

Digital Christianity: Evaluating Exposure, Knowledge, and Use of Faith-Based Social Media Handles by Christians in Southeast Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.12060095>

Received: 27 May 2025; Accepted: 03 June 2025; Published: 11 July 2025

ABSTRACT

Faith-based social media platforms have become increasingly influential in shaping how Christians engage with their spirituality. This study investigated the extent of exposure, knowledge, and use of such platforms among Christians in Southeast Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents across 20 urban communities, with 375 valid responses analyzed. The findings indicate that Christians in the region are highly exposed to faith-based social media handles, with NSPPD and "We Are Catholics" being the most followed. Facebook and YouTube were identified as the primary platforms used, and the majority of respondents reported daily engagement lasting one to three hours. Participants demonstrated a strong understanding of how these platforms function in preaching, prayer, and sharing church updates. They also actively used them to access church-related information and participate in virtual religious activities. Overall, the study highlighted the widespread use and knowledge of digital faith-based platforms as effective tools for religious connection and church communication among Christians in Southeast Nigeria and also recommended that pastors and ministers are encouraged to have a digital media in their various churches and use multiple religious' social media handles in propagating the faith as they could be able to reach-out many Christians using the platforms.

Keywords: Digital Christianity, Social Media, Faith-Based Handles, Religious Communication, Exposure, Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technology has transformed virtually every aspect of human society, including religion and spiritual practice. The Christian faith, which has traditionally relied on physical gathering spaces such as churches and religious crusades for propagation and interaction, is increasingly shifting toward digital spaces. This development has given rise to the phenomenon termed "Digital Christianity" a contemporary expression of Christian faith mediated through digital technologies and platforms, particularly social media (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In Nigeria, and particularly in the Southeast region, this phenomenon is rapidly gaining traction, reshaping religious communication, participation, and identity formation.

This digital world has expanded with the inclusion of diverse social media and these social media platforms have really re-defined how people communicate and interact in today's modern world with their innovations and trifles. Social media is defined as a form of self-directed mass communication that allows people to communicate with each other without going through the channels set up by institutions of society for socialized communication (Niemandt, 2013).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Twitter (now X) have become vital tools for Christian leaders, ministries, and organisations to reach their audiences. Faith-based social media handles now serve as digital altars where sermons are streamed, testimonies shared, devotionals posted, and prayers offered (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). These platforms also function as tools for evangelism, discipleship, spiritual mentorship, and even fundraising.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of digital media into religious life, as restrictions on public gatherings forced churches to adopt online worship services (Linonge-Fontebo & Baloye, 2024). Social media played a very important role in the life of the church and the enculturation of the gospel. The natural advantage of the use of social media is that they are fast, furious, and infectious. It is an all-inclusive, non-restrictive, non-hierarchical and non-pretentious way of spreading the gospel (Adebowale 2020).

In the religious lives of Christians, the digital world seems to have penetrated deeply and influenced Christians' conventional attitude towards reading the word of God, listening to the word of God, prayer and other practices. This shift highlighted the critical importance of digital literacy among congregants and religious leaders alike. While some embraced the digital transformation, others struggled with limited access, knowledge, or motivation to engage online. This uneven digital adaptation has raised important questions about inclusion, accessibility, and the authenticity of online religious experience (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

In view of these considerations, this study seeks to evaluate the level of exposure, knowledge, and use of faith-based social media handles among Christians in Southeast Nigeria. It will explore patterns of digital engagement, and assess perceived benefits and challenges of digital faith expressions. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to the growing field of digital religion and provide empirical data to guide both scholarly discourse and practical application in religious contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Southeast Nigeria, predominantly occupied by the Igbo ethnic group, is known for its vibrant Christian population. The region has historically maintained high levels of religious participation and church affiliation. With increasing internet penetration and mobile phone usage in the region, the potential for digital Christianity is significant (Statista, 2023). However, the extent to which Christians in Southeast Nigeria are exposed to, knowledgeable about, and actively engage with these digital platforms remains under-researched.

Much of the existing literature focuses on Western contexts, with few studies addressing the unique socio-cultural and religious dynamics of African societies most especially, Nigeria. This gap calls for more localized and context-specific investigations. In particular, there is a need to evaluate how Christians in Southeast Nigeria perceive, access, and utilize faith-based digital content. Hence to what extent are Christians in Southeast Nigeria exposed, knowledgeable and h-based social media handles in the digital age.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to;

- i. Ascertain the exposure level of Christians in Southeast, Nigeria to faith-based social media handles;
- ii. Determine the level of knowledge of Christians in Southeast, Nigeria, in the use of faith-based social media handles for Christian activities;
- iii. Determine the level to which Christians in Southeast Nigeria use the faith-based social media handles for Christian activities;

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis were formulated for the study

H₁: There is a relationship between exposure to faith-based social media handles and knowledge of the use of the handles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of digital technology has transformed the practice of religion globally, leading to the emergence of "Digital Christianity," where faith-based content is increasingly disseminated via social media platforms. Digital Christianity refers to the use of digital tools, especially social networking sites, by Christian individuals and organizations to share, experience, and engage with religious content (Evolvi, 2021). This digital

expression of faith expands traditional religious practices and allows for more interactive, participatory worship and evangelism. Exposure to faith-based social media involves individuals encountering religious content intentionally or unintentionally through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (Now X). This exposure can be passive (e.g., seeing a shared sermon) or active (e.g., following a pastor's account) (Bingaman, 2023).

Knowledge refers to users' awareness and understanding of digital Christian content, including their familiarity with platforms used by religious institutions and personalities. It also encompasses their ability to critically assess the theological soundness and doctrinal consistency of the content they consume. Use reflects the behavioral engagement with faith-based handles such as liking, commenting, sharing, and joining live worship sessions online. It includes how believers incorporate digital religious activities into their spiritual routines, such as using apps for Bible reading or participating in virtual fellowships (Siuda, 2021).

The intersection of these three constructs exposure, knowledge, and use shapes the evolving dynamics of religiosity in the digital age. In Southeast Nigeria, where Christianity plays a dominant role in social life, understanding these interactions is essential for evaluating how faith is mediated and lived through digital platforms.

Empirical Review

Numerous studies have examined how digital platforms influence religious practice globally and within specific national contexts. For example, Campbell and Tsuria, (2021) observed that digital media offer Christians new ways of expressing and negotiating religious identity, often blending secular and spiritual content.

In Nigeria, Afolabi and Oderinde (2024) conducted a study on the use of social media by Pentecostal churches and found that digital platforms are actively used for evangelism, tithing, and maintaining community engagement. However, they also reported disparities in media literacy among congregants, which affected their ability to discern credible messages.

Similarly, Chukwudebelu et al. (2024) investigated digital religion among Igbo youth in Southeast Nigeria and found that while most youths were exposed to Christian messages online, their engagement was often shallow, driven more by entertainment than theological interest. This highlights a gap between exposure and meaningful spiritual use.

Makhutla (2021) examined social media use during the COVID-19 lockdown and noted that many churches in Southeast Nigeria leveraged platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube to sustain worship, with varying degrees of effectiveness based on digital literacy and access.

These empirical findings underscore the need to assess not just the availability of digital faith content, but also the knowledge base and behavioral use of these platforms by believers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two interrelated theories:

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

UGT posits that media users actively seek out content that satisfies specific needs—cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release (Camilleri & Falzon, 2020). In the context of digital Christianity, this theory explains why Christians choose to follow and engage with faith-based social media handles to gain knowledge, maintain spiritual connection, or experience community. UGT enables the categorization of motivations behind exposure and use of digital religious content.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Developed by Davis, TAM posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use determine the adoption of a new technology. This model is particularly relevant for understanding knowledge and use of faith-based platforms. In regions where digital literacy is uneven, TAM helps explain variations in the adoption of social

media for religious purposes (Normalini, 2019). Together, UGT and TAM provide a robust lens to evaluate how and why Christians in Southeast Nigeria engage with faith-based social media platforms, considering both motivational and technological determinants.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional approach to evaluate the exposure, knowledge and usage of faith-based social media handles by Christians in Southeast Nigeria. This study was carried out in the southeast, Nigeria with a population of 21,955,400 which consist of Ebonyi State, Anambra State, Abia State, Enugu State and Imo State. The sample size for the survey was 400. This was calculated using the Survey system online sample size calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used, including the cluster sampling, non-proportionate sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The multi-stage process is represented in the steps below:

- ✓ **Step One:** Five states make up the Southeast geopolitical zone in Nigeria viz Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States.
- ✓ **Stage Two:** From these five states, the state capitals were selected and they include: Umuahia, Awka, Abakaliki, Enugu and Owerri, the reason for choosing the state capital is based on the fact that most mega churches and good number of churches are found in state capital with the possibility of seeing Christians who are literate and who are familiar with social media environment. Also, given the fact that there is an active network service to enable respondents who have smartphone access, religious social media handles easily.
- ✓ **Stage Three:** From each of the five state capitals, two local government areas in the Urban area were purposively selected. They are Umuahia North and Umuahia South, Awka North and Awka South, Abakaliki and Izzi, Enugu East and Enugu South, Owerri Municipal and Owerri West.
- ✓ **Stage Four:** In this stage, the researcher selected two communities in each of the two LGA's in the state capitals, making it 20 communities. The reason for choosing these communities is based on the fact that they are within the central area of the state capital, and two were selected for manageability.

This means that 20 copies of the questionnaire were purposively administered to each community where Christians with smartphones and who subscribe frequently are. The questionnaire was patterned on a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents are expected to agree or disagree at varying degrees with the statement measurement indices. Where 5 is the highest score and 1, the lowest. Thus, strongly agreed (SA) = 5; Agreed (A) = 4; Fairly Agreed (FA) = 3; Disagreed (D) = 2; and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1.

RESULT PRESENTATION

Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 385 were returned, yielding a high response rate of 97%. After excluding 10 invalid responses, 375 valid questionnaires were used for analysis. The responses were assessed using simple percentages and weighted mean scores (WMS), where a score of 3.00 or higher indicated significance.

Research Question One: What is the level of exposure of Christians in Southeast, Nigeria to faith-based social media handles?

Table 1: Level of exposure to different faith-based social media handles

Ratings	<i>X</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>fx</i>	%
Very High	5	189	945	50
High	4	131	524	35
Average	3	34	102	9
Low	2	14	28	4
Very Low	1	7	7	2
Total	N = 5	375	1,606	100

$$\text{Average mean score} = \frac{\sum fx}{\sum F} = 1606/375 = 4.3 = 86\%$$

The table above reveals a high level of exposure to faith-based social media handles. About 50% of respondents rated their exposure as "Very High," and another 35% as "High." The calculated average mean score was 4.3 (86%), indicating strong engagement with these platforms.

Table 2: Most popular Faith-based handles exposed to on Social media

Handles	<i>F</i>	%
NSPPD	175	47
ZION	14	4
Faith Tabernacle	53	14
ECWA Headquarters	12	3
We Are Catholics	121	32
Total	375	100

According to Table 2, *NSPPD* (New Season Prophetic Prayers and Declarations) was the most followed handle, with 47% of the respondents identifying it, followed by *We Are Catholics* (32%). Other popular handles included *Faith Tabernacle* (14%) and *ZION* (4%).

Research Question Two: How knowledgeable are Christians in Southeast, Nigerian on the use of Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities?

Table 3: Knowledge of Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities

Indices	Rating <i>x</i>	SA 5	A 4	FA 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	<i>xi</i>
Faith-based social media handles are used for preaching and reading the word of God.	<i>f</i>	276	94	5	0	0	375	4.73
	<i>fx</i>	1380	380	15	0	0	1775	Accepted
	%	74	25	1	0	0	100	95%
Faith-based social media handles are used for prayer activities.	<i>f</i>	276	99	0	0	0	375	4.74
	<i>fx</i>	1380	396	0	0	0	1776	Accepted
	%	74	26	0	0	0	100	95%
Faith-based social media handles are used for praise and worship.	<i>f</i>	181	170	14	8	3	375	4.4
	<i>fx</i>	905	680	42	16	3	1646	Accepted
	%	48	45	4	2	1	100	88%
Faith-based social media handles are used for Offering and Tithes.	<i>f</i>	231	120	7	14	3	375	4.5
	<i>fx</i>	1155	480	21	28	3	1687	Accepted
	%	61	32	2	4	1	100	90%
Faith-based social media handles are used to publish information about church activities.	<i>f</i>	276	94	5	0	0	375	4.74
	<i>fx</i>	1380	380	15	0	0	1775	Accepted
	%	74	25	1	0	0	100	95%

Results from Table 3 shows a high level of knowledge among respondents regarding Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities. Over 95% agreed or strongly agreed that faith-based handles are used for preaching, prayers, and church information, with mean scores ranging from 4.4 to 4.74. This indicates significant awareness and understanding of the platforms' purposes.

Research Question 3: To what extent do Christians in Southeast Nigeria use Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities?

Table 4: Respondents' use of Faith-based handles for Christian activities.

Indices	Rating <i>x</i>	SA 5	A 4	FA 3	D 2	SD1	Total	<i>xi</i>
I use Faith-based social media handles for my bible reading.	<i>f</i>	226	104	24	14	7	375	4.40
	<i>fx</i>	1130	416	72	28	7	1653	Accepted
	%	60	28	6	4	2	100	88%

I use Faith-based social media handles to keep up with prayer meetings.	<i>f</i>	231	120	7	14	3	375	4.5
	<i>fx</i>	1155	480	21	28	3	1687	Accepted
	%	61	32	2	4	1	100	90%
I use Faith-based social media handles to give my tithe and offerings.	<i>f</i>	124	186	52	9	4	375	4.11
	<i>fx</i>	620	744	156	18	4	1542	Accepted
	%	33	50	14	2	1	100	82%
I use Faith-based social media handles to source information about church activities/programmes.	<i>f</i>	303	72	0	0	0	375	4.80
	<i>fx</i>	1515	288	0	0	0	1803	Accepted
	%	81	19	0	0	0	100	96%

Result from Table 4 demonstrates strong usage of these platforms by respondents. Most notably, 96% use them for sourcing information about church activities (mean = 4.80), while 90% use them for prayer meetings and 88% for Bible reading. Additionally, 82% use them for giving offerings and tithes (mean = 4.11), suggesting widespread functional adoption.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is a relationship between exposure to faith-based social media handles and knowledge of the use of the handles for Christian activities.

Calculating Hypothesis

Table 5: Correlation of exposure (X) and knowledge (Y).

Ratings	X	X	Y	X ²	Y ²	XY
SA	5	216	276	46,656	76,176	59,616
A	4	151	94	22,801	8,836	14,194
FA	3	5	5	25	25	25
D	2	0	0	9	0	0
SD	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total, Σ	N=5	375	375	69,491	85,037	73,835

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

$$r = \frac{(5 \times 73,835) - (375 \times 375)}{\sqrt{[5 \times 69,491 - (375)^2][5 \times 85,037 - (375)^2]}}$$

$$r = \frac{369,175 - 140,625}{\sqrt{284,560 \times 206,830}}$$

$$r = \frac{228,550}{\sqrt{58,855,544,800}}$$

$$r = \frac{228,550}{242,601}$$

$$r = 0.94$$

$$r = 0.94$$

$$r = 0.94$$

$$r = 0.94$$

$$r = 0.94$$

$$r = 0.94$$

The hypothesis examined the relationship between exposure and knowledge of faith-based social media handles. A very strong positive correlation was found ($r = 0.94$), indicating that higher exposure is strongly associated with better knowledge and better knowledge directly influences usage of these faith-based social media handles for Christian activities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study provide significant insights into the dynamics of digital faith expressions and the use of faith-based social media handles by Christians in Southeast Nigeria.

Research Question One: What is the level of exposure of Christians in Southeast, Nigeria to Faith-Based social media handles?

The study revealed that 85% of respondents reported a "high" to "very high" level of exposure to faith-based social media handles, with an average weighted mean score of 4.3 (86%). This suggests a strong digital penetration of religious content among Christians in the region. These findings align with Linonge-Fontebo and Baloye (2024), who found a high frequency of digital religious engagement among Cameroonian Pentecostal churches, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated online worship practices.

Notably, platforms such as NSPPD and "We Are Catholics" were most recognised among respondents, reflecting a diversification in digital ministry strategies. NSPPD, for instance, gained transnational attention through aggressive digital outreach and structured morning prayers on YouTube and Facebook (Ige, 2022). The popularity of such handles highlights the growing influence of charismatic Pentecostalism and structured Catholic networks in shaping digital worship narratives.

In line with this findings, Badmos (2014) reported that most Churches and their members have a high level of exposure to members to social media handles and use the same for connecting members. That is to say, it is an indisputable fact that Christians in the Southeast are exposed to religious social media handles. Majority of the respondents including the Ministers were highly exposed hence they recourse to the social media for various purposes such as facilitating ministerial activities, spreading the Christian message, preparing for homilies, offering spiritual advice and prayers.

Research Question Two: How knowledgeable are Christians in Southeast, Nigerian on the use of Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities?

Respondents demonstrated a high level of knowledge regarding the functions of faith-based social media handles. Activities such as preaching ($M = 4.73$), prayers ($M = 4.74$), praise/worship ($M = 4.4$), offerings/tithes ($M = 4.5$), and dissemination of church information ($M = 4.74$) were all rated significantly above the 3.0 mean threshold. These findings confirm those of Jung (2023), who noted that social media is not only used for religious broadcasting but also for fostering spiritual intimacy and communal participation.

Based on the inference drawn from the analysis above, it is evident that the level of knowledge of Christians in the use of faith-based social media handles for the preaching and reading of the word of God is high. This finding corroborates the findings of McKinney (2014) who, in his study, revealed that the high knowledge level of Christians in the use of social media has propelled many Churches to begin utilizing social media in their ministry efforts in areas such as evangelism, prayer, and promote events.

Also, the strong positive correlation ($r = 0.94$) between exposure and knowledge indicates that increased exposure to faith-based handles significantly enhances users' knowledge of their functions. This result agrees with Brubaker and Haigh (2017) findings which revealed that those who frequently use social media as a result of their knowledge are fond of posting, liking, commenting, and sharing faith-based content and who are more religious us and more likely to minister to others. Many of these social media sites were visited daily, spending hours. This supports the theoretical proposition by Hafiar et al. (2024) that digital religion is characterised by interactivity and ongoing learning facilitated through exposure and the assumption of Technological determinism theory that holds that new technology determines the way the society behaves.

Research Question 3: To what extent do Christians in Southeast Nigeria use Faith-based social media handles for Christian activities?

In terms of actual usage, the data reveal strong engagement levels: 88% of respondents used faith-based handles for Bible reading ($M = 4.4$), 90% for prayer meetings ($M = 4.5$), 82% for giving offerings/tithes ($M = 4.11$), and 96% for sourcing information about church programs ($M = 4.8$). This aligns with Kayode-Adedeji et al. (2024), who emphasised the “spiritual utility” of digital media in Pentecostal practices, particularly in Nigeria.

Moreover, the increased use of digital means for tithing and offering suggests an evolving theology of giving and trust in virtual ecclesiastical structures. As Afolabi and Babatunde (2021) note, the digitalisation of offertory practices represents both technological adaptation and a deeper integration of faith and finance within mobile-mediated religious life.

The findings have both practical and theological implications. They reveal a new landscape where digital faith expressions complement traditional worship. For Southeast Nigerian Christians, this digital transformation is not merely an adaptation to technological trends but a re-imagination of sacred spaces and spiritual connectivity. Faith is no longer confined to physical pews but flows across pixels and data streams. However, this transformation invites ecclesiological reflection on authenticity, digital sacrality, and community. As Evolvi (2022) argue, the digitalization of worship calls for critical engagement to preserve the depth of spiritual meaning and communal identity. This is to say that the influence of technology particularly this social media on the individual (and in this case, the Christians) and the society as a whole is basically determined by the extent of attention and consumption (access and use) given to it by the people and society that use it.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that digital Christianity has become an integral part of religious life among Christians in Southeast Nigeria. With high levels of exposure, knowledge, and active usage of faith-based social media handles, digital platforms have emerged as powerful tools for spiritual formation, worship, and community engagement. The significant positive correlations observed between exposure, knowledge, usage, and perception underscore the transformative potential of faith-based digital media in shaping modern Christian practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher therefore recommends that;

1. Given that Christians in Southeast Nigeria are highly exposed to faith-based social media handles, Pastors and Ministers are encouraged to partner with digital platforms and use multiple religious' social media handles in propagating the faith as they could be able to reach out to many Christians using the platforms.
2. Considering the fact that Christians have high knowledge in the use of faith-based social media handles, efforts should be made by religious organizations and institutions to maintain it by using faith-based social media handles in connecting and updating members about Christian activities and enhancing digital engagement.
3. The fact that Christians had a high level usage of faith-based social media handles for Christian activities. Church organizations are advised to use it frequently in promoting all programmes, activities and sustain the attitudes of Christians in using it in all Christian's faith-based activities.

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