# Digital Christianity and the Faith: Reaffirming the Relevance of the Church in the Age of Technological Transformation – An African Theological Perspective

**Samson C. Anwasia, PhD**

**Department of Religious Studies, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Nigeria**

**DOI: https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1310000239**

**Received: 02 November 2026; Accepted: 07 November 2026; Published: 17 November 2026**

## ABSTRACT

The expansion of digital technologies has transformed the communication, organisation and experience of Christian faith. Livestreamed worship, online prayer, social-media evangelism and digital theological education have widened access to religious resources and enabled forms of participation across geographical boundaries. These developments also raise significant ecclesiological questions concerning Christian identity, embodied fellowship, pastoral authority, sacramental practice, inclusion and public responsibility. This article examines the continuing relevance of the Church in the age of technological transformation from an African theological perspective, with particular attention to Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative, conceptual and contextual-hermeneutical approach, it brings selected biblical witnesses into dialogue with scholarship on digital religion and African ecclesiology. It argues that digital technologies can extend the Church's communicative and missionary capacities but cannot, by themselves, constitute or replace the Church in its theological fullness. The article develops the Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model (CCDEM), an integrated framework comprising five mutually related commitments: Christ-centred identity, communal fellowship, missionary expansion, pastoral and ethical accountability, and social responsibility and inclusion. The model treats technology as a facilitating environment rather than the source of ecclesial identity. It offers theological criteria for assessing digital practices and encourages African churches to appropriate technological change critically, contextually and inclusively. The article concludes that the Church's relevance is demonstrated not by digital visibility or numerical reach alone, but by fidelity to Christ expressed through worship, discipleship, mutual care, ethical leadership and public witness.

**Keywords:** African theology; digital Christianity; digital ecclesiology; digital religion; church; technological transformation

## INTRODUCTION

Technological transformation has become a defining feature of contemporary social life. Digital communication platforms shape how people obtain information, sustain relationships, organise communities and participate in public debate. Christian communities are part of this transformation. Churches and ministries use livestreaming, social-media platforms, messaging applications, podcasts, websites and digital learning environments to communicate sermons, organise prayer, provide pastoral contact and extend theological education. These practices have widened access to Christian resources, particularly for people separated from congregational life by distance, illness, disability, insecurity, migration, work or other constraints.

The growth of digital Christianity, however, raises questions that cannot be answered by technological adoption alone. If worship can be streamed, sermons accessed on demand and prayer groups organised through messaging applications, what remains distinctive about the Church as a community of faith? Can online participation adequately express Christian fellowship? How should churches understand pastoral authority, accountability and sacramental practice in digitally mediated environments? How can African churches engage technological opportunities without allowing platform culture—its emphasis on speed, visibility, metrics and monetisation—to redefine Christian identity and mission?

The central argument of this article is that digital technologies can strengthen the Church's mission, but they cannot determine its identity or replace the embodied, relational and communal dimensions of ecclesial life. The Church is not simply a communication network, a religious service provider or an online audience. It is a community constituted by its relation to Jesus Christ and called to worship, discipleship, fellowship, service and witness. Its relevance therefore rests not on its ability to imitate every technological trend but on its faithfulness to this vocation under changing social conditions.

The African perspective adopted here is contextual rather than homogenising. African Christianity is diverse in its histories, denominations, theological traditions, social locations and technological resources. Nevertheless, African theological reflection on community, solidarity and human interdependence offers important resources for examining the meaning of ecclesial belonging in digital environments. Such resources must be used critically: communal language should not conceal abuses of authority, suppress individual dignity or romanticise social realities. The article therefore considers both the possibilities and the risks of digital Christianity, including unequal access, misinformation, personality-centred authority, commercialisation and the exclusion of vulnerable groups.

The article makes two connected contributions. First, it offers a theological assessment of digital Christianity through biblical ecclesiology and scholarship on digital religion. Secondly, it develops the Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model (CCDEM) as a framework for evaluating whether digital practices serve the Church's identity and vocation. The discussion proceeds from its methodological and conceptual approach to the nature of digital Christianity, the biblical identity of the Church, African contextual considerations, the ethical and public implications of digital ministry, and the proposed model.

**Methodological and Conceptual Approach**

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual and contextual-hermeneutical approach. It does not report empirical fieldwork or claim to measure the digital practices of particular congregations. Rather, it interprets selected biblical texts in conversation with scholarship on digital religion, ecclesiology and African theological reflection. Its method is theological because it evaluates digital practices in relation to Christian convictions about Christ, the Church, worship, fellowship and mission. It is contextual because it considers how these convictions are expressed and challenged within African ecclesial settings, with Nigeria serving as a particular point of reference rather than a representative account of the continent.

The biblical texts are approached as theological witnesses shaping the Church's self-understanding, not as direct predictions about contemporary communication technologies. Matthew 16:18 locates the Church's origin in Christ; Acts 2:42–47 presents its common life through teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 depicts believers as members of one interdependent body; Hebrews 10:24–25 emphasises gathering and mutual encouragement; and John 1:14 provides an incarnational perspective on embodied human life. These texts are read in their literary and theological contexts and are not treated as proof-texts about technologies unknown to their authors.

The interpretive procedure has three movements. First, the selected texts are examined for their ecclesiological claims. Secondly, these claims are brought into dialogue with research on digital religion, especially debates about mediation, authority, ritual and community. Helland's (2005) distinction between religion online and online religion remains useful for understanding the difference between transmitting established religious activities and forms of religious practice shaped within digital environments. Campbell (2013) and Hutchings (2017) further demonstrate that digital media can influence religious identity, authority, ritual and community rather than functioning merely as neutral channels. Thirdly, the resulting theological criteria are considered in relation to African ecclesial contexts.

The approach is normative and constructive: it asks what faithful digital practice ought to look like, not how frequently a particular practice occurs. CCDEM is consequently proposed as a conceptual framework for theological discernment. It is not presented as an empirically validated instrument; its practical usefulness requires further testing through case studies and research with congregations.

## Understanding Digital Christianity and Digital Religion

Digital Christianity refers broadly to Christian beliefs, practices, relationships and institutions as they are communicated, mediated or organised through digital technologies. It includes online sermons, livestreamed worship, digital Bible study, prayer groups, religious podcasts, online theological education and pastoral communication through messaging platforms. It also encompasses the ways digital platforms influence religious authority, identity, belonging and the circulation of theological ideas.

The term does not describe a single uniform phenomenon. For some believers, digital media supplement participation in a local congregation. For others, particularly those who are geographically isolated or unable to attend services, online resources may provide an important connection to Christian teaching and worship. Some digital spaces are organised by established churches, while others emerge through independent ministries, individual religious personalities or informal networks. Their theological accountability and relationship to local congregations therefore vary.

Helland's (2005) distinction between religion online and online religion helps clarify this diversity. In the former, digital media function principally as channels through which established religious activities are publicised or transmitted. In the latter, the digital environment becomes a setting in which religious interaction and practice take distinctive forms. The distinction is not absolute: a livestream may transmit a service organised in a physical congregation while also enabling remote viewers to interact, pray and form relationships.

Digital media are not neutral containers. Platform design influences what becomes visible, how users interact and which forms of communication are rewarded. Brief, emotionally compelling content may circulate more readily than sustained theological reflection. Views, likes, shares and follower counts can become informal measures of religious influence. Campbell (2013) shows the importance of examining the negotiation between religious traditions and new media environments, while Campbell (2021) draws attention to digital creatives and the changing dynamics of religious authority. The Church must therefore evaluate not only what it communicates digitally but also how platform structures and incentives may shape its message and practices.

## The Biblical and Theological Identity of the Church

Christian reflection on the Church begins with Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declares that he will build his Church. The statement locates the Church's origin and continuity in Christ rather than in the ingenuity, popularity or institutional power of its human leaders. Churches may employ changing forms of communication, but technology does not create ecclesial identity. Digital platforms can serve the Church, yet they cannot become the foundation of its existence or the final measure of its faithfulness.

The New Testament also presents the Church as a body whose members are interdependent. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul uses the body metaphor to challenge division and affirm the contribution of different members. Christian belonging therefore involves reciprocal responsibility, care and participation. A digital audience may share content and exchange comments, but these activities do not automatically establish the enduring relationships and obligations associated with the body of Christ.

Acts 2:42–47 describes the early believers as devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. Their common life includes worship, material sharing and practical concern for one another. The passage should not be used to prescribe one unchanging format for every Christian gathering. It does, however, show that Christian faith is more than the reception of religious information: it is a shared way of life involving teaching, worship, relationships and material responsibility.

Hebrews 10:24–25 encourages believers not to neglect meeting together, but to encourage one another. Gathering matters because Christian perseverance is sustained through mutual encouragement and responsibility. Digital communication can assist this encouragement, especially when physical gathering is difficult or temporarily impossible. Nevertheless, the capacity to watch a service remotely should not lead churches to disregard the formative value of shared presence and mutual care.

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

John 1:14, which declares that the Word became flesh, provides an incarnational lens. The incarnation does not mean that every aspect of Christian communication must occur face to face, nor does it render digital participation spiritually meaningless. Rather, it cautions against reducing faith to disembodied information or treating human presence as dispensable. The Church's ministry concerns whole persons whose needs are spiritual, relational, physical and social.

Taken together, these biblical witnesses suggest that the Church cannot be adequately defined as a building, broadcast, platform or collection of online followers. Buildings and technologies may serve its life, but its identity is grounded in Christ and expressed through a worshipping, learning, serving and mutually responsible community.

**Digital Christianity, Fellowship and Embodied Participation**

One of the most important questions raised by digital Christianity concerns the meaning of fellowship. Online spaces can enable interaction across geographical boundaries and provide access to Christian teaching and prayer. They can sustain relationships when illness, disability, insecurity, migration or public emergencies prevent physical gathering. For older people, persons with disabilities and those living far from a congregation, digital access may be a significant means of connection. Digital ministry should therefore not be dismissed as inherently superficial or inferior.

At the same time, access to a livestream is not identical to participation in the full life of a congregation. Watching a service may provide teaching and a sense of connection, but it does not necessarily enable the viewer to be known, accompanied through difficulty, included in communal decision-making or supported through practical acts of care. Digital fellowship becomes more substantial when churches intentionally create pathways for interaction, pastoral follow-up, small-group participation, mutual assistance and accountable relationships.

The distinction is not between a perfect physical church and a deficient online church. Physical congregations can be impersonal, exclusionary or abusive, while digital communities can offer genuine encouragement and support. The theological question is whether a particular practice fosters the relationships, responsibilities and forms of participation that belong to Christian community. Hutchings (2017) demonstrates that online churches can develop meaningful practices of ritual, interaction and support, while also raising questions about the nature and organisation of community.

Sacramental practice requires particular care. Christian traditions differ in their theological understanding of baptism, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, ministerial authority and the conditions under which sacraments may be administered. It would be inappropriate to impose one universal ruling on all denominations. Churches should articulate their own theological convictions clearly and consider how digital mediation affects participation, communal recognition and pastoral oversight. The technological capacity to transmit a service does not, by itself, settle sacramental questions.

A balanced ecclesiology therefore recognises the genuine value of digital participation while resisting the assumption that every dimension of gathered Christian life can be transferred without remainder to an online environment. Digital ministry is most constructive when it strengthens the community's capacity to worship, teach, care and serve rather than encouraging isolated consumption of religious content.

**The African Church in the Digital Age**

African Christianity is marked by considerable diversity. Historic mission churches, Pentecostal and charismatic movements, African Instituted Churches, evangelical organisations, independent ministries and newer church networks have developed different patterns of worship, leadership and public engagement. Their access to digital infrastructure also varies widely. In Nigeria, churches and Christian organisations use websites, livestreaming, social-media platforms, messaging applications and digital broadcasting to share sermons, announce programmes, organise prayer and communicate with members. These tools can extend Christian teaching and connect communities across local and international boundaries.

African theological reflection on community provides resources for considering the relational character of

ecclesial life. Sakupapa (2018), for example, critically appropriates ubuntu as a horizon for African ecumenical ecclesiology, emphasising communality, communion and the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. Ubuntu should not be treated as a single worldview shared identically by all African societies, nor should it be collapsed into the New Testament concept of koinonia. Their dialogue is nevertheless useful because both can direct attention to belonging, interdependence and responsibility.

This conversation raises a practical question for digital Christianity: do online practices deepen solidarity and participation, or do they encourage believers to become consumers of religious content detached from communal obligations? Chiluwa's (2012) study of online religion in Nigeria documents the use of internet communication for Christian worship, fellowship and the circulation of religious claims. His analysis also identifies concerns about deception and the possible weakening of offline congregational relationships. The Nigerian experience therefore illustrates both the opportunities and tensions of online religious participation.

Ndereba (2023) examines digital ecclesiology and Africa's digital natives, identifying opportunities for missional outreach alongside challenges concerning identity, authority and community. Churches should take seriously the communicative habits and questions of younger people without assuming that technological fluency automatically produces theological maturity. Digital access can create opportunities for learning, but discipleship still requires discernment, sustained teaching, ethical formation and accountable relationships.

African churches should approach digital transformation neither with uncritical enthusiasm nor blanket rejection. The relevant question is how technologies can be appropriated in ways that are theologically faithful, contextually sensitive and attentive to the material conditions of African communities.

**The Church's Public and Social Responsibility in Nigeria**

The relevance of the Church cannot be measured solely by its internal activities or online visibility. Christian ecclesiology has a public dimension: the Church is called to bear witness to the values of the Gospel through truthfulness, justice, reconciliation, compassion and the protection of human dignity. In Nigeria, where communities confront insecurity, poverty, corruption, social division and unequal access to public goods, churches have responsibilities extending beyond the transmission of religious messages.

Digital platforms can strengthen this public vocation. Churches can circulate verified information, coordinate humanitarian assistance, draw attention to abuses, support peacebuilding initiatives and provide educational resources. They can use digital communication to encourage responsible citizenship and give visibility to marginalised communities. Such engagement must be guided by truthfulness and discernment. The speed with which information circulates online makes verification essential; churches should avoid forwarding unsubstantiated allegations, inflammatory claims or messages that deepen ethnic, religious or political hostility.

The Church's public witness must also resist partisan capture. Christian communities and leaders may legitimately speak about public morality, justice and the common good. Their credibility is weakened, however, when spiritual authority is used to manipulate political loyalties, silence criticism or confer unquestioning legitimacy on powerful individuals. Responsible Christian engagement requires theological conviction, factual care and a willingness to hold all public authorities to ethical standards.

The Church's relevance is therefore demonstrated not simply by its ability to command attention but by its contribution to human flourishing. Digital ministry should connect communication to service: information should lead to responsible action, prayer should be accompanied by compassion, and public statements should be consistent with the Church's conduct.

**Digital Inclusion, Accessibility and Inequality**

A theological evaluation of digital Christianity must consider who is able to participate and who remains excluded. Access to reliable electricity, affordable data, suitable devices, stable connectivity and digital literacy is uneven. These inequalities affect rural and urban communities differently and can exclude people living in poverty. A church that moves essential communication and participation entirely online may unintentionally disadvantage members who cannot afford the technology required to remain connected.

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

Accessibility is also a matter of Christian inclusion. People with disabilities may benefit from digital resources, but only when platforms and content are designed with their needs in mind. Captions, sign-language interpretation, screen-reader-compatible websites, clear navigation, alternative text for images and audio descriptions can improve access. Amenyedzi (2024) argues that disability exclusion in physical church settings can be reproduced in virtual environments when accessibility is not deliberately incorporated into digital ministry.

Digital inclusion does not mean that every congregation must possess expensive equipment or maintain a sophisticated online presence. It means that churches should assess the actual needs and resources of their members and avoid equating technological sophistication with spiritual vitality. Where connectivity is unreliable, alternatives such as printed materials, telephone contact, local gatherings and community-based support may remain essential.

An inclusive digital ecclesiology asks whether technological decisions expand participation or create new barriers. Older adults, people with disabilities, low-income households and rural communities should be treated as full members of the Church rather than peripheral recipients of occasional assistance. Accessibility and inclusion are expressions of the Church's commitment to the dignity of every person.

**Pastoral Authority, Accountability and Institutional Integrity**

The call to reaffirm the relevance of the Church must not become an uncritical defence of every institution, leader or practice claiming Christian authority. Churches are human communities and institutions; they can fail through corruption, abuse, manipulation, financial exploitation, discrimination or misuse of spiritual power. Such failures should be named and addressed rather than concealed in the name of protecting the Church's reputation.

A theological defence of the Church is different from institutional apologetics. It is a defence of the Church's vocation as a community called by Christ, not a defence of misconduct by those who exercise leadership. Accountability is necessary if the Church is to remain credible in its witness. Leaders should be subject to appropriate oversight, financial practices should be transparent, allegations of abuse should be handled through responsible procedures, and vulnerable people should be protected.

Digital media make accountability both more urgent and more complex. They can expose wrongdoing and provide channels through which victims and concerned members speak. They can also enable rumour, public shaming without due process and the spread of false accusations. Churches should neither suppress legitimate criticism nor treat every online allegation as established fact. Responsible procedures should protect complainants, ensure fair investigation and prevent institutional power from intimidating those who raise concerns.

Pastoral authority in digital environments requires particular care. Online influence can grow rapidly, sometimes without the theological formation, communal recognition or accountability expected of established ministry. Campbell (2021) demonstrates how digital creatives and religious media figures can challenge or bypass traditional structures of religious authority. Churches should therefore encourage theological competence, ethical conduct and transparent relationships between leaders and followers. The credibility of Christian leadership rests not on follower counts but on service, integrity and fidelity to the Gospel.

The Church remains relevant not because it is incapable of failure, but because its calling continually summons it to repentance, renewal and faithful service. A mature affirmation of the Church includes honest criticism of practices that contradict its mission.

**The Commercialisation of Christianity and Digital Popularity**

Digital platforms operate within attention economies in which visibility, engagement and monetisation can become powerful incentives. Christian ministries are not immune to these pressures. Sermons, testimonies, prophetic claims and worship performances may be packaged in ways designed primarily to attract clicks, shares,

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

donations or subscriptions. The pursuit of a digital audience can gradually become confused with the fulfilment of Christian mission.

There is nothing inherently wrong with churches using professional communication, receiving legitimate financial support or making teaching widely available. The problem arises when commercial success becomes the measure of spiritual authority or when religious trust is exploited for personal enrichment. The Gospel's invitation to give freely (Matthew 10:8) and the New Testament warning against domineering leadership and dishonest gain (1 Peter 5:2–3) offer ethical principles for digital ministry.

Views, likes and follower counts are limited indicators. They may show that content has attracted attention, but they do not establish that people have grown in faith, developed theological understanding, reconciled with others or become more committed to service. A ministry may have a large online following while offering little pastoral care or accountability. Conversely, a small congregation with limited digital reach may embody deep discipleship and substantial service to its community.

Churches should therefore develop ethical policies for fundraising, advertising, sponsorship, data protection and the use of personal testimonies. They should be transparent about the purpose and destination of donations, avoid manipulative appeals and resist claims that financial giving guarantees divine favour. Digital communication should serve the truth of the Gospel rather than turn religious longing into a marketable commodity.

## The Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model (CCDEM)

The preceding discussion demonstrates the need for an integrated framework through which churches can evaluate their engagement with technological transformation. This article proposes the Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model (CCDEM). The model is a constructive theological framework designed to relate Christian ecclesiology to digital engagement. Its central proposition is that technology should serve the Church's identity and mission rather than determine them. Digital platforms may facilitate communication, expand participation and create opportunities for Christian witness, but they cannot independently establish the theological foundations of ecclesial existence.

CCDEM is organised around five mutually related commitments: Christ-centred identity, communal fellowship, missionary expansion, pastoral and ethical accountability, and social responsibility and inclusion. These are not isolated operational categories. They form an integrated theological structure in which each dimension contributes to the integrity of the others. The model therefore resists an understanding of digital Christianity that reduces ecclesial relevance to online visibility, technological innovation or numerical engagement.

## The Five Interrelated Dimensions

### Christ-centred identity

Christ-centred identity provides the theological foundation of the model. Matthew 16:18 locates the Church's origin and continuity in Christ. Neither technological infrastructure nor digital popularity can become the defining source of ecclesial identity. Digital content, leadership and communication must be evaluated in relation to the Gospel and the Church's confession of Christ. This dimension provides the normative criterion through which the other dimensions are assessed.

### Communal fellowship

Communal fellowship expresses the relational character of Christian existence. The Church is not merely an audience assembled around religious information but a community whose members share responsibility for one another. The body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 provides a theological basis for this understanding. Digital communication should strengthen relationships, participation, pastoral care and mutual support. Its value lies not merely in connectivity but in its capacity to deepen Christian belonging.

### Missionary expansion

Missionary expansion recognises the opportunities technological transformation offers for evangelism,

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

theological education and discipleship. Digital platforms can extend the proclamation of the Gospel across geographical boundaries and facilitate engagement with younger generations. Yet missionary expansion must not be confused with the accumulation of followers or the commercial promotion of religious personalities. Its significance rests on whether digital engagement contributes to Christian formation and participation in the mission of Christ.

**Pastoral and ethical accountability**

Pastoral and ethical accountability addresses the responsibility accompanying religious influence in digital environments. The accessibility and speed of digital communication allow leaders and independent religious communicators to reach audiences beyond conventional ecclesiastical structures. Such influence requires theological competence, integrity, transparency and appropriate accountability. Digital pastoral ministry must protect vulnerable persons, respect privacy, avoid financial exploitation and promote responsible communication. Digital popularity does not automatically confer spiritual legitimacy.

**Social responsibility and inclusion**

Social responsibility and inclusion situate digital ecclesiology within the wider ethical and public responsibilities of the Church. Christian mission extends beyond the transmission of religious information to the promotion of human dignity, justice, compassion, reconciliation and social wellbeing. Digital ministry should address unequal access, disability, poverty and social marginalisation. Technological innovation must not create new forms of exclusion or privilege only those with the financial and infrastructural resources to participate.

**The Structural Relationship among the Five Dimensions**

The five dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Christ-centred identity provides the theological foundation; communal fellowship ensures that digital engagement retains its relational and ecclesial character; missionary expansion directs digital communication towards evangelism and discipleship; pastoral and ethical accountability establishes standards governing leadership and participation; and social responsibility and inclusion ensure that digital ecclesiology remains attentive to human dignity and the common good.

Their interdependence is essential. Missionary expansion without Christ-centred identity may degenerate into religious marketing. Communal fellowship without accountability may expose participants to manipulation and spiritual abuse. Digital expansion without inclusion may reproduce existing inequalities. Public engagement without truthfulness may intensify social division. The model is therefore not a sequence in which one commitment is completed before another begins. The dimensions operate simultaneously and continuously inform one another.

**Table 1 The Five Interrelated Dimensions of CCDEM**

| Dimension | Theological foundation | Digital expression | Potential distortion | Intended outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christ-centred identity | Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:18 | Christ-centred teaching, worship and communication | Personality cults; audience-driven theology | Theological integrity and fidelity to Christ |
| Communal fellowship | Acts 2:42–47; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 | Online fellowship, prayer networks and pastoral interaction | Isolation; superficial relationships | Mutual care, belonging and participation |
| Missionary expansion | Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8 | Digital evangelism, theological education and discipleship | Numerical obsession; sensationalism | Gospel proclamation and Christian formation |
| Pastoral and ethical accountability | 1 Peter 5:2–3; 1 Timothy 3:1–7 | Safeguarding, transparency and responsible leadership | Manipulation; misinformation; exploitation | Trustworthy leadership and ethical practice |
| Social responsibility and inclusion | Matthew 25:35–40; Galatians 6:2 | Accessible ministry and public engagement | Digital exclusion and inequality | Human dignity, justice and inclusive participation |

Source: Author's conceptual development.

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

## Conceptual Representation of CCDEM

The architecture of CCDEM may be represented as a concentric and interconnected structure. At its theological centre is Jesus Christ, who provides the foundation and normative orientation of the Church. The five dimensions surround and express this centre. Digital technology functions as the facilitating environment through which the commitments are enacted, while the intended outcomes concern the strengthening of ecclesial identity, mission and public witness.

**Figure 1. The Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model (Ccdem)**

**FOUNDATIONAL CENTRE: JESUS CHRIST**

(Identity • Authority • Mission)

↓

**FIVE INTERCONNECTED ECCLESIOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS**

Christ-centred identity ↔ Communal fellowship

Missionary expansion ↔ Pastoral and ethical accountability

Social responsibility and inclusion

↓

**DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AS A FACILITATING ENVIRONMENT**

(Digital communication • Online worship • Social media • Digital education • Virtual fellowship)

↓

**INTENDED ECCLESIOLOGICAL OUTCOMES**

Faithful identity • Meaningful participation • Discipleship • Accountable leadership • Inclusive public witness

*Source: Author's conceptual development.*

The representation emphasises that digital technology is neither the theological centre nor the ultimate objective of the Church. It is an environment and a set of instruments through which the five commitments may be expressed. The reciprocal relationship among the dimensions also indicates that the model is not a rigid sequence. Each commitment is necessary to the integrity of the others.

## CCDEM as an Analytical and Practical Framework

Beyond its conceptual significance, CCDEM provides a framework for evaluating digital ecclesial practices. Its application requires churches to move beyond asking whether they possess an online presence and to consider whether their digital activities advance their theological and pastoral responsibilities. A church establishing a livestreaming ministry, for example, should consider more than broadcast quality or viewer numbers. It should ask whether the content communicates the Gospel faithfully, whether online participants can interact meaningfully, whether pastoral follow-up exists and whether people with disabilities can access the service.

An online fundraising initiative should be assessed in relation to pastoral and ethical accountability, including transparency about the purpose, management and destination of donations. A digital evangelistic programme should be evaluated by whether it encourages sustained discipleship rather than merely attracting attention. The model proposes five evaluative questions:

1. Christological: Does the initiative preserve and communicate the Church's identity and mission in Jesus Christ?
2. Communal: Does it strengthen meaningful fellowship, mutual responsibility and pastoral relationships?
3. Missional: Does it advance evangelism, theological formation and Christian discipleship?
4. Ethical: Does it demonstrate accountability, integrity, transparency and responsible pastoral leadership?

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

5. Social: Does it promote inclusion, human dignity, justice and participation, particularly among marginalised communities?

These questions can guide decisions about livestreamed worship, digital theological education, online counselling, social-media evangelism, electronic giving and other forms of technological engagement. The model does not prescribe a uniform technological arrangement for all churches. African Christian communities operate within different economic, infrastructural, cultural and denominational circumstances. A rural congregation with limited electricity and internet connectivity may prioritise telephone communication, accessible printed resources and local fellowship, while a large urban congregation may sustain extensive digital platforms. Both can demonstrate theological faithfulness when available resources serve the Church's vocation.

### The African Theological Significance of CCDEM

The African theological significance of CCDEM lies in its integration of Christ-centred ecclesiology with communal responsibility and social inclusion. African theological reflection on communal existence provides resources for understanding the Church as a community in which belonging, mutual assistance and relational obligations are significant. The conversation between koinonia and ubuntu is constructive when it recognises their distinct origins while attending to their shared concern for relationship and responsibility (Sakupapa, 2018).

Digital Christianity can weaken communal responsibility when believers become primarily consumers of religious content. It can also strengthen relationships across geographical boundaries, facilitate mutual assistance and extend pastoral engagement to people who might otherwise experience isolation. CCDEM challenges African churches to approach technological transformation through theological discernment rather than technological imitation. Its concern is not simply whether African Christianity can compete within the global digital environment, but whether digital resources can be appropriated in ways that preserve theological integrity, strengthen communal relationships and contribute meaningfully to society.

Contextualisation must not become an excuse for overlooking accountability, safeguarding or individual dignity. Communal belonging must coexist with the protection of vulnerable persons, responsible leadership and respect for the rights of every member. In this respect, the model treats ecclesiology and ethics as inseparable dimensions of faithful digital ministry.

### Theoretical Contribution, Limitations and Further Research

CCDEM contributes to discussions of digital ecclesiology by bringing five dimensions of Christian existence into an integrated theological framework. Its distinctive emphasis is the relationship between Christological identity, communal participation, missionary responsibility, ethical accountability and social inclusion within digitally mediated ecclesial environments. It offers a set of theological criteria through which churches and researchers can assess digital practices without treating technological adoption as an end in itself.

The framework is conceptual and normative; it is not an empirically validated instrument or an exhaustive theory of digital religion. Its practical usefulness requires engagement with the lived experiences of Christian communities. Comparative studies involving different African denominations, rural and urban congregations, and different generations of church members could investigate how its five dimensions are understood and practised. Such research could examine whether digital participation strengthens or weakens communal relationships, how online pastoral authority is negotiated, and how churches address accessibility and technological inequality.

Empirical findings would provide opportunities to refine the framework and assess its applicability across different ecclesial contexts. CCDEM should therefore be understood as an invitation to sustained theological reflection and practical investigation. It offers churches, theologians and researchers a common framework for examining the relationship between technological innovation and ecclesial faithfulness.

## CONCLUSION

Digital transformation has created significant opportunities for Christian communication, evangelism,

theological education and pastoral connection. It has also raised questions about the nature of Christian fellowship, ecclesial authority, sacramental practice, inclusion and the public responsibilities of the Church. These questions cannot be answered by technological enthusiasm or by rejecting digital media outright. They require theological discernment.

This article has argued that digital technologies can extend the Church's mission but cannot, by themselves, constitute or replace the Church in its theological fullness. The Church's identity remains grounded in Jesus Christ and is expressed through worship, teaching, fellowship, discipleship, mutual care and public witness. Digital participation can be meaningful and, at times, indispensable, especially for people facing barriers to physical attendance. Yet it should be integrated into an ecclesiology that values embodied relationships, accountability and communal responsibility.

The African context offers resources for this reflection through theological attention to community, solidarity and human interdependence. At the same time, African churches must confront unequal access, misinformation, personality-centred authority and the commercialisation of religious communication. Reaffirming the relevance of the Church therefore requires openness to appropriate technological innovation alongside a willingness to challenge practices that undermine the Gospel.

The proposed Christ-Centred Communal Digital Ecclesiology Model brings these concerns together through five interrelated commitments: Christ-centred identity, communal fellowship, missionary expansion, pastoral and ethical accountability, and social responsibility and inclusion. It treats digital technology as a facilitating instrument rather than the source of ecclesial identity. Ultimately, the Church's relevance is not measured by the number of people who view its services or follow its leaders online. It is demonstrated by faithfulness to Christ and the capacity to form communities of worship, discipleship, compassion, justice and hope. Digital Christianity should not produce a Church without community, a faith without discipleship or worship without fellowship.

## REFERENCES

1. Amenyedzi, S. B. (2024). Disability and digital ecclesiology: Towards an accessible online church. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 80*(1), Article a9599. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9599
2. Campbell, H. A. (Ed.). (2013). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*. Routledge.
3. Campbell, H. A. (2021). *Digital creatives and the rethinking of religious authority*. Routledge.
4. Campbell, H. A., & Dyer, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Ecclesiology for a digital church: Theological reflections on a new normal*. SCM Press.
5. Chiluwa, I. (2012). Online religion in Nigeria: The Internet church and cyber miracles. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 47*(6), 734–749. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909611430935
6. Helland, C. (2005). Online religion as lived religion: Methodological issues in the study of religious participation on the Internet. *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, 1*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00005823
7. Hutchings, T. (2017). *Creating church online: Ritual, community and new media*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203111093
8. Ndereba, K. (2023). Digital ecclesiology and Africa's digital natives: Prospects and challenges. *Acta Theologica, 43*(1), 98–111. https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i1.6195
9. Sakupapa, T. C. (2018). Ecumenical ecclesiology in the African context: Towards a view of the church as Ubuntu. *Scriptura, 117*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.7833/117-1-1384