

## Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism in the context of modern technology and innovation

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### Abstract

Since its inception through the vision that God gave to Ellen G. White in 1848 in that a small paper containing the present truth should be printed, the Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism has majorly relied on print media approach for its mode of dispersion. Speaking of the importance of the distribution of the Seventh-day Adventist literature, Ellen G. White urged: “Sell them far and near. Scatter them like the leaves of autumn. This work is to continue without the forbiddings of anyone. Souls are perishing out of Christ. Let them be warned of His soon appearing in the clouds of heaven.” (White, 25 [1]). The print media, however, still remains the chief form of delivering literature, one-on-one, for the denomination. The modern digital technology and innovation, nevertheless, poses a challenge to the traditional way of print media of disseminating the Seventh-day Adventist literature. An estimated 4.9 billion people are using social media in 2024 (Forbes Advisor, 2024 [2]). This figure is more than half the world’s population of 8 billion (United Nation, 2024 [3]). Today’s society is engrossed in interacting with digital information, busy, individualistic, insecure of visitation by strangers, and conscious of personal space. In such a milieu the traditional slant to literature evangelism for the Seventh-day Church begins to have limitations. This article submits that the Seventh-day Adventist traditional literature evangelism method of door-to-door can be augmented for the better by adopting digital Seventh-day Adventist form of evangelism tactical slant to fulfil the dream of Ellen G. White of scattering literature like the leaves of autumn. The methodology used in this article is deductive. Relevant information will be consulted and analyzed. A conclusion will be drawn based on the relevant information gathered.

**Key words:** technology, innovation, digital, traditional, literature

### Introduction

The second advent of Christ and the end of the world is contingent on the gospel of Jesus being preached to the whole world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come (Matt 24:14 [RSV]). On the island of Patmos, God instructed John as regards the extent to which the gospel must spread. “And I was told, ‘You must again prophecy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’” (Rev

10:11[RSV]). In the same vein that everyone must be reached with the gospel of Christ, Ellen G. White saw the avenue of literature evangelism as urgent and effective. She advocated: “A far greater effort should be made to extend the circulation of our literature in all parts of the world. The warning must be given in all lands to all peoples.” (White, 1948 [4]). Elsewhere she speaks of God in relationship to literature evangelism, saying, “And one of the

principal agencies He has ordained for our use is the printed page.” (White, 1948 [5]).

During Ellen G. White’s time, the door-to-door fashion of dispersing Seventh-day Adventist literature to houses, schools, sanitarium, and camp meetings was the common way of dispersing the print. However, times have changed and so is the technology and innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The web and digital technology still evolving, provides fast, labor-saving, and efficient form of sharing information, revolutionizing the speed and breadth of sharing that information. Take for example, a person’s presence in social media individually or corporately and their contacts. A wider circle of clientele would be within reach for such a Seventh-day Adventist colporteur otherwise would be beyond reach without the digital technology. This article submits that the digital technology and innovation can adequately be adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist colportage to supplement and not to replace the traditional Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism line of house-to-house. The methodology used in this paper is deductive –gathering relevant information to the topic and deducing a conclusion from the information garnered.

#### *Historical Background of the Seventh-day Adventist Literature Evangelism Print*

Bible portions were circulated at the beginning of Reformation in the European continent, before religious tracts became a common way of disseminating religious information. (McClinton & Strong, 2024 [6]). Apart from translating the Bible, Wycliff distributed many tractates. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the printing press was invented in Germany, paving the way for mass production of religious tracts. Martin Luther, the reformer used the print to spread his religious writings.

“In 1742 the Rev John Wesley, in prosecution of his evangelical work in Great Britain, commenced printing and circulating religious tracts by personal effort and the co-operation of the preachers associated with him . . . In 1872 Mr Wesley instituted a society for the distribution of Religious Tracts among the poor. In his published proposals in behalf of the society, he said, “I cannot but earnestly recommend this to all those desire to see true Scriptural Christianity spread throughout the nations. Men wholly unawakened will not take the pains to read the Bible. They have no relish for it. But a small tract may engage their attention for half an hour, and may, be the blessing of God prepare them for going forward.” (McClintock & Strong, 2024 [7]). Wesley “saw the production and distribution of tracts, editions, and abridgement as crucial to early Methodist movement.” (Snead, 2018 [8]).

Helped by Joshua V. Himes in printing and distribution of tracts as a second avenue of spreading the Millerite message of the soon coming of Jesus Christ in 1843-1844, William Miller was able to spread the message not only in north America, but also the whole globe. (Knight, 1999 [9]). After the Sabbatarian Adventists united around the present truth in 1848, the Lord through a vision in 1849 instructed Ellen G. White to tell her husband, James White, to print a small paper containing the present truth and distribute it. The tracts will be beams of light going round the globe (White, 1922 [10]). Ellen G. White came from the Methodist Church background whose founder was John Wesley who used religious tracts to spread Methodism and therefore, she must have had a positive view of religious tracts and their role in spreading the gospel of salvation. From then on the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed publishing houses



as institutions to print religious materials, including the proclamation of the gospel.

*The Traditional Seventh-day Adventist Literature Evangelist and Its Drawback in the Modern Era of Technology and Innovation*

The traditional Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism of door-to-door tactic has some advantages, including but not limited to the following:

1. One-on-one facial interaction which builds personal touch and trust between the colporteur and the client.
2. Prayers can be offered for the client regarding personal issues or concerns.
3. The canvasser can explain elaborately or exhaustively on the literature being presented or related Bible issue in a relaxed atmosphere such as questions and related responses.
4. It is not affected by a ban which is likely to upset some social media outlets.

There are shortcomings, nevertheless, to the traditional Seventh-day literature evangelism, including but not limited to the following:

1. Aging and retiring Seventh-day Adventists literature evangelists encumbered with responsibilities such as raising children.
2. Disinterested young people who are not overwhelmingly filling the void left by the aging colporteurs.
3. Travels for long distances involving high cost and transportation inconveniences for large loads of hard copies of literature.
4. Quite often weather, is the itinerary determinant factor for the literature evangelist.
5. Canvassing programs closing down.

*Seventh-day Adventist Literature Evangelism Trend*

Since Ellen G. White’s time, Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism dispersal approach has been door-to-door style. The literature evangelist carries hard copies in a bag

and visits houses, organizations, and institutions to contact clients. (Williams, 2018 [11]); Agui, 2020 [12]). “Sometimes the literature is free, or sometimes it’s for sale. Sometimes it’s left up to the recipient if they’d like to have it for free or provide a donation of their chosen amount.” (Ask an Adventist Friend, 2024 [13]). Seventh-day Adventist Literature evangelists are classified as: full-time, part-time, student, and temporary participants. (AskAnadventistFriend, 2024 [14]).

**December 2018 Statistics**

|                              |             |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| Publishing Ministries        | 75          |
| Department Leaders           |             |
| Literature Evangelists       |             |
| Full-time                    | 530         |
| Part-time                    | 351         |
| Students                     | 251         |
| Total Literature Evangelists | 1,132       |
| Total Sales in US\$          | \$49,149.74 |
| Books and Magazines Sold     | 1,913       |

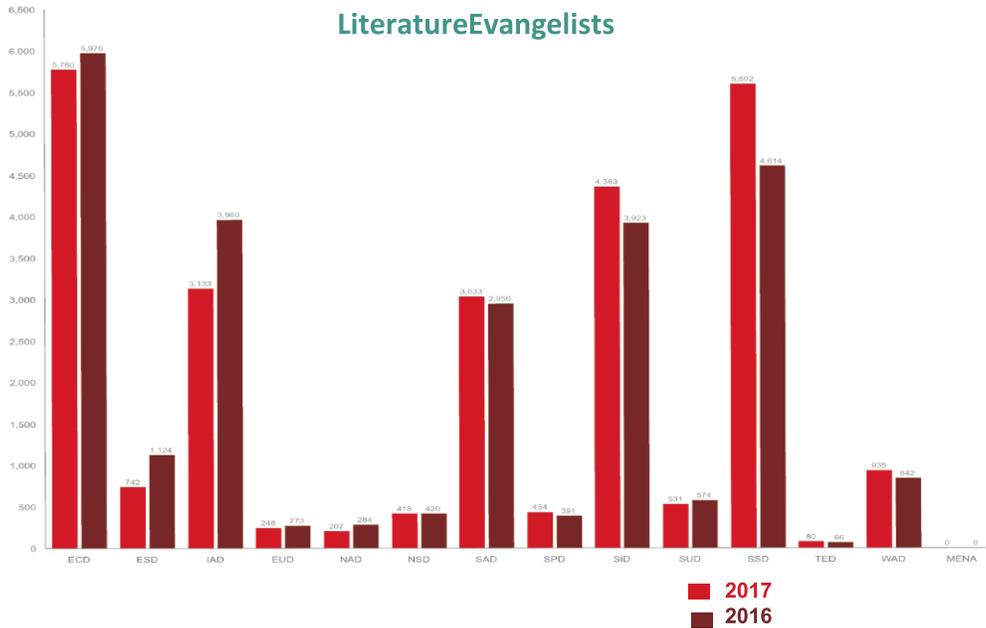
Adopted from Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist Literature Evangelism in West-Central Africa Division. By Abraham Dada Obaya January 29, 2020

Judging from the above West-Central Africa Division statistics of 2018, the total number of books and magazines equals or is less than the persons contacted, considering the fact that one client could have bought more than one book. According to the year book 2020, Seventh-day Adventist West-Central Africa Division had a total population of 446,383,000. Compared against the contacts made in 2018, the ratio would be 1:394,331. This ratio points to a

dismal picture for the Seventh-day Adventist

SummaryReport

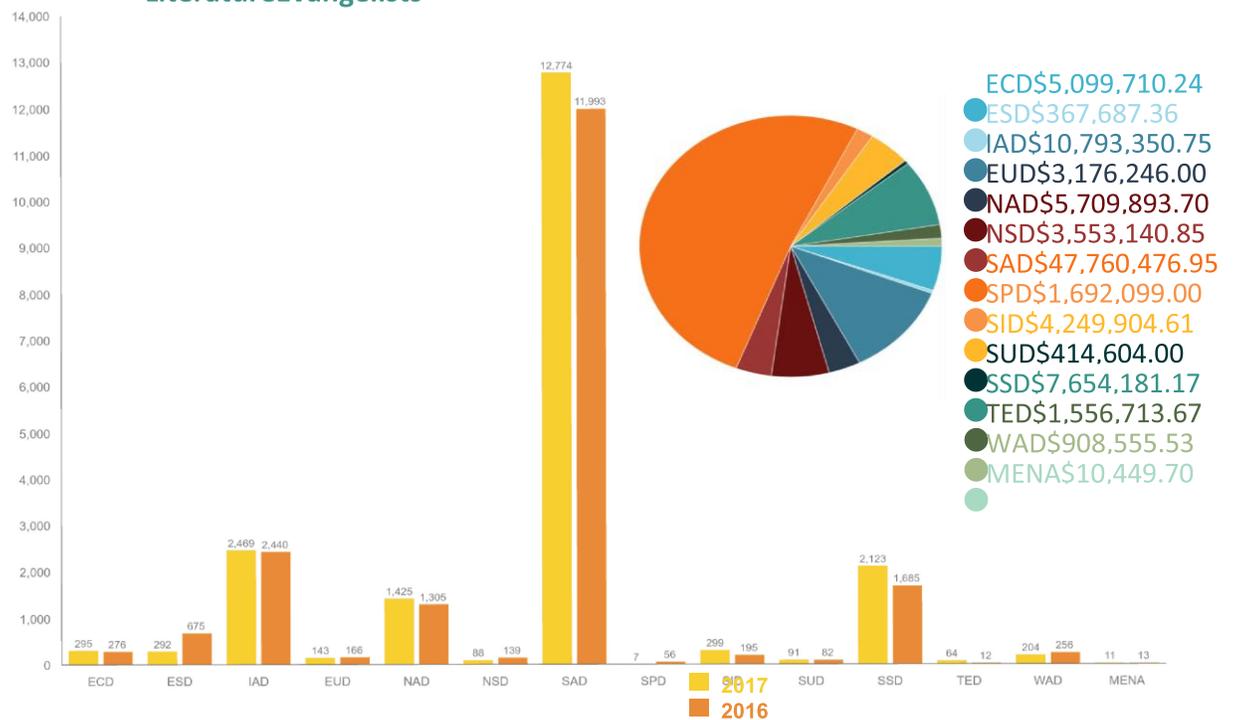
NumberofFull-timeandPart-time  
LiteratureEvangelists



literature evangelism door-to-door approach.

NumberofStudent  
LiteratureEvangelists

TotalSalesforFull-time,Part-time,  
andStudentLiteratureEvangelists



...

Adopted from *The Literature Evangelist* April-June, 2018



Similarly, the statistical total number of the Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelists in 2017 is 45,791. Compared to the total world population the ratio is 1:175,000. Again this is a staggering ratio for the Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism to reach the world with its gospel of salvation. In Brazil, “the literature evangelists are facing greater difficulties in personally talking to people. The traditional door-to-door sales method is reaching fewer and fewer people and new approaches are required to support colporteurs in their work.” (Martinelli, 1996 [15]). “The modern era has brought about a shift in the way people communicate and access information with the rise of the internet and social media, more and more people are turning to digital platforms to find information and connect with others. This shift has had a significant impact on the way that literature evangelism is done.” (Hemet Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2024 [16]). Kirk Thomas is of the opinion that, “all Seventh-day Adventists should participate in the circulation of literature.” (Thomas, 2024 [17]).

On the one hand, instead of consigning literature evangelism to literature evangelists only, every Seventh-day Adventist can participate in literature spreading through hard or soft copies whichever way is convenient for them. (Walker, 2020 [18]). “For too long we have relied on professionals to do that work for us, but now that the financial curve has been flattened we all can get busy doing the Lord’s work, sharing our own unique experience and understanding of God with our own voice. When we do this as a church collectively, imagine the beautiful picture of God that will be painted to the world!” (Walker, 2020 [19]). The Seventh-day Adventists with an access to the internet and social media can share the soft copy through but not limited to the following: WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Youtube, facebook, X (twitter), Instagram, Podcast, TV, Radio, Email, Telegram, Capcut,

Snapshot, Messenger, Zoom, Wechat, QR or Barcode scanning, Blog, and web link.

On the other hand, those Seventh-day Adventists who would like to evangelize through literature traditionally from door-to-door can disperse hard copies through their physical contacts. A good example, is “Edith from a small rural Church. She is an elderly person with only one functional arm. When her church found an opportunity to sell vegetarian burger at a local agricultural expo, she decided she would put a Bible in every napkin that went with the meal. That year Edith, as well as others in her Church, distributed hundreds of tracts one of which ended up in the hands of former Californian governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.” (Ministry Magazine, 2015[20]).

#### *Digital Technology and Innovation as A Supplement to Seventh-day Literature Traditional Approach*

The arrival of digital technology and innovation availed a splendid opportunity to spread the Seventh-day Adventist literature fast, reaching wider clientele, with less cost, and convenience. (Hemet Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2024 [21]). This phenomenon enhances Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism. The phenomenon was experienced globally during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns in many countries of the world. Majority of the Seventh-day Adventists literature evangelists were grounded at their homes. Yet, some of them managed to use the digital technology while others innovated to reach their clients with their literature. For example, Corin Pelina in the Romanian Union during the Corona pandemic used Zoom to conduct a vegetarian cooking by charging the participants health books and vegetarian recipes for \$45. (Corin Pelina, 2021[22]). Hedged in by Covid-19, Elizabeth Rosado Zapata incapacitated by an accident for few months, used WhatsApp Business

application and Zoom to sell literature books. (Zapata, 2021 [23]).

The good legacy of Covid-19 lockdowns is that it opened the eyes of the Seventh-day Adventists to continue using digital technology and innovation to evangelize. (Lemos, 2022 [24]). “Ministries should therefore, enlist their people in their practical work of tract distribution. This is too great and too good a work to be confined to a few.” (McClinton & Strong, 2024 [25]).

### *The Need for More Diversified Approach to Seventh-day Adventist Literature Evangelism*

In the modern world people are individualistic, independent, aloof, busy, insecure with strangers, time conscious, and have “mind-your-business” attitude. They are self-scheduled instead of being timed by another person. This scenario has the implication that people do not have time or the wherewithal to entertain others. Social media has riveted majority of the world’s population. However negatively social media may seem to preoccupy the minds of people, it may offer an excellent chance for the literature evangelist to meet their targets in the social media. As a non-pervasive way of style by Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelists, digital literature evangelism would cut across ethnicity, political and religious persuasions, and geographical and social groupings. The modern populace keeps pace with the prevailing fashion of life. Thus, the current form of acquiring and disseminating information is molded by technology and innovation and therefore, there arises a necessity to diversify the Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism method to accommodate the diversity of the contexts in which the modern society is living in. The principle advocated by Ellen G. White concerning the printing press in her days can be applied to the modern technology and innovation: “We must take

every justifiable means of bringing the light before the people. Let the press be utilized, and let every advertising agency be employed that will call attention to the work . . . and should those who have the light of life be satisfied with feeble efforts to call the attention of the masses to the truth?” (White, 1946 [26]).

### **Conclusion**

In view of the modern technology and innovation, the Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelism needs to adapt to the modern times and adopt digital technology and innovation to supplement the traditional door-to-door literature evangelism approach. The digital evangelism is not to replace the traditional evangelism but augment it, retaining its advantages and benefits. This blending will not only enhance delivery, proficiency, and reaching a wider clientele, but also involve virtually every Seventh-day Adventist Church member. The gospel will reach the ends of the world as commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ and broadcast like the leaves of autumn as envisaged by Ellen G. White.

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