard to the set rules on gatherings. Some writers and authors like Ephraim Kisangala, Andrew Marvin Kanyike among others in their article Web-based COVID-19 risk communication by religious authorities in Uganda, have proven the deteriorating effects and strengthening effects of Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic on religious gatherings and how religious groups

respond to the crisis originating from their unique rationality. This study will therefore bring out all forms of religious expressions during the lock down period and how they adopted to new changes.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

With the COVID 19 pandemic in Uganda, the government and Ministry of Health instituted standard Operating Procedures which included suspension on the religious gatherings, prayers in Churches, in Mosques, open air prayers and services on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. In the interests of people's health, the Religious leaders were asked to use the TVs, Radios stations to continue preaching to their people. At some time, the government permitted places of worship to have at most 70 people in the audience each with a mask and visible social distancing.

With the changed environment, religious practices too had to change and fit into the new normal and at the same time find a way of protecting the people from the pandemic.

The problem with the changes is that there was no more physical gatherings and nights of prayer which were very important in the spiritual growth of the believers. Before the pandemic, people used to shake hands, hug and smile with each other, share testimonies with each other which helped them express their emotions and connection with other people. However with The Standard Operating Procedures, communication and physical connection of believers was no more and people resorted to social media and slowly by slowly felt detached from the spiritual connection. This study therefore brings out how religions adopted to visual and written communication after the suspension of gatherings and congregations. The fact that most places of worship were used to gathering and listening to sermons and singing as a community, with the outbreak of the pandemic all sects including the religious sects had to adopt in order to keep in communication with their people



## **1.4 Objectives of the study**

### **1.4.1 General objective**

The study generally sought to examine the changes in communication practices in the Post Covid 19 era in religious places or places of worship.

### **1.4.2 Specific objective**

- i) Identify religious rites and practices Pre-Covid 19
- ii) Identify religious rites and practices Post Covid
- iii) Discussing the different communication ways in which religious people have adopted to the Covid 19 disruptions on the religious practices.
- iv) How effective are the new religious communication schemes and methods

### **1.4.3 Research questions**

- i) What are the different religious rites and practices pre and post Covid and how has the pandemic drastically changed these religious rites.
- ii) How has communication changed in the different places of worship during the pandemic?
- iii) What is the people's response towards the changes that have been made in the places of worship?
- iv) How effective are the new religious communication schemes and methods

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

By studying changing patterns in religious practices that were brought about by COVID 19, i hoped to find out why communication is a very important thing in religion and how the pandemic has disrupted this practice.

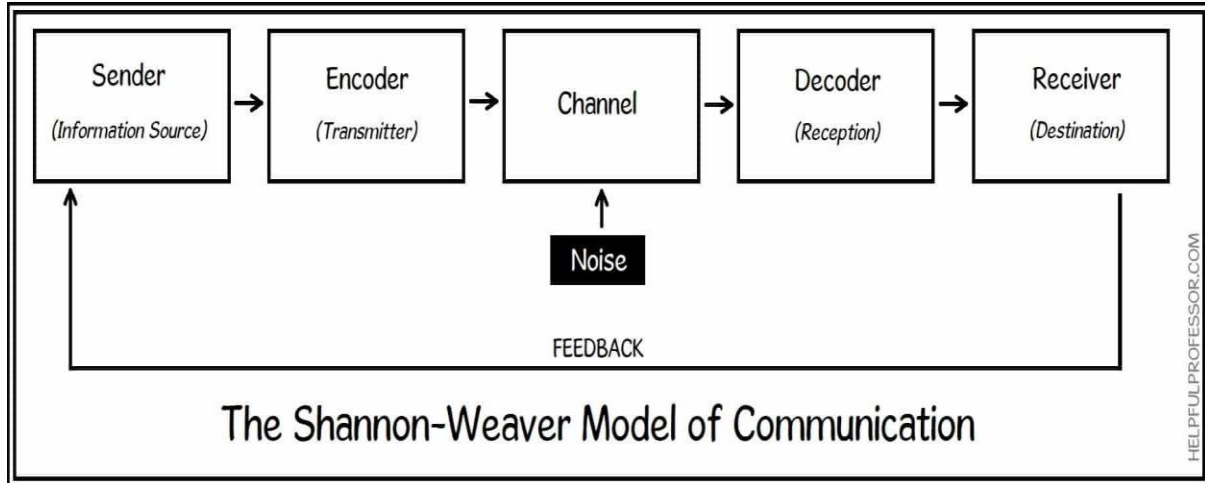
Through the study, i was able to find out that religious practices communicate and therefore are important in promoting social action in society. Religious rites are not only communicative but they are as well transformative in term of social change in society. Religions establish various standards that control and guide human attitudes. In most human societies, religion is the prime source of the ordination of standard of behaviour. Hence, religion's profound function lies on its ability to educate, instruct, inform and build people individually and collectively including the society at-large.

I observed that religion is a means of communication and with the disruptions of COVID 19 on religious gatherings, this study is very important because it has helped me find out how communication was affected and how different religion adopted to these changes.

### **1.6 Theories and Theoretical framework:**

The study applies the theory of Shannon and Weaver's Theory of Communication (1949; Weaver, 1949b) which is widely accepted as one of the main seeds out of which Communication Studies has grown. It is a clear example of seeing communication as the transmission of messages. The

model's primary value is in explaining how messages are lost and distorted in the process



The argument related to this model associates the deficiency of being one-way and linear, which is not satisfying human communication which is interactive. When we link this to our study, it is clear that with the occurrence of the pandemic, communication in religions became a one way thing that is to say that the congregation received the sermons and the instructions guided by their religious leaders but there was no feedback for the fact that most of these were done online. In this model, sender has an active role which identifies the meaning of the message and receiver has a passive role which only consume information. There is no feedback system to allow sender to be adjusted to receiver's needs.

This model is specially designed to develop the effective communication between sender and receiver.

This study found it useful to employ this theory since it literary engages with meaning. First, it accounts for elements that hinder effective communication and the hindrance here is the Coronavirus.

Hence, it makes it possible to identify communication flaws or **noise** and resolve them. The model also breaks the communication process into small parts, making it more understandable to the receiver. In addition, it is applicable in almost every type of communication since it makes communication a two-way process. Lastly, it evaluates communication as a quantifiable process. (Fiske, 1990) Please write a conclusion to this chapter and all others. What has the chapter done, what has it shown? Give flesh to the ideas

To conclude this chapter, it clearly shows the background of the study, its objectives and the importance of the study. The importance of this study is that it seeks to understand how a crisis or a pandemic deeply effects the mode of practices most especially the communication process among religions.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter examines and analyses different literature on the subject under study. It points out detailed literature under study basing on subject matters. Therefore, it was extracted from text books, newspapers, journals, electronic sources and reports.

Communication may be conceived differently by different people. Communication is a way to transfer information in interpersonal, group and social interaction (Gazniuk, Soina, Goncharov, & Chervony, 2019). Communication is considered as a way of being of everyday life, a universal form of sociality, reproduced in intersubjective interaction. The identification of religious individuals and communities takes place through communication.

Communication has no single simple universally acceptable definition. It could be described as the science or practice of transmitting information. Communication can simply mean the sharing of thoughts, ideas, feelings, desires or messages among several persons with the aid of sound or symbols. It can be described as a process by which meaning is assigned and conveyed in order to establish and share understanding (Craig, 2006). Communication as a process permits significant insight into the nature of human beings. As a process, communication transfers information from one destination to the other .....Communication is one of the basic needs of human beings in society. As a social being, in the absence of communication in society, human beings would be lost in their understanding of one another. In other words, there will be no social cohesion if there is no communication between members of society. Communication therefore, makes and keeps society actively alive. As this explains communication in general, it is also important to emphasize that communication in religion especially among Christians, is usually done through sermons, singing, Christian concerts which is basically an engaging type of

communication. However with the outbreak of the pandemic in Uganda, guidelines were put up and physical gatherings were put on hold for some time. This study is interested in how communication changes and how Christians adopt to it.

Understanding behavior in the pandemic as a function of mutable processes, rather than fixed psychological tendencies, means a greater understanding of behavioral change – both analyzing it and designing interventions to facilitate it. The effects of a pandemic are much more dispersed in time and space than those of other emergencies, such as fires, earthquakes and terrorist attacks. Yet, like these other kinds of emergencies, a pandemic such as COVID-19 represents a mortal threat that creates collective fear. In all cases, immediate and dramatic responses are required. Therefore, (Drury, Carter, Ntontis, & Guven, 2020) in their article as well as referring to other research on public responses to COVID-19, they draw upon the accumulated research on behavior in emergencies to provide on change in behavior. The starting point for a behavioral response to an emergency is the recognition of the threat, so their article covers what we know about, when and how people perceive threats. Whereas this article looks at the general public response to an emergency, this thesis seeks to specifically look at religious sects as a part of the public and how the people in the different places of worship responded to the outbreak of the pandemic and how it affects communication. For example at the beginning of COVID- 19 crisis was intense gatherings and worship and podcasts making rounds so it is fair to say that there was a panic and in such a way this pandemic later hit people into preparedness. This intends to explain how a pandemic can cause changes in behaviour which means for individuals to shift from the old normal and conforming to the new normal.

The relationship between times of crisis (natural disasters, pandemics) and religious behavior has been the subject of long debate. Theoretical models of religious coping propose that adversity

caused by adverse and unexpected events instigates people to use religion more intensively (Meza, 2020). Given the fact that this Pandemic brought fear among the people, it is clear that religious leaders and their congregations put extreme effort on prayer and worshipping God. From my observation, it is safe to say that after the pandemic hit Uganda, prayer and worship became very intense and it also pushed people to believe more in the word. This explains that an adversity or a pandemic in this case communicates messages to the people and it is upon them to interpret the message. More so, the global pandemic of COVID-19 unpredictably re-confronts people with the instability and chaos (Bentzen, 2019). Probably, in this scenario, we can observe how believers use religion to face unexpected and sudden adversity.

57% of those who claim to attend religious services, generally, said that they have watched religious services online or on TV (Campbell, 2020)., Worship places have been closed preventively and religious services have been transferred to the internet quickly and efficiently. Churches have multiplied several offline and online initiatives to overcome the disturbance caused by the coronavirus. These proposals include a variety of activities through various media, especially through the internet: rites and prayers, educational courses, messages, sermons, religious music concerts, practical information on health and social actions in favor of the neediest. Consequently, we must ask, do believers, particularly Catholics, intensify their religious practices by facing a threatening event such as COVID-19 and by doubling the religious offer?

Religious activities transferring to a virtual environment is not a new phenomenon. Online religious studies have explored this topic from different perspectives and contexts: ritual transformation, virtual temples, and online religious communities. However, the transfer of churches to the internet as a “pragmatic response” to this cultural change does not exhaust the diversity of religious practices during the pandemic but rather the growth of religious exchange

through the internet is evident. For example, recent research shows that one of the most searched for prayers on google in March 2020 was the “coronavirus prayer”, a prayer in which believers ask God for protection against the coronavirus, strength to resist and thanksgiving for the efforts of health professionals. The use of religion in this context of communication is not only personal but also institutional. We see some interfaith leaders prayed together for salvation from the pandemic in Israel, Uganda and many more states.

Religious institutions, communities, practices, beliefs, and identities present a particularly rich area for social scientific study, especially given the centrality of face-to-face and intimate gatherings typically associated with nearly all religious practices and traditions. Further, the death and mourning wrought by a pandemic would typically result in an increase in face-to-face gatherings and religious rituals; but given the need for social distancing and the necessity of adapting interaction to these constraints, the pandemic is triggering an increased need for religious traditions while at the same time significantly altering the expressions of those traditions. How religious institutions manage death and mourning—two of the social moments religious leaders and institutions are most central to during normal times—is a strategic location for viewing some of the ongoing changes to religion. In this we can see how the “demand” for religious ritual, comfort, and support is presumably increased by the pandemic, while simultaneously the “available supply” of religion (in the form it is expected) is drastically decreased. So too the changes to levels of existential risk and the associated patterns of social engagement brought about by the pandemic offer numerous opportunities to explore important questions regarding how conditions of change and uncertainty relate to private religious beliefs and practices. (Baker, Martí, Braunstein, Whitehead, & Yukich, 2020)



Due to this Global pandemic, most governments in various countries suspended indoor worship. This caused churches to immediately convert face-to-face worship to virtual worship (Hjarvard, 2008). Through the process of mediation, religion enters the logic of the media; as a channel for delivering content, an environment where communication-mediated communities gather. The media has become a channel of communication in the church community during this COVID-19 pandemic; used as the main source of religious ideas. Text, symbols, and imagery by virtual worship/e-church are combined by the producers when building stories or films.

This ban on religious gatherings limits in-person communication between religious leaders and their congregations. To continue meeting the spiritual needs of the population, the religious authorities must adopt alternative methods of keeping in contact with the people. Today, a handful of churches provide different online packages to their members. According to the Uganda demographic and health survey report, Ugandans also receive information through the mobile telephones, mass media and internet. Even with the general increase in the internet coverage in Uganda, little is known about its usage by the religious institutions as a medium of communicating public health information.

As most governments intensified their efforts in the fight against COVID-19 in March 2020, outlooks on social life changed drastically. Societal ‘lockdowns’ aimed at restricting human interaction to ‘flatten the curve’ of infections, had a pervasive impact in many social and economic and religious domains. Consequences for the performing arts including live music were particularly severe, as concerts, tours, festivals were rapidly cancelled. This is not only problematic financially for the sector but also societally, as (live) music can play a crucial role in, amongst others, generating social solidarity and fostering social resilience.

In religions like the Anglican faith, the Pentecostals and Evangelical fellowships in Uganda, music is a common way of communicating and fellowship. Music is often mobilized to provide the occasions that constitute “social life” and, as such, give meaning to people and their social surroundings (Roy & Dowd, 2010). In other words, apart from its immediate individual effects (emotional release), music has a social function. Live music events in particular often take on ritual characteristics, generating a ‘sonic bond’ which aids in connecting people in the reciprocation of emotions. Durkheim (1995) called this social-emotional experience ‘collective effervescence’ and linked it to the generation of social solidarity. Hence, during times of collective crisis such as a global pandemic, it is not unusual for people to turn to music, due to its connective purposes. In the initial stages of the societal lockdowns, musicians rapidly moved to the virtual sphere, with livestreams in particular proving to be a vital resort for artists and audiences. Although the practice of livestreaming was around long before the pandemic, the emphasis had predominantly remained on live experiences in the ‘traditional’ sense (Holt 2010). But when venues closed, there was little choice but to shift focus to the free and accessible livestreaming services of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. As this changed the nature of the live experience, this begs the question: to what extent can livestreamed concerts conduce feelings of social solidarity and resilience when physical gatherings are impossible? In this study, we analyze the emerging collective practices, in doing so, we study how livestreams are experienced in general, but we focus specifically on their potential to contribute to the development of a collective consciousness, and related feelings of social solidarity in a time of Corona-induced physical isolation. While previous research has predominantly focused on face-to-face rituals, more recent studies have looked into the capacity of social networking services such as Instagram, Facebook, and o to generate feelings of collectivity resulting from collective rituals. By investigating religious rituals in a virtual

environment, we expand not only our understanding of one of the prominent ways the heavily affected cultural sector coped during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also of the role of online communities during a time of crisis. This is a specific question in a period when collective involvement and cooperation is needed from each individual in the fight against the pandemic. (Vandenberg, Berghman, & Schaap, 2020)

In addition to the religious practices Pre Covid and Post Covid, christians look at corporate worship. One should know that corporate worship is **a call to all believers to practice the presence of God as a community on a regular basis**; gathering together is an important part of spiritual life and public testimony where people get to share experiences and learn a thing or two. However The Outbreak of Covid changed all this and it was now turned to personal worship which meant worshipping in a more personal space and no communion with others. Community and communal gatherings are essential components of many religions and religious traditions, such that the requirements for distancing disrupted many standard religious rituals, from weekly services and gatherings to religious holidays such as Passover and Easter. As such, churches and religious individuals had to respond to these challenges and many disruptions to their traditions in 2020. Many churches were caught off guard by the technological necessities required to move services online, even as many people turned or returned to faith as a way of coping with the anxieties of the global situation. Restrictions on in-person gatherings immediately raised questions about religious freedom and the regulatory capacity of government over religious institutions. Many religious adherents expressed doubts about the ability of religious practices to ever return to a pre-pandemic normal (GJELTEN, 2020). Despite these complications, the Pew Research Center reported that across 2020, a significant portion of Americans found that the pandemic had increased the strength of their personal religious convictions. Scholars and clergy have also

weighed in with insights into the ways that religion has been impacted by the pandemic, how religious institutions have, can, or should respond to the pandemic, and how religious belief has made a difference in such challenging times.

In studying religion and the pandemic, of particular note has been ways that the religious and the political have become challengingly intertwined in the United States context over 2020, especially in regard to the information and policies related to COVID-19. As previously mentioned, controversy quickly erupted when government shutdowns and stay-at-home orders impacted religious gatherings, raising questions about religious freedom. Over the course of the pandemic, many churches adhered to local, state, and federal regulations regarding in-person meetings, while others blatantly defied such orders on theological grounds, says Luis De Molina a known theologian. Because government mandates controversially restricted in-person gatherings, which had a direct impact on traditions of religious practice, other government recommendations (such as mask wearing) were at times controversial by association, raising questions about government control and whether religious individuals needed to obey such orders. As such, public health practices that were arguably straightforward from a medical perspective became far less straightforward when they were instituted in religious settings. Responses to COVID-19 were never universal nor uncomplicated, but the peculiarities of religious freedom and convictions regarding religious practices in the United States especially created often differing convictions for how religion and religious practice could or should flourish under pandemic conditions. Thus, both studying religion in the pandemic and specific practices such as social distancing involves navigating the sometimes competing interests of faith, politics, medicine, and the individual experience. Social media has been one critical tool for individuals to voice their opinions, see, and hear the opinions of others, and collectively make sense of world and local circumstances. (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021)

The preventive measures aim to limit or, to the extent possible, prevent social gatherings or collective interpersonal interactions involving any type of physical contact. From a religious perspective, these measures affect almost all the Islamic ritual acts, particularly congregational prayers. Apart from this concentration on the impact of the pandemic on ritual prayer and pilgrimage to the holy shrines, there were also questions about the other ritual pillars of Islam: fasting and charity. For example, some questions were raised about whether the pandemic can be considered a valid excuse for not observing the ritual fast during the month of Ramadan. Most of statements that were issued in connection with the outbreak of the Coronavirus concentrated on its impact on holding congregational prayers in mosques. Under these circumstances, Friday as well as congregational prayers were suspended in order to limit the spread of the disease

For the Islamic faith, the call to prayer should still be made but because of the pandemic people should pray at home instead of going to the mosque. This points out that individuals can pray together with family members, in their own homes. (Shabana, 2021)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Methodology**

**In this study**, it is clearly basic and pure research given the fact that the thesis is driven to generate information. For this study, I used the qualitative method of research. **Qualitative studies** gather non-numerical data using, for example, observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. Open-ended questions are often posed. This yields rich, detailed, and descriptive results. Qualitative studies are usually **subjective** and are helpful for investigating social and cultural phenomena, which are difficult to quantify.

Using qualitative method allows respondents/participants to give detailed explanations and experiences and also promote a close relationship between the researcher and the researched to deal with the issue of power relations and minimize power hierarchies

Researcher should play the role of the and facilitator and not control the research process/space – to allow participants an opportunity to give their views as they wish/making their voices heard

In-depth interviews/individual interviews (unstructured interviews), Key informant interviews, Informal conversations and observations (picked up in-passing), Life histories/stories and Systematic Observation are the research tools that will be used for this study.

### **Research Process**

The study adopted a systematic procedure of research. The process involves formulating research questions which require knowledge to form them. Resonating with the topic of the study and the objectives, writing the literature review which involved reading the available literature.

This study drew on Campbell's idea of qualitative research method and the process which is as follows;

Identifying  
the topic of study, the statement of the problem was made, review of related literature, coming up

with research objectives and research questions, collection of data using observation and interview, analysing and Interpreting data, general conclusion and recommendation.

I used interviews for this study. These were used because interviews collect richer information yet from a small number of people. Still interviews were a better choice because of the limited time I had for this research and as earlier mentioned, a small number of people are required which was fair enough too because of the time. Interviews were also most effective for this research because they help explain and explore research subjects' opinions, behavior, experiences and so on. Interview questions were also open-ended questions which helped collect in-depth information. I interviewed around five people of which two were religious leaders, and the rest were youth who were well versed with religion and its operations.

I conducted one face to face type of interview and others were done online. I also used the Observation method which allows the researcher to study people in their 'natural setting' without their behavior being influenced by the presence of a researcher. Observational data usually consists of detailed information about particular groups or situations. This kind of data can 'fill out' and provide a deeper, richer, understanding. **MARSHALL and ROSSMAN (1989)** define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and objects in the social setting chosen for study." It involves looking and listening very carefully. We all watch other people sometimes, but we don't usually watch them in order to discover particular information about their behavior. This is what observation does and it helped me answer some details in the research questions.

### **Interview questions**

1. What are the different religious rites pre and post Covid and how has the pandemic drastically changed these religious rites
2. How has communication changed in the different places of worship after the outbreak of the pandemic?
3. What is your response towards the changes that have been made in the places of worship?
4. How effective are the new religious communication schemes and methods

### **Method of Analysis and Interpretation of Data:**

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. In the article *Designing Qualitative Research*, (Marshall, Rossman, & Blanco, 2021) describe qualitative data analysis as the process of making sense from research participant's views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes and regular similarities.

The analysis is made based on the observations, Inference which is the use of reasoning to reach a conclusion based on evidence. Interview findings were synthesized to answer the research questions and the conclusions made in line with the analysis of the objectives of the research.

In conclusion, i used qualitative research method for data collection and it was more of interviews and observation as explained above.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Presentation and Analysis of Findings**

#### **4.1: Introduction:**

This chapter presents the findings of this study and offers an in-depth explanation to the data obtained from the observations and interviews made from the field. The analysis closely looks at the different religious rites pre and post Covid and how has the pandemic drastically changed these religious rites, How communication changed in the different places of worship after the outbreak of the pandemic, peoples response towards the changes that have been made in the places of worship and lastly how effective are the new religious communication schemes and methods The conclusions as well borrow from the literature available to offer substantive base for relation and making concrete deductions.

**What are the different religious rites pre and post Covid and how has the pandemic drastically changed these religious rites.**

From the data collected and the available literature, religions like the Anglican faith has practices and ways how they communicate to their congregation and the people that belong to the church. In my observation, practices like prayer or bible study may not have changed much but the practices like Holy Communion which is also the same for the Catholics, the overnights that were regular for churches, the numbers accommodated on the services and mass, things like personal prayer sessions with the clergy was also affected. In most churches, before the pandemic hit Uganda, there was communal worship and gatherings. Communication was easily conducted because there were no restrictions on what to do and how to do it or when to do it. With an observation from the St. Francis church Makerere, the priest usually welcomed new people into the church and there were always asked to introduce themselves and the immediate neighbors would go ahead and hug them. When the lockdown came in, services were shifted to online and with the new changes it was strictly the sermon and a few announcements made to the people

listening in and watching. One realizes that some practices were put off and when it came to the re-opening of places of worship, things didn't change much because new people were just warmly welcomed and gestures like hugging the person was no more because people had to still be cautious of the virus. This affects communication in such a way that the interaction with people becomes less compared to before and it is now more of a personal space and no chance to get to socialize and know other people.

A large number of churches turned to electronic platforms to reach their members and this has given a faster and inevitable rise to the digital church. Churches had to adjust to digital worship, digital sacraments, digital sermons, digital tithes and digital mission. These include Youtube channels, Church of Uganda Family TV <http://www.coufamilytv.co.ug> ,





For long we have been accustomed to gathering physically for public worship as seen in the image below



It is that moment and experience when the church (people of God) gathers in community and communion to ascribe praise and glory to God. It is a time for celebration, fellowship, renewal of faith and hope. Pastors have for a very long time encouraged worshippers to ‘come to church’ and

some often resort to making believers feel guilty if they don't attend church. Needless to say, the closure of churches turned this around with the plea to 'please join us on YouTube or other electronic platforms'. While it is important to recognise the significance of the church 'gathering to worship' the pandemic has forced us to rethink *how* we gather. Suddenly we are recognising that with all the challenges we may encounter yet the church must gather. The church buildings may be closed but the churches (people of God) are still alive and active. What we see in Christianity so often is a move away from family (often as a place of spiritual defeat) on towards a move of organised artificial performances in sacred buildings far from the atmosphere of real life. So what we see with the COVID-19 pandemic is the church returning back to its roots – back to where it came from. It literally comes home, so in essence churches have not closed but come home: a church in each home.

One also notices that the COVID-19 lockdown in Uganda has forced many people to turn to electronic platforms to continue with public worship. This has also provided an opportunity for Christians to be exposed to other forms of worship, liturgical practices and preaching than they are usually accustomed to. The electronic medium has created opportunities to 'wander' and experiment. For some, it leads to a deeper appreciation of their church tradition and worship practices and for others, it may have opened up a totally new world of worship experience altogether. Channel flipping has become a new norm for 'seekers'. We choose where and when we worship, which denomination to follow and the clergy we would like to attend on Sunday. COVID-19 has increased the possibilities of consumer choice and crossed denominational boundaries; worshippers are following preachers they like and are not restricted to church affiliations.

The electronic platforms also open new doors to Christian worshippers from different cultures and backgrounds worldwide. COVID-19 has strengthened the possibilities of spreading the Gospel on a broader scale and reaching the un-churched, people of other faiths and people with no faith as we grapple for answers in the current struggles in the world and tune in to electronic platforms for encouragement and hope. This reinforces the integration of worship and mission. The primary purpose of the church and its worship is not to attract, drawing people in, but to equip and send God's redeemed people into mission in the world. If God's primary desire was for a church with full seats and never-ending activities, we would focus our time, effort and resources on making our congregation more attractive and appealing than any of the neighbouring churches, yet some churches do this. (Pillay, 2020). However with the new normal, there is a full realisation that it has all changed and it's not about competing with which church since at some point places of worship were completely shut down. The message changed to the preaching of the true doctrine and what the Holy Bible tells us to do rather than enticing and attracting people to churches with the false doctrine. As we earlier discussed, sometimes communication is through what message you intend to give to people and therefore with the outbreak of Corona Virus, the message somewhat changes from a selfish note of some church leaders to a message of faith, surrender and hope.

From the data collected through interviews, the respondents looked at different religious rites and practices in their religions and how these have changed over the pandemic time.

From one of the respondents, he explained that Covid 19 messed up communication in the places of worship in such a way that it was realised the ministers were preaching to empty sanctuaries while the congregation was watching online and many church activities were on hold. However, it is evident that some people have grown accustomed to the new normal while some people may be drifting away. As Uganda laid out the requirements for opening places of worship,

not more than 50 people were allowed in the places of worship, no physical touching that is to say no handshakes nor hugging and any gesture that involved body contact, no wine and communion, no singing and no choir. He says that there is more of online services, on various platforms and things like announcements have been moved to social media platforms, for example you'll find the order of service and the marriage announcements are done online.

As earlier discussed that singing was one of the ways to which the people were ministered to church, restrictions like no choirs, no singing or sing with masks on were put. One of the respondents says she started singing at the age of 6 and that for her personally it was like the hardest time. She claims she would have never been spiritually connected if she hadn't found her faith through a song. She says she is not sure if she would even be a Christian today if she wasn't able to pray by singing but at the same time no one would want to kill someone by prayer or by music since health experts say the Coronavirus easily spreads through singing and therefore the only option is to follow the services at home and it feels really sad and hard for her to keep sitting in the living room and singing by herself and she felt disconnected from religion at some point. From this respondent, we get to find out that some people communicate through music and now with the hit of the pandemic, communication is somehow cut off for some people and this affects their spiritual growth.

The Corona virus has had an effect on churches in Uganda in a way that before there were weekly study groups and activities and therefore the suspension of in person worship is like God sending everybody to their room for a time out. Looking at St Augustine and St Francis chapels Makerere, they held midweek services and fellowships where people would gather and fellowship together, share testimonies, worship together as a community, do outreaches to other communities and this gave christians a sense of belonging to a christian family, there were strong friendship bonds to an



extent that incase one had a problem, the fellow christians would extend help, both physical andm emotional help. However with the pandemic, it was more of individual worship and weaken group communication.

"Things will never be the same," says one of the respondents when asked how communication has changed over the pandemic period. The pandemic has altered people's views of church life and their expectations for worship in the years ahead. "I love my fellow brothers and sisters in God," Anonymous as he prefers to keep it. "I used to go to many church-related activities like Bible studies and men's fellowship. Now we barely communicate by text." The change seen here is that before the pandemic hit, there was physical meet up and engagement when it came to church activities. But from the restrictions and fear to catch the virus, communication has been moved to social media and there is really not much engagement on social media that it would be for physical church.

A [survey by the Pew Research Centre](#) shows that the changes are not all negative. Many pastors have intensified efforts to stay in touch with members of their congregations and maintain their church communities. "This crisis has actually caused us to do a better job of picking up the phone and checking on our members," says Denis Mugume Habwayesu, a youth pastor at St. Francis Chapel, Makerere. "It's made me refocus on connecting individually with people. We have our staff checking on many people in the congregation every couple of weeks to see what they need and how we can serve them. So there are some connections that are probably stronger now than they were before."

The shift to online communication on platforms such as Zoom has also introduced some new efficiencies. Jasper Ssendikwanawa, 35, a devoted member of one of the churches in Kampala Church, says before the pandemic, he had been attending worship services at least twice a week,

plus leading Bible study sessions with other church members. Under the shutdown, he says, he's been able to do even more. "I don't have to drive an hour to sit down and read the Bible with someone," he says. "I can do it all from home. There's no running to meetings. I'm not always rushing somewhere."

Jasper's spiritual life, he says, may even have been strengthened during this time. "It's almost like God is sending everyone to their room for a time out," she says. "With all the business taken away, I can just be still and really focus on my relationship with God."

In some cases, however, the coronavirus shutdowns have weakened church connections. The Pew survey and [a survey by the Public Religion Research Institute](#) found that one-third or more of those who had previously attended church regularly were not bothering to watch online services. For those whose church affiliation was already tenuous, the disconnection may be permanent.

Information and communication are drastically changing the world we live in. Instead of establishing commonness and solidarity, some public church communication tends to reinforce divisions, widen the gap between rich and poor, consolidate oppression, and distort reality in order to maintain systems of domination and subject the silenced masses to media manipulation.

Yet communication remains God's great gift to humanity, without which we cannot be truly human, reflecting 'God's image'. Nor could we enjoy living together in groups, communities and societies steeped in different cultures and different ways of life, the adoption to mass media has shut all this down.

It was also observed that Communication creates community. Many people today fear the loss of community and community spirit and therefore some people have clearly not adopted to the new ways of communication in places of worship. Rather than bringing people together, the mass media

often isolate or divide them. Yet communication, including the use of alternative media, can revitalise communities and rekindle community spirit, because the model for genuine communication, like that for communities of all kinds, is open and inclusive, rather than unidirectional and exclusive. Most people claim to have lost a sense of community because of the media. Clearly people preferred the old ways of communicating. Genuine communication cannot take place in a climate of division, alienation, isolation and barriers which disturb, prevent or distort social interaction. True communication is facilitated when people join together regardless of race, colour or religious conviction, and where there is acceptance of and commitment to one another which was not the case during the lockdown.

On the other hand, there is now a growing awareness that there are information and communication needs, felt by individuals and groups, which the mass media cannot meet. Modern communication technologies could allow a much higher degree of participation than those who control the media systems are willing to grant or to develop. Communication is, by definition, participatory. It is a two-way process. It is interactive because it shares meaning and establishes and maintains social relationships. Some people actually looked at media in a positive manner. The more widespread and powerful the media become, the greater the need for people to engage in their own communication activities. In this way, they will also rediscover and develop other forms of communication.

One of the respondents also emphasized that communication was way better before the pandemic because it was participatory and not limiting. He accounts that participatory communication challenges the authoritarian structures in society, in the churches and in the media. It also challenge some of the 'professional rules' of the media, whereby the powerful and rich occupy centre stage to the exclusion of ordinary men, women and children. Participatory communication therefore

gives people a sense of human dignity, an experience of community, and the enjoyment of a fuller life which is not the case for online communication. With the adoption of online methods of communication, some people felt left out because only those who could afford had the chance to engage.

Religious institutions in Uganda made several adjustments to maintain the culture of prayers and offerings when gatherings were restricted. Radio, television and internet-based platforms were used to deliver religious programs while electronic money transfer media were used for offerings. Likewise, evidence shows that religious ceremonies and studies are being held through video conferences as a way of keeping individuals connected to each other thereby making them more resilient during the COVID-19 crisis.

Before the lockdown was shared worship, generally including the shared singing of hymns or psalms, scripture reading and exposition in sermons, shared and individual prayer and often participation in the Eucharist or Holy Communion. While in some contexts, it is the continuity of worship that is so significant, it is important for most Christians that such rituals proceed in the context of a supportive fellowship of co-believers. Attending and participating in shared worship is a central pillar of religious life based on close intertwining between individuals. Fellowship shapes the relationships between people and place through the development of relationships that are centered in shared worship. These principles have been disrupted by social distancing measures and lockdown.

COVID-19 forced all denominations across the Uganda to experiment with new forms of service delivery like tele mediated, virtual services and so on. The introduction of tele mediated virtual services supported and enhanced existing relationships between church and congregation. Technological innovation have enabled some types of services to be stored and experienced from

afar and in the diaspora. A key question concerns the difference between participation in a live service encounter compared to one that is recorded and stored. The introduction of virtual church services alters the relationship between the individual and the wider fellowship of the congregation. There is a change in the religious experience. But there is also the temporary creation of worship spaces within homes.

Furthermore, participating in a virtual service is about setting aside time and space at home for worship. The home becomes part of the worship experience and becomes, for a time, intertwined with a more formal worship space represented online. The interrelationships between family and church reveal how intimate practices and family spaces are permeable, expanding the church into the household and vice versa. Nevertheless, they also extend the congregation; even small churches are seeing online attendances well into the hundreds. Online services have enhanced inclusivity as the ill, are able to engage with intersacred space.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The study found out that the closure of churches during the coronavirus pandemic forced churches to function in new ways of staying open and being church. There were a lot of changes in the church during the time of COVID-19 like learning how to live-stream sermons, worship songs, religious rites and requests for tithes. COVID-19 has reaffirmed that the church does not live within walls but rather the people of God who live and long for God's reign in the world. Religious leaders were challenged to improvise alternative worship forms to sustain their congregations while providing pastoral support for them. This challenged existing practices disrupting religions that often make a virtue of precisely not being culturally contextualised or adapting to social change. To (Rumsey, 2017), crisis changes rules and places; COVID-19 did both, forcing ministers to engage in a more enclosed individual religious culture. It is important to remember that places of worship are places of hope, fellowship and socio-spatial embeddedness and communities which accommodate the otherwise excluded (Hunter 2020). Ministers and congregations adapted rapidly to changing circumstances by creating intersacred spaces, or an interconnected network of temporary sacred spaces, connecting people together in shared worship and fellowship. This new virtual normality contributed to re-connecting people and place through shared beliefs and behaviours

Within days of the announcement that public worship in churches would cease, the live-streaming of services and new virtual communities became part of religious and community life. Homes were transformed into recording studios; live-streaming facilitated lay participation, not just observation. The shifting nature of the relationship between religions and digital media presents a solution to the problems of the pandemic. The Christian church has relied upon social networks and the intersections of real and imagined communities, to provide a location for faith. However, while there is observed and audible presence of the online virtual worshipping community,

christians feel an absence of the tangible and a physical togetherness and fellowship. The challenge that faces religion in its complex relationship with social media is precisely the absence of physical presence in collective worship.

### **Recommendation(s):**

This study intended to investigate the changes in religious practices during the COVID 19 era and it basically contains the changes in communication pre and post COVID 19. This study therefore has not been able to explore other Religious practices and also changes in the Islamic community since this study is entirely focusing on the christian community. This was because of the limited time given to do the research. I would rather that other studies put attention on the Islamic community and also other practices apart from communication.

In conclusion, the interaction of faith and community with social media and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic will surely be an important part of that history.

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