

# Missional video technology framework in the context of the *Missio Dei*

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**Background:** The new prophetic churches are led by young and innovative prophets who have incorporated various forms of video technology (VT) tools to propagate the gospel through the performance of technology-aided miracles conceptualised here as miraculous VT.

**Objectives:** This article aimed at developing a missional video technology (MVT) that is aligned with the *missio Dei* rather than relying on the miraculous VT, which is not always aligned with the mission of God.

**Method:** A literature review in qualitative research was used to demonstrate that the prophets in these churches use VT to claim the performance of miracles. Missional video technology was developed by reviewing missiological approaches to technology to demonstrate the research gaps.

**Results:** The article found that missional imagination is a relevant framework to fill the research gap in the alignment of technology to the mission of God.

**Conclusion:** The use of VT should be done for the benefit of the mission of God, not individual prophets in new prophetic churches. Video technology tools should not be used to entertain the members of the new prophetic churches, but rather to align with the mission of God.

**Contribution:** The MVT contributed to the study of technology from a missiological perspective in proposing an orientation of VT to the mission of God. Missional video technology is important for missiologists as a missiological approach to VT, particularly its emphasis on the use of VT tools for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

**Keywords:** video technology; missional imagination; missional video technology; miraculous VT; mission of God; new prophetic churches.

## Introduction

Video technology (VT), particularly in media studies, refers to the process of recording, capturing and streaming moving objects and sound for public consumption. Video technology is not limited to media studies, but has been studied and approached from different disciplines in the past. The present study approaches the use of VT in the discipline of missiology; in other words, how we understand VT from the missiological perspective. This is one of the important research questions for this current study. The study acknowledges the current missiological approaches to VT through a literature review in qualitative research. But at the same time, the study has identified the research gaps, particularly the relevant frameworks on approaching VT missiologically. In understanding the current practices of VT, including the miraculous VT, the present study will use the relevant cases in the new prophetic churches. The cases are Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering, Pastor Alph Lukau of the Alleluia Ministries International, and Paul Sanyangore, a pastor at Victory World International Ministries Church in Zimbabwe. The three pastors were selected by evaluating their use of modern VT for the enhancement of the performance of miracles, hence the concept of miraculous VT. The study evaluates how each of these prophets and churches has been using VT tools for the performance of miracles.

In addition to the general question raised above, that is, how we understand VT from the missiological perspective, this article seeks to answer a specific research question: *What framework is relevant for the alignment of VT with the mission of God?* To answer this research question, this article proposes missional video technology (MVT) using a missional imagination as the

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theoretical framework. Contrary to the miraculous VT in the reviewed literature in some of the new prophetic churches in South Africa, the MVT seeks to propose a framework that is aligned with the mission of God. Missional video technology, as opposed to miraculous VT, will be unpacked as a framework not built on individuals but rather on the mission of God. This framework will be developed by reviewing the current missiological approaches to technology to identify the current research gaps. The practice of miraculous VT will be highlighted in the new prophetic churches in South Africa. Missional imagination is discussed as the theoretical framework for the present study as it serves as a good foundation for the orientation of VT towards the mission of God. Therefore, MVT will be mainly discussed as a framework that aligns with the mission of God to contribute towards the missiological approaches to modern technology. The next section briefly introduces missiological approaches to technology to identify the current research gaps.

### Missiological approaches to technology

Different missiological approaches have been taken to address technology, with some intersections between technology and the discipline of missiology (Baron 2022; Beltran 2020; Hirome 2024). This is because the theme of technology, particularly newer technological developments, is important; hence, missiologists cannot ignore them. This is pivotal in the understanding of the relationship between the mission of God and the use of technology, which, according to Beltran (2020:48), includes, among others: 'Artificial Intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, blockchain technology, self-driving vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, massive energy storage, data analytics, and quantum supremacy'. Baron (2022:159) mentions the issue of human agency in the intersections of missiology and technology to highlight the extensions of human intelligence in the use of technology. This means that technology should not be perceived as another form of intelligence, but rather as part of human intelligence. This is correct, considering that technology is a human innovation. Therefore, instead of viewing technology as leading to dehumanisation, it should be perceived as the extension of human intelligence. Hirome (2024:52) argues for 'an understanding of humans as embodied agents of God as a central tenet in a missional strategy to respond to the proliferation of advanced technology'. However, Baron (2022:160) warns us that while technology might be a sign of human innovations, he warns that its use in empowering some and disempowering others should be highlighted. However, until there is a proper framework for how technology aligns with the mission of God, the disempowering of others will continue through the same. People would continue to use technology without the consciousness of the mission of God in their lives. Hence, the importance of this study, that is, the development of MVT to deal with challenges such as the disempowerment of others using technology.

The intersections of missiology and technology are also discussed in the context of the use of newer technologies in the church, particularly the virtual church, as was the case during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (La Cruz & Mora 2024; Molehe 2022; Ugboh 2023). In other words, as many churches around the world could not have physical meetings during COVID-19, they were forced into virtual meetings. This also caused so many churches to quickly adapt to the use of technology for the propagation of the gospel. In the words of Ugboh (2023:59), this caused a paradigm shift in the understanding of mission in the context of its connections with the use of technology. The adaptation by churches meant that mission could no longer be performed traditionally, meaning, in physical meetings. In this way, technologies such as live streaming offered an opportunity for the realisation of the mission in the context of the virtual church. This has raised important research questions, such as how the mission is supposed to be performed in the context of the virtual church, where the use of technology has been helpful in the propagation of the gospel during challenging times such as COVID-19. Many Pentecostal and charismatic churches, including new prophetic churches, have been efficient in the use of technology to propagate the gospel. La Cruz and Mora (2024:1) point out that the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are one Christian tradition where the use of newer technology has been embraced as part of the making of disciples of all nations, as per the great commission. Even in the context of the virtual church, there is still a necessity for the development of a relevant framework to align the virtual church with the mission of God.

The last approach in the intersections of missiology and technology is the role that the church can play in mitigating the challenges of modern technology and unleashing its potential in the mission of God on earth (Hirome 2024; Huizinga 2022). It means that the church has a role to play even in avoiding dehumanisation as discussed above. The church can play a pivotal role in mitigating the challenges that have to do with the exposure of children and other vulnerable communities to the negative uses of technology. Huizinga (2022) points out that the intersection of missiology and technology is where the church has an opportunity to add the Christian voice to the use of technology by religious groups. Hirome (2024:54) explains 'how the Church, in the face of advancing technology, can adapt and leverage it in a way that enhances its mission'. This is important because the church is already part of society, where the use of technology is already in place. The use of technology by faith communities is an important aspect of learning the intersections of mission and technology. In other words, the church can decide to be the driving force behind the positive use of technology within the context of the mission of God. However, the main challenge remains the development of a relevant framework in which the church will be able to find a balance between technology and the mission of God. Before I delve into the development of such a framework, I will first review the current uses of VT in the new prophetic churches.

## Miraculous video technology in selected new prophetic churches

This section serves as a case study for prophets in new prophetic churches whose performance of miracles was enhanced by the support of VT. New prophetic churches are discussed in the context of the broader Pentecostal movement in southern Africa (Chitando & Biri 2016; Kgatle & Anderson 2020; Manyonganise 2016). However, these churches, although they have retained the fundamental teachings of Pentecostalism, differ from the traditional or classical Pentecostal churches. The new prophetic churches are known for the embracement of prophetic gifts, particularly the performance of one-on-one prophecy, also known as forensic prophecy. In other words, prophecy is not practised in the traditional way of sharing the word from God to believers, but in a way that reveals the personal details of recipients. These churches are also known for the embracement of prophetic titles such as major one, seer one and others. Instead of being called reverend, pastor, or even bishop, these churches use prophetic titles with peculiar titles like 'major one' as prophet Bushiri is affectionately known by his followers. The new prophetic churches emphasise consultative deliverance where believers pay exorbitant amounts to consult their prophets. Instead of praying for the congregants for healing, for example, these prophets would rather ask their congregants to visit them in their office, where the consultation fee is even more than that of medical doctors. These churches are also known for the use of prophetic objects, including anointed oil and anointed water. Similarly, like the consultations, the prophetic objects do not come cheap as congregants are expected to pay for them. These churches are popular in sub-Saharan Africa in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe with similar practices, that is, forensic prophecy, prophetic titles, prophetic consultations, prophetic deliverance and prophetic objects.

The first prophet is Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering who is known for the performance of miracles and prophecies in southern Africa (Banda 2021, 2024; Lipenga 2021). Bushiri is one of the most popular prophets in southern Africa and is also surrounded by a lot of controversy. However, this study is not necessarily concerned much about the controversy, but with his relationship with the VT. On 03 October 2015, a video surfaced showing Bushiri, where he claimed to be walking on air, but in essence,<sup>1</sup> he was being assisted by others for this claim. In the video, Bushiri can be seen walking down the stairs. The camera zooms in on his feet, and for a few seconds, it seems like he is walking on air. Banda (2021:4) points out that in showing such a video, Bushiri claims to be carrying powers above other prophets in the new prophetic churches. Banda (2024:6) also pointed out elsewhere that 'Bushiri, asserted his spiritual supremacy through a video recording

that showed him walking on air'. However, the VT cameras managed to portray a video of him that demonstrated that he was walking on air. The only blunder is that the voices of people who assisted him were heard on the video, and also the shadows of the same are seen on the video which makes it a fake. However, the point I make here is that many of his congregants and supporters would still perceive it as a miracle which becomes the wrong use of VT. This means that the VT is used for the popularity of the prophet, instead of the mission of God. In addition, the prophet, by displaying such a video, is propagating his mission rather than the mission of God.

The second prophet is Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International, who claimed to have resurrected a dead body when a man who was still alive acted to be dead and was placed in a coffin (Banda 2020; Moses 2022; Ramantswana & Sebetseli 2021). A video surfaced on 24 February 2019 showing Lukau claiming to be resurrecting a dead body.<sup>2</sup> Because of the VT used during the service at the Alleluia Ministries International, some congregants believed that indeed the man was dead and Lukau was able to resurrect him. In other words, the new technology enabled the performance of this resurrection miracle to an extent that some people believed that it was true. Moses (2022:17) states that the members of the Alleluia Ministries International were convinced that a miracle indeed had taken place. Ramantswana and Sebetseli (2021) concur:

For many of the people who were present at Alleluia Ministries International on that day but not close enough to see things as they unfolded, the atmosphere would have been electrifying, especially when they saw someone who had been taken out of a coffin walk up and down and run in front of the church. (p. 8)

It is also important to point out that the majority of those people, as mentioned by Ramantswana and Sebetseli (2021), viewed the event on screens as it was displayed live using the VT. The only challenge is that the public was not as convinced that Lukau had resurrected a dead man. Even the president of the country, Cyril Ramaphosa, condemned the miracle, as quoted below by Banda (2020):

How can we work together to ensure that we rid our country of bogus religious leaders who are taking our people for a ride? [People] who are doing things that are just completely shocking of trying to hoodwink the whole nation and saying that somebody has been raised from the dead? [People] who are actually [taking] the name of the Lord, of God, and of churches into disrepute? (p. 2)

Therefore, speculations soon came out that the man was hired to act dead. The point I make in this study is that VT is influential in making members of the new prophetic churches believe that miracles have taken place. I conceptualise this as miraculous VT. This calls for a new framework to be able to evaluate the use of VT in new prophetic churches through the lens of the mission of God.

1.The video of Bushiri walking on air can be watched on this URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jwgf5ECuhCg>, Malawian Prophet Shepherd Bushiri 'Walks' On Air Video (Yeah Right)

2.The video of the resurrection miracle can be watched on this URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0lvU7NihXk>

The last case study is that of Paul Sanyangore, a pastor at Victory World International Ministries Church in Zimbabwe, who appeared to be speaking to God on the phone before the congregation during a church service (Kaunda 2016; Machingura & Sande 2020; Mapuranga 2020). A video emerged on 21 May 2017 showing Pastor Sanyangore talking to God on the phone.<sup>3</sup> The pastor claims to have a direct phone number to heaven after a video of him talking on the phone during a church service emerged and shared it with others through social media. The pastor is seen in the video holding his cell phone and responding to the questions asked by God. This is another example of how technology can be used for the performance of miracles to promote the popularity of prophets such as Paul Sanyangore. However, the challenge is that the public ends up finding the real truth that these VT-assisted miracles are fake, and at times, it has serious consequences. Machingura and Sande (2020:11) point out: 'Prophet Sanyangore's brother was beaten up by bodyguards and left for dead when he revealed all the fake miracles the prophets purported to perform'. Hence, there is a need to develop a framework that will not only be used by missiologists, but prophets of new prophetic churches will also use the same to implement VT in the broader framework of the mission of God. This framework is important so that VT is not used to entertain the church members, but to advance the kingdom of God. In the next section, I discuss the missional imagination as a theory that can assist in developing such a framework.

### Missional imagination: Framing the discourse

Missional imagination is a theory that seeks to define the mission of the church in light of God's mission, popularly known as *missio Dei* (Beard 2015; Roxburgh & Boren 2009; Smith & Niemandt 2022). The proponents of the missional imagination, such as Roxburgh and Boren (2009:20), argue that the church does have its mission, but is expected to align with the mission of God. This means that the church should not try hard to come up with its activities, but rather engage in activities that fulfil the mission of God. Missional imagination is to reimagine the church to reorientate her to the mission of God. God, in this context, is not only a reference to God the Father, but rather the triune God. This means that missional imagination is trinitarian in orientating the church towards the mission of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Smith and Niemandt (2022) explain:

In terms of a missional imagination, the habitus of the missional church opens participants to the reality of the *missio Trinitatis*. Congregants imagine that mission is now possible within the every day and not just the privilege of the elite. This missional habitus invites participants into the bodily movements and poetics of the Trinitarian God which is radically different from the habitus of a church that is caught in modes of Christendom that distorts the mission by directing it back to the church alone. (p. 6)

3.Sanyangore's video can be watched on this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytgG309D5RU>

The church should not be preoccupied with attracting numbers to the church building, but rather bringing people to God. I am not in any way suggesting that numbers do not matter in the missions or not even suggesting that churches with big numbers are not engaged in the mission of God, but rather to point out that this should not be the preoccupation of the church.

Missional imagination is about what God does in faith communities, not what humans do. In this way, God is the founder of the mission of the church and not the church (Beard 2015:151). When God is perceived as the foundation of the mission, the church will then be able to join him in reaching out to the lost souls in the world. Hence, the role of the church in this case is the knowledge of the mission of God to implement it in the context of the local church. This means that everyone in the church should be called upon to participate in the mission of God. Maponya and Baron (2020) explain:

It is the role of the church to empower its people not to be inward-focused, but outward-focused in participating in the mission of God by bringing about reconciliation and healing. (p. 8)

Therefore, in the fulfilment of the mission of God, the task of reaching out to the lost souls is not only left to individuals, but it becomes the priesthood of all believers in the kingdom of God. The mission of God as the priesthood of all believers is more an effective way as opposed to delegating it to a few individuals. Thus, the mission of God is not individualistic, but rather very communal. When the church is unified in the activities of the mission of God, it achieves more than when it is the responsibility of the selected few. Therefore, the missional church is the one that is oriented towards sending the believers to fulfil the mission of God rather than only relying on the person of the prophet to do so. This happens when the church is not only concerned with its internal affairs, but also looking at the activities that will propagate the mission of God on earth.

Missional imagination is somehow related to missional leadership, where even church leaders are also expected to align with the mission of God. In other words, a missional church is not possible without the leadership of a missional leader. In this context, the missional leader is defined as a leader whose style is aligned with the mission of God on earth. This is a kind of leadership whose identity and foundation are rooted in the mission of God and its activities. Niemandt (2019:73) defines missional leadership as 'the transformation of people and institutions to participate, through meaningful relations and in the power of the Spirit, in God's mission'. This means that the people or believers, the leaders, and the church as the institution of God are all inspired to take part in the mission of God. Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011) explain:

An important role of a missional leader is cultivating an environment within which God's people can discern God's directions and activities in them and for the communities in

which they find themselves. We like the people in biblical stories are invited to cultivate our imagination to see the possibilities of what the Spirit wants to do in and among the people we are called to lead. (p. 89)

This means that in missional leadership, the leader initiates the activities in which believers can participate in the mission of God, not the mission of the leader per se. The missional leader therefore does not lead by their creativity alone, but rather by being inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:17) explain that being led and directed by the Holy Spirit is one such important factor in ensuring that the missional leader aligns the activities of the church with the mission of God.

### **Missional video technology: A missiological contribution**

In summary, missional imagination is a theory based on the orientation towards the mission of God, the activities of God in faith communities, and missional leadership. This section seeks to apply these three aspects of missional imagination to MVT. Firstly, the missional imagination as an orientation of the church towards the mission of God is helpful in the development of MVT. It means that the MVT is a framework for the orientation of the VT towards the mission of God. This means that whenever a church is engaged in VT, there is a need to align its activities towards the mission of God. The new prophetic churches in southern Africa do not have their mission in the use of VT, but are rather expected to align with the mission of God. In the use of VT, the goal is not to attract the crowd through the use of miraculous VT, but rather to align new prophetic churches with the mission of God. This means that every video recorded and streamed in the church is expected to align with the mission of God. This also calls for those serving in the media and technology team in the church context to understand their activities in light of the mission of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states very well, 'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God'. This means that video recording and streaming in the church is not an ordinary activity; hence, it should be done for the fulfilment of the mission of God.

Secondly, MVT is a framework that seeks to orientate churches like new prophetic churches towards what God is doing through the VT, not necessarily the activities of prophets and pastors. Missional video technology is about the recognition of the triune God being active in the world for the transformation of the people (Jn 5:16–19). These pastors should endeavour to know the mission of God for their churches and plan to fulfil it through the use of VT. The mission of God in the new prophetic churches is not fulfilled through human efforts, but rather in aligning with the mission of God using VT. In addition, the new prophetic churches in the MVT can be oriented to be aware that the VT in their churches is consumed not only by their church members, but also by society in general. This calls for the

creation of the VT that will be able to reach out to the communities and the larger society in southern Africa and beyond. The MVT is a relevant framework in the joining of the whole church to fulfil the mission of God in the use of VT as opposed to the machinations of the selected few pastors in new prophetic churches. When the prophets in new prophetic churches work alone in the use of VT, they become exposed to the fake miraculous VT, as no one can correct them. This means that believers in the new prophetic churches become change agents in the utilisation of VT for the advancement of the kingdom of God. This allows the church members to be creative in the use of VT, but such creativity is linked to the mission of God. In the end, society will be transformed through the use of VT as opposed to the miraculous VT that has been criticised even by the sitting president of the Republic of South Africa.

Lastly, MVT is a framework that seeks to align the leaders in the new prophetic churches, such as Bushiri, Lukau and Sanyangore, to the mission of God. Missional video technology is the framework that is founded on the missional leaders who can implement the activities of the VT as part of the mission of God. In the MVT, the leaders pride themselves on the mission of God rather than their activities. In John 5:19, Jesus states, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise'. Therefore, the missional leaders in MVT are those who do what the triune God is doing rather than their innovations. In the MVT, the missional leaders are expected to transform society rather than bring shame to the church. This means that video recording and streaming in the new prophetic churches are expected to transform and not entertain the people of God. The church, believers and leaders in the new prophetic churches all join together in the transformation of the society rather than entertaining with miraculous VT. Hence, it is expected of the leaders in the new prophetic churches to be filled with the Holy Spirit as an endeavour to bring transformation in their churches. Therefore, the MVT is a framework where leaders discern the will of God in capturing, recording and streaming videos. The leaders in the new prophetic churches can use MVT to encourage those who serve in media and technology teams to participate in the mission of God. This is also possible when both the leaders and followers of these churches are filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **Missional video technology: An alignment with the *Missio Dei***

We need to ask bold questions as to what purpose miracles performed by prophets such as Shepherd Bushiri, Alph Lukau and Sanyangore serve in the mission of God. What purpose does a video of a pastor faking resurrection, walking on air, or even talking to God on the phone serve? Do these videos assist communities and society in the embracement of the kingdom of God in their lives or move them away

from the latter? The reviewed literature demonstrates that society did not receive these videos in good light. Maybe this is a good sign that the videos that were streamed on different media platforms in these churches did not necessarily serve the purpose of the mission of God. In the absence of serving any purpose to the mission of God, these miracles become entertainment before the congregants. Therefore, the importance of the MVT is to align any performance of miracles through the use of VT to the mission of God. The prophets in the new prophetic churches have a kingdom mandate to reach out to the lost souls through the use of technology rather than entertaining the audience or promoting the person of the pastor or prophet. Therefore, the main contribution of the current study is the use of MVT for the alignment of video capturing, recording and streaming in new prophetic churches towards the mission of God. This is an important framework not only for the missiologists, but also for the pastors and prophets serving in the new prophetic churches and others.

## Conclusion

This study examined the different missiological approaches to technology to highlight the research gaps. The study aimed to propose an MVT in contrast to the miraculous VT in the new prophetic churches in South Africa. Hence, it was important to unpack what miraculous VT means by using some examples from the new prophetic churches in South Africa. Missional video technology was developed using missional imagination as the theoretical framework. This framework is built on the orientation of VT towards the mission of God. The study found that the use of VT should be conducted for the benefit of the mission of God, not individual prophets in new prophetic churches. From an MVT perspective, VT tools are not meant to fulfil the mission of the prophet in the new prophetic churches, but the mission of God in the use of new technologies to reach the lost souls for the kingdom of God. In addition, the VT tools within the MVT framework are not meant to be used as gimmicks in entertaining the audience in the new prophetic churches but rather to advance the kingdom of God. Therefore, MVT is important for missiologists as a missiological approach to VT, particularly its emphasis on the use of VT tools for the advancement of the kingdom. Therefore, instead of demonising and paganising the use of VT tools, the broader church should adopt MVT to orientate itself to the mission of God in the use of VT. Future studies can use MVT to test its empirical relevance on the use of VT tools in churches, as this was the limitation of the current study. This makes MVT an important framework for missiologists in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

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## Author's contribution

M.S.K. is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of South Africa, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee on 05 March 2019 (No: 240816-052).

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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