



Digital Evangelism and the Mediatization of Nigerian Pentecostalism: New Media and the Transformation of Religious Communication in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed the structure and practice of religion worldwide. Nigerian Pentecostal churches have emerged as particularly innovative adopters of new media platforms for evangelism, religious instruction, and global networking. The Pentecostal churches have been particularly innovative in adopting digital media for evangelistic outreach and global religious engagement. This article examines how digital media—including social networking platforms, livestreaming technologies, and digital broadcasting systems—have reshaped religious authority, worship practices, and transnational expansion within Nigerian Pentecostalism. Drawing on mediatization theory, globalization theory, and religious economy theory, the study analyses the digital communication strategies of major Nigerian Pentecostal ministries. The article argues that digital evangelism has enabled Nigerian Pentecostal churches to transcend geographical boundaries and construct global religious communities while simultaneously generating new challenges such as commercialization, exploitation, doctrinal fragmentation, and the virtualization of worship which leads to fragmentation of African community life. The study contributes to the growing scholarship on digital religion and the globalization of African Christianity.

Keywords: Digital religion, Nigerian Pentecostalism, new media, globalization, digital evangelism

Introduction

The relationship between religion and communication technologies has historically been dynamic. From the use of the printing press during the Protestant Reformation to the emergence of radio and television evangelism in the twentieth century, religious movements have consistently adopted new technologies to disseminate their teachings and expand their influence (Eisenstein 1979; Hoover 2006).

In the twenty-first century, digital communication technologies have further transformed religious life. The rise of the internet, social media platforms, livestreaming services, and mobile applications have created new spaces for religious interaction and participation. These developments have led scholars to speak of the digitalization or mediatization of religion (Campbell 2013; Hjarvard 2011).

Within Africa, Nigerian Pentecostalism has become one of the most visible examples of religion's engagement with digital technologies. Since the late twentieth century, Nigerian Pentecostal churches have expanded rapidly both within Nigeria and across the global diaspora. Their growth has been accompanied by an increasing reliance on mass media and digital communication platforms.

In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches have emerged as leading adopters of these technologies. Through online worship services, digital crusades, and social media engagement, Nigerian Pentecostal leaders now reach global audiences numbering in the millions. As a result, digital evangelism has become a defining feature of contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

Scholars such as Afe Adogame, Ogbu Kalu, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Ruth Marshall have highlighted the dynamic relationship between Pentecostalism, globalization, and modern communication technologies. Building on these insights, this article explores the ways new media have transformed Nigerian Pentecostal evangelism and religious authority.

Prominent Nigerian Pentecostal ministries such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church Worldwide, Mountain of Fire Ministry, and Christ Embassy have developed sophisticated media infrastructures that include satellite television networks, online streaming services, and social media outreach.

This article explores how new media technologies have reshaped the practice of Pentecostal evangelism in Nigeria and contributed to the globalization of African Christianity.

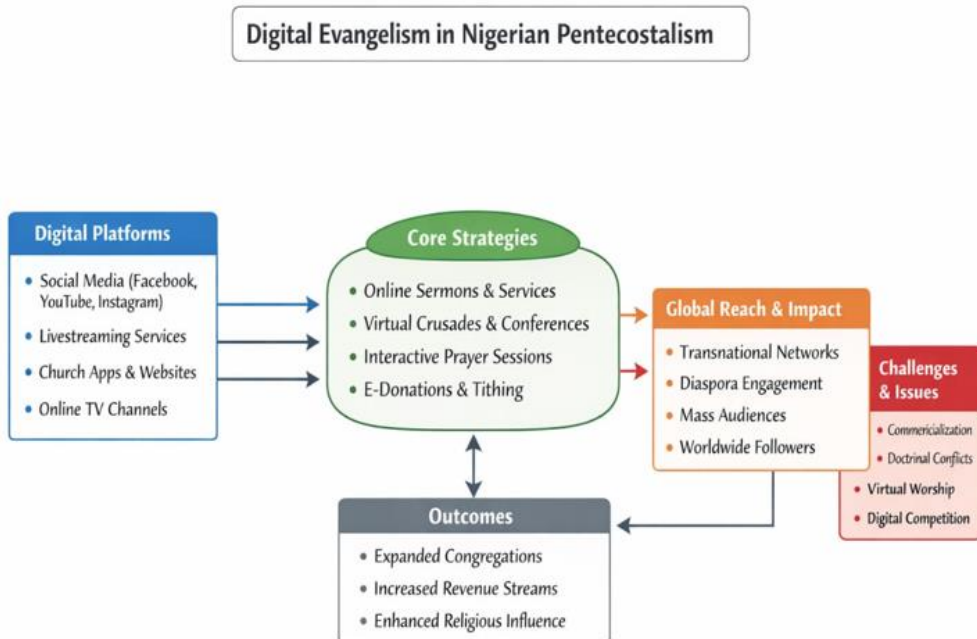


Figure 1: Digital Evangelism diagram

Literature Review: Media, Religion, and African Pentecostalism

A literature review on media, religion and African Pentecostalism examines scholarly discussions on how communication technologies – radio, television and digital media – shape Pentecostal religious practices, identities and expansion in Africa.

The relationship between media and religion has become a major area of scholarly inquiry in the sociology of religion and media studies. With the rapid growth of African Pentecostalism, scholars increasingly examine how Pentecostal Churches employ media technologies to disseminate religious messages, expand congregation, and shape public discourse. The intersection of media and religion has produced what scholars describe as ‘mediatised religion’ or ‘digital religion’, where religious practices and identities are mediated through communication technologies.

African Pentecostalism has been particularly responsive to media innovations, using broadcasting, print media and digital platforms to expand influence locally and globally. Scholars therefore explore how media shapes Pentecostal theology, worship practices, evangelism, and religious authority in African context.

The relationship between media and religion has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent decades. Scholars argue that modern communication technologies reshape religious authority, ritual practices, and institutional organization (Hoover 2006; Meyer 2015).

Research on digital religion highlights how online environments create hybrid spaces where religious experiences occur simultaneously online and offline (Campbell 2013). Digital platforms facilitate new forms of participation in which believers interact with religious leaders and with one another in networked communities.

Within African Christianity studies, scholars such as Ogbu Kalu and Afe Adogame emphasize that Pentecostal movements are particularly compatible with media technologies because of their emphasis on: charismatic preaching, testimonies and miracles, and dramatic religious experiences among others. Other scholars such as Paul Gifford, Ogbu Kalu and Birgit Meyer have highlighted the central role of media in the growth of Pentecostal Christianity across Africa.

Similarly, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu argues that Pentecostalism's performative worship style lends itself naturally to visual media formats such as television and online streaming.

Studies of Nigerian Pentecostalism also highlight the role of religious media in expanding Pentecostal influence beyond Africa. According to Ruth Marshall in her work: 'Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria', Pentecostal media networks function as powerful instruments for disseminating religious ideology and constructing global religious identities.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three key sociological frameworks: mediatization theory, globalization theory, and religious economy theory.

Mediatization Theory

Mediatization theory examines how media technologies influence the structure and practices of social institutions. According to Stig Hjarvard (2011), religious institutions increasingly adapt their practices to the logic of media communication stressing that media has become an independent social institution influencing how religion is communicated and experienced.

In Africa, religious groups increasingly adapt their messages to fit their media format such as television sermons, religious advertisement and online worship services. Media, thus become a space where religion is performed and negotiated.

Studies on African Christianity show that media logic shapes how religious experiences are packaged and presented to audiences. Religious activities such as healing, deliverance and prophecy are frequently broadcast to attract viewers and create religious legitimacy. Media platforms therefore function as arenas for evangelism, image-building, and religious competition.

In the context of Nigerian Pentecostalism, sermons, healing services, and testimonies are often designed to suit digital broadcasting formats that emphasize visual spectacle and emotional engagement.

Globalization Theory

Globalisation theory refers to the process by which economic, political, cultural and social interactions increasingly operate on a global scale. Scholars such as Anthony Giddens, Roland Robertson, Arjun Appadurai and Manuel Castells have contributed significantly to this theoretical framework.

Anthony Giddens describe globalisation as the intensification of worldwide social relations, where local events are shaped by global interactions. In the context of religion, this means that religious movements are no longer confined to local communities but participate in global networks.

Roland Robertson introduces the concept of ‘globalisation’ which explains how global ideas are adapted to local cultural contexts. Pentecostal churches often adopt global media strategies while tailoring messages to local audiences.

Globalization theory highlights the increasing interconnectedness of societies through technological networks. Manuel Castells (2010) describes contemporary society as a network society in which information flows across global communication systems, hence, it captures the description of the world as a global village. This theory provides a useful framework for understanding how religious movements expand and interact across borders through modern communication technologies. In the contemporary era, digital media has become a powerful instrument of global religious circulation, enabling religious ideas, practices and identities to transcend geographical limitations.

Scholars argue that Pentecostalism is inherently transnational and adaptable, making it especially compatible with global communication networks. Through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, livestreaming services, podcasts, and online meetings, Pentecostal ministries are able to reach global audiences, build transnational communities, and reinforce charismatic authority.

Digital technologies enable Nigerian Pentecostal churches to maintain transnational religious networks connecting congregations in Africa, Europe, and North America.

These theoretical perspectives help explain how Pentecostal churches use digital media to build transnational religious network.

Religious Economy Theory

Religious economy Theory has become an important framework in the sociology of religion for explaining the growth, competition and vitality of religious movements in modern societies. Developed primarily by scholars such as Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Laurence Iannaccone, the theory conceptualise religion as operating within a market-like environment where religious organisations compete for adherents, resources and influence. Within this framework, media -particularly digital media- functions as a strategic tool that religious groups use to expand their visibility, attract followers and strengthen their institutional presence. Pentecostal movements especially in Nigeria have effectively utilised media technologies such as television, radio, and social media to enhance their competitiveness within the religious marketplace.

Religious economy theory views religious organizations as actors competing within a marketplace of beliefs. Media technologies provide platforms through which churches compete for congregants, influence, and resources.

Digital evangelism therefore functions as a strategic tool for attracting and retaining adherents both physically and virtually.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the digital communication strategies of Nigerian Pentecostal churches.

Data sources include: livestreamed worship services, social media posts and digital devotionals, online crusades and prayer campaigns, official church websites and media platforms

The study focuses on selected Pentecostal ministries with strong digital presence, including:

Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church Worldwide, Christ Embassy and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries.

These organizations were selected because of their extensive use of digital technologies and global reach.

A qualitative analysis of digital religious data—such as live-streamed worship services, social media posts, online crusades, prayer campaigns, and official church websites—from major Nigerian Pentecostal churches can be carried out using thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and digital ethnography.

Overview of the Data Sources

The qualitative data were drawn from the official digital media platforms of four leading Nigerian Pentecostal churches: Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Living Faith Church Worldwide

(LFC/Winners' Chapel), Christ Embassy and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM).

These churches represent influential actors in African Pentecostalism and digital evangelism and maintain strong online presences across websites, streaming platforms, and social media.

Types of Data Collected are the following: live-streamed worship services, online crusades and revival meetings, digital prayer campaigns, social media posts (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X/Twitter), official church websites and online devotional materials, digital flyers, announcements, and promotional media.

These sources provide insight into how Pentecostal churches utilize digital media as a tool for evangelism, community formation, and spiritual engagement.

Method of Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Content Analysis: The primary analytical method employed is thematic content analysis, which involves identifying recurring patterns and themes in textual, visual, and audio-visual content.

The analytical process follows several stages:

The qualitative analysis followed four major stages:

(a). **Data Familiarization**

The researcher repeatedly viewed recorded livestream services, reviewed social media posts, and examined online materials published by the churches. This stage allowed the identification of recurring themes and communication patterns.

(b). **Initial Coding**

Segments of digital content were coded based on their thematic significance. Codes were generated inductively from the data and guided by existing scholarship on media religion and Pentecostal communication.

(c). **Theme Categorization**

Codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories reflecting patterns in digital religious communication.

(d). **Interpretation**

The themes were interpreted in relation to theories of globalization, mediatization of religion, and religious economy, which explain how religious organizations utilize media technologies to expand their influence and attract followers.

Coding Table for Qualitative Content Analysis

The coding process produced several thematic categories that capture the dominant patterns in the digital communication strategies of Nigerian Pentecostal churches.

CODE CATEGORY: description, indicators in Data, examples from Churches, digital Evangelism, use of digital media for missionary outreach and preaching, livestream sermons, evangelistic messages, online crusades

RCCG: Holy Ghost Services livestream, online Prayer Mobilization, organization of collective prayer through digital platforms, prayer campaigns, fasting announcements, deliverance sessions

MFM: online prayer meetings, spiritual Warfare Narrative, emphasis on deliverance, warfare prayers, and spiritual battles, prayer directives against enemies, curses, or demons, MFM prayer broadcasts, prosperity and Breakthrough Discourse, teachings linking faith to financial success and personal breakthroughs, sermons on prosperity, testimonies of financial miracles

LIVING FAITH CHURCH: sermons, global Outreach Messaging, emphasis on international audiences and global mission, “Join from anywhere in the world,” global prayer networks

CHRIST EMBASSY: global broadcasts, virtual Community Formation, creation of online religious participation and interaction, live chat participation, testimony sharing, online giving

RCCG AND CHRIST EMBASSY: livestream engagement, media Professionalization, sophisticated use of media production and branding and high-quality broadcast studios, graphics, media teams

Results: Major Themes Emerging from the Data

Digital Evangelism and Global Mission:

A major theme observed across all four churches is the intentional use of digital media as a missionary tool.

Live streams and online crusades frequently include statements encouraging viewers worldwide to participate in worship and share broadcasts. For instance: RCCG broadcasts its Holy Ghost Services globally through YouTube and church media platforms.

Living Faith Church streams services from Faith Tabernacle to international audiences.

Christ Embassy utilizes highly sophisticated digital media production for global outreach.

Digital media thus functions as a virtual mission field, allowing churches to transcend geographical boundaries.

Online Prayer Campaigns and Spiritual Warfare

Another recurring theme is the prominence of digital prayer mobilization, particularly in MFM and RCCG platforms.

Prayer campaigns often include: scheduled online prayer sessions, social media prayer chains, deliverance and warfare prayer broadcasts.

MFM, for example, organizes online deliverance programs where participants are instructed to follow prayer directives during livestreams.

These practices illustrate how traditional Pentecostal spiritual warfare is adapted to digital spaces.

Construction of Virtual Religious Community

The analysis shows that digital platforms are used to create a sense of online fellowship and belonging. Indicators include the following: comment sections where viewers share testimonies and prayer requests, interactive worship experiences through livestream chats, online giving and membership platforms.

Through these mechanisms, digital worshippers participate in a virtual congregation, blurring the distinction between physical and digital church communities.

Branding and Media Professionalization

The churches studied demonstrate a high level of media sophistication and branding.

- Key features include:
- Professionally produced broadcasts
- Branded graphics and digital flyers
- Dedicated media departments
- Multi-platform broadcasting strategies

Christ Embassy, in particular, exemplifies media-driven evangelism, operating a global media network and extensive digital platforms.

This professionalization reflects the increasing institutionalization of digital religion within African Pentecostalism.

Prosperity, Healing, and Testimony Narratives

The analysis also highlights recurring theological themes: divine prosperity, miraculous healing, personal testimonies, breakthrough narratives and testimonies are frequently shared through social media videos, livestream segments and website publications.

These narratives serve to reinforce faith claims and attract online audiences.

Comparative Observations

Although all four churches utilize digital media extensively, their emphases differ slightly:

Churches and their dominant Digital Emphases:

Figure 2: Dominant emphasis

Churches	RCCG	LFC	CE	MFM
Peculiarities	Global services and prayer programmes	Prosperity teaching and faith-based empowerment	Highly professionalised global media evangelism	Deliverance ministry and spiritual warfare prayers

Despite these differences, all four churches share a strategic commitment to digital evangelism.

One of the most dominant themes across the digital platforms of the churches is the use of media technologies for evangelistic outreach. Livestream services often encourage viewers from across the world to participate in worship and share broadcasts with others.

For instance, RCCG's Holy Ghost Service broadcasts are streamed globally through multiple digital platforms, allowing millions of viewers to participate simultaneously. Such practices illustrate how digital media function as a missionary extension of Pentecostal ministry, enabling churches to transcend geographic boundaries.

Scholars have noted that Pentecostal movements have historically embraced modern communication technologies to spread their messages. Digital platforms now represent the latest phase of this technological adaptation.

Implications for Digital Religion Studies

The findings suggest that Nigerian Pentecostal churches are not merely adapting to digital technology but are actively shaping a new form of mediated Christianity.

Digital platforms now function as: missionary tools, worship spaces, community networks and theological communication channels.

This transformation reflects the broader mediatization of religion, where religious practices increasingly operate through media technologies.

The Rise of Media-Driven Nigerian Pentecostalism

Pentecostal Christianity has experienced extraordinary growth in Nigeria since the 1970s. Urbanization, economic instability, and social change created conditions in which Pentecostal messages of divine intervention and prosperity resonated strongly with many Nigerians (Kalu 2008).

From the beginning, Nigerian Pentecostal leaders like Benson Idahosa recognized the importance of media for evangelism. Early Pentecostal ministries relied heavily on radio and television broadcasts. With

the advent of digital technologies, these ministries quickly expanded their media strategies.

Many Nigerian Pentecostal churches now operate: satellite television networks, online streaming platforms, social media ministries, and mobile applications for devotional content among others.

These media infrastructures enable churches to reach audiences numbering in the millions without necessarily stepping the venue of the place of worship.

Digital Evangelism and Online Worship

The rise of digital technology has transformed the relationship between Pentecostalism and media. Contemporary Pentecostal churches increasingly rely on social media, live streaming and online sermons to connect with global audiences. Recent studies indicate that digital media enables Pentecostal leaders to foster participation and community beyond geographical boundaries. Online platforms provide opportunities for theological teaching, evangelism and religious networking across continent.

Digital evangelism refers to the use of digital communication technologies to spread religious teachings and attract converts. Nigerian Pentecostal churches frequently livestream worship services, healing sessions, virtual deliverance sessions, digital testimonies and revival meetings.

For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God broadcasts major religious events such as the Holy Ghost Congress to millions of viewers worldwide right from the place of worship in Lagos, Nigeria.

Similarly, global healing programs organized by Chris Oyakhilome attract participants from numerous countries through online streaming platforms.

Through such practices, worship has increasingly become a transnational digital experience.

Social Media and Networked Religion

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp play a central role in contemporary Pentecostal evangelism.

Prominent Nigerian Pentecostal leaders including: Enoch Adeboye, David Oyedepo, Chris Oyakhilome Dr D. K. Olukoya etc. regularly communicate with followers through social media messages, digital devotionals, and online prayer sessions.

These platforms enable believers to share testimonies, request prayers, participate in online religious discussions etc. Heidi Campbell describes this phenomenon as networked religion, in which religious authority becomes distributed across digital communities (Campbell 2013).

Digital Media And The Globalization Of Nigerian Pentecostalism

Digital technologies have significantly contributed to the globalization of Nigerian Pentecostal churches. Diaspora congregations maintain strong connections with Nigerian headquarters through livestreamed services and digital communication.

According to Adogame (2013), African diaspora churches utilize digital platforms to maintain transnational religious identities that link migrant communities to their spiritual roots in Africa.

Consequently, Nigerian Pentecostal leaders now exert significant influence within global Christianity.

The Digital Religious Economy

Digital evangelism has also generated new forms of financial engagement within Pentecostal ministries because the online platforms now facilitate:

Electronic tithing and offerings: the followers do not need to be at the venue of the programmed before their tithes or offering can be paid. This has been enabled by the cashless policy of the Nigerian government.

Online donations: various forms of donation are made possible as a result of the digitalisation of the service. The people donate towards the construction of the new place of worship, acquisition of new musical instrument or landed property, the church welfare programme etc.

Other sources of generating revenue boosting the financial muscle of the church are digital sales of religious books and media including registration for conferences and seminars.

These developments illustrate the emergence of a digital religious economy, where religious organizations operate within technologically mediated financial networks.

However, critics argue that such practices risk transforming religion into a commercial enterprise.

Challenges Of Digital Pentecostalism

Despite its advantages, digital evangelism presents several challenges.

COMMERCIALIZATION: The increasing monetization of religious content raises concerns regarding the commodification of faith and exploitation of the followers. There are often allegations of extortions of the poor by the church.

DOCTRINAL FRAGMENTATION: Open digital platforms allow diverse interpretations of religious teachings to circulate widely without institutional regulation. Of recent was the apology rendered by Pastor Enoch Adeboye on his position concerning tithing. He had to openly address his

followers and others by retracting that payment of tithes is never a condition for making heaven.

VIRTUALIZATION OF WORSHIP: Online participation may weaken traditional congregational relationships and communal worship practices. The *Ubuntu* ('*I am because we are*') idea of the Africans is being gradually eroded.

DIGITAL COMPETITION: Churches increasingly compete for followers, attention, and influence within digital media environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Nigerian Pentecostal churches have successfully integrated digital technologies into their evangelistic strategies. This became more pronounced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Digital media have enabled these churches to: expand globally, maintain diaspora connections, reach younger audiences. However, the mediatization of religion also reshapes religious authority and institutional organization.

As Pentecostal leaders become global digital influencers, the boundaries between religious leadership, media celebrity, and entrepreneurial activity become increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

The rise of digital communication technologies has profoundly transformed Nigerian Pentecostal evangelism and religious communication. Through digital evangelism, Nigerian Pentecostal churches have expanded their global influence and created transnational religious communities.

Nevertheless, the integration of new media into religious practice also raises significant questions regarding commercialization, exploitation, doctrinal authority, and the future of congregational worship.

Future research should explore how digital religion shapes theological formation, religious authority, and community identity within African Pentecostalism.

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