Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369

www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

Qualitative Study on Gender Inclusion and Power in Digital Religious Spaces in Nigeria: A Review

MUHAMMAD, Sani Mukhtar[1]*
gwani1978@gmail.com
SHERIF, A. R. Ajiteru[2]
DOGARA, Rahmatullah Abdullahi[3]
ISAH, Maigida Damau[4]

[1]Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria
[2]Department of Political Science, International Relations and Public Administration, Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria
[3]Department of Educational Foundation, Kaduna State University, Kaduna State, Nigeria
[4]Department of General Studies Unit, Air force Institute of Technology, Mando, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Abstract

Digital platforms have become important sites of worship, religious education, pastoral care, identity formation, debate, and community building. Yet expanded participation does not necessarily produce equitable participation. This paper examines how gender, social location, institutional authority, and platform design interact to shape inclusion and power in digital religious spaces, with particular attention to Nigeria and comparable Global South settings. It adopts a critical integrative review and qualitative thematic synthesis of scholarship on digital religion, gendered religious authority, platform governance, online activism, and digital inequality, supplemented by reports from international institutions. The analysis is guided by networked religion, intersectionality, counter public theory, and platform power. Four interconnected dimensions emerge: access, visibility, authority, and safety-accountability. Digital media can reduce spatial and institutional barriers, enable women to access religious knowledge, create alternative publics, and establish relational forms of authority. However, affordability constraints, unequal digital skills, language hierarchies, algorithmic ranking, engagement-driven visibility, harassment, and persistent patriarchal norms restrict these gains. Nigerian evidence shows that women religious leaders and learners can achieve wider reach online while male authority, institutional endorsement, and platform metrics continue to structure credibility and influence. The paper proposes a Digital Religious Power and Inclusion Framework for assessing who can enter digital faith spaces, whose speech becomes visible, whose knowledge is treated as legitimate, and who can participate without disproportionate risk. It recommends gender-responsive digital policies within religious organisations, transparent and locally informed platform governance, improved affordability and literacy, accessible low-bandwidth design, safeguarding protocols, and independent research using disaggregated data. Inclusive digital religion therefore requires more than connectivity: it requires the deliberate redistribution of visibility, voice, protection, and decision-making power.

Keywords: digital religion; gender inclusion; religious authority; platform power; Nigeria; intersectionality; digital inequality

Introduction

Religious life is no longer adequately described through a strict separation between physical and virtual spaces. Livestreamed worship, WhatsApp study groups, online madrasas, YouTube sermons, prayer applications, Facebook fellowships, TikTok apologetics, podcasts, and digitally coordinated charitable networks now form part of ordinary religious practice. Campbell (2012) conceptualises this condition as "networked religion", marked by networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and a multisite reality. Digital religion is therefore not religion transferred unchanged to a screen. It is a field in which religious meanings, practices, identities, and institutions are continuously negotiated through digital media (Campbell, 2017; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). These developments matter greatly in Nigeria, where Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religious traditions shape public life, education, welfare, political discourse, and community identity. Mobile phones and social platforms allow religious organisations and independent teachers to reach dispersed audiences, maintain communities across distance, and circulate religious knowledge quickly. For women, young people, persons with disabilities, rural residents, migrants, and people constrained by domestic responsibilities, digital participation can open doors that physical institutions have not always made equally accessible. Fahm (2025), for example, shows how online madrasas, WhatsApp groups, Zoom Qur'anic classes, and mobile

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369
www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

applications can give Yoruba Muslim women greater flexibility, autonomy, and access to Islamic knowledge. In Nigerian Christianity, Oloba and Blankenship (2025) similarly find that digital platforms enable female religious leaders to bypass some conventional barriers and communicate with wider audiences. Nevertheless, a larger audience is not the same as equality. Digital platforms are commercial and technical systems that rank, recommend, monetise, moderate, and archive speech. Their algorithms determine which religious messages are displayed, whose accounts are suggested, and what forms of content become influential. Existing gender hierarchies can also travel online through institutional endorsement, household control of devices, unequal skills, reputational policing, harassment, and doctrinal claims about who may teach or lead. The same environment that enables a woman to speak beyond the pulpit can expose her to intensified surveillance, abuse, or accusations of religious impropriety. Digital religious space is thus simultaneously an arena of access and exclusion, empowerment and discipline, innovation and continuity. This paper examines these contradictions through the linked concepts of gender, inclusion, and power. Its central argument is that digital religious inclusion must be evaluated at four levels: access to the space, visibility within it, authority gained through participation, and safety-accountability conditions that make participation sustainable. Connectivity alone is an incomplete measure. Genuine inclusion exists when diverse participants can enter, be heard, be regarded as credible, influence community decisions, and seek redress when harmed.

Statement of the Problem

Research on digital religion has established that online and offline religious practices are interdependent and that digital media can alter community, authority, identity, and ritual (Campbell, 2012, 2017; Cheong, 2017). Gender scholarship has also shown that women use digital media to form counter publics, narrate religious identities, challenge spatial restrictions, and develop authority through authenticity and sustained relationships with audiences (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019; Nas, 2022). However, three problems remain. First, studies sometimes treat access to a platform as evidence of inclusion. This approach underestimates the material barriers that determine meaningful participation. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2025) reports continuing gender, income, and urban-rural divides in internet use. The GSMA (2025) likewise finds that women in low- and middle-income countries remain less likely than men to use mobile internet, with especially pronounced gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. A person who depends on a shared handset, intermittent electricity, expensive data, or a low-capacity device may technically be connected but unable to livestream, upload video, moderate a community, or participate consistently. Digital inclusion must therefore address quality, autonomy, affordability, literacy, accessibility, and security, not merely the presence of a connection. Second, the redistribution of religious authority is frequently described as though platforms automatically weaken established hierarchies. In practice, authority becomes hybrid. Formal qualifications, denominational position, clerical networks, gender expectations, performance skills, follower counts, visual branding, and algorithmic amplification combine to determine credibility. Bunt (2018) demonstrates that cyber-Islamic environments transform how Muslims encounter scholars and guidance, but they do not remove struggles over expertise. Cheong (2017) similarly argues that new media reorganise communicative authority rather than simply replacing institutional leaders. In Nigeria, female Christian leaders gain visibility online, yet male leaders retain greater reach and authority (Oloba & Blankenship, 2025). The unresolved question is therefore not whether authority changes, but who benefits from its changing criteria. Third, scholarship on gender and digital religion often examines Christian, Muslim, or platform-specific cases separately. It gives less attention to the common power mechanisms that operate across faith traditions and platforms in Global South settings. The interaction among gender, class, age, disability, location, language, marital status, religious minority status, and platform design requires an explicitly intersectional analysis. Without such an analysis, policy responses may favour already visible urban and educated women while overlooking those facing multiple barriers. The knowledge gap addressed by this paper is the absence of an integrated framework linking material access, algorithmic visibility, religious legitimacy, and safety. The study responds by asking:

1. How do digital platforms redistribute religious visibility and authority across gender and other intersecting social positions?
2. Which mechanisms enable or constrain inclusion in Nigerian and comparable Global South digital religious spaces?

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369
www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

3. What responsibilities should religious organisations, platforms, public institutions, and civil society assume in creating more inclusive digital faith environments?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Digital religion and networked authority

Digital religious spaces are online or digitally mediated environments in which religious knowledge, identity, community, ritual, leadership, service, or debate is produced and negotiated. They include both explicitly religious platforms and religious activity on general platforms. Their boundaries are porous because users commonly move between online and offline congregations, institutions, families, and peer networks. Campbell's (2012) networked religion approach is useful because it treats this movement as a multisite reality rather than a competition between "real" and "virtual" religion. Mediatisation theory adds an institutional dimension. Hjarvard (2016) argues that media acquire the capacity to shape the conditions under which religion is represented and practised. Religious actors adopt platform conventions such as short-form video, personal storytelling, livestreaming, hashtags, thumbnails, and frequent posting. Consequently, authority increasingly depends on communicative competence and media visibility alongside formal religious office. Febrian (2024) shows how religious influencers visually perform authority on Instagram, while Lövheim and Lundmark (2019) describe a relational form of women's religious authority based on authenticity, trust, vulnerability, and ongoing audience interaction. These changes can broaden participation. A woman who lacks access to a physical pulpit may teach through audio messages or host a digital study circle. A young believer may compare interpretations from multiple traditions. A person with limited mobility may participate in worship from home. Yet these opportunities are mediated by platform ownership, interface design, data extraction, moderation rules, and recommendation systems. Digital religion is therefore networked but not power-free.

Intersectionality and participatory parity

Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality explains why gender cannot be isolated from other structures of disadvantage. The experience of an urban professional woman with a private smartphone differs from that of a rural woman using a shared device. Likewise, an established female cleric, an unmarried youth, a religious minority, and a woman with a disability may face different barriers even when using the same platform. Tsuria (2020) demonstrates that religious and cultural contexts can discourage women's digital participation, showing why universal accounts of the digital divide are inadequate. Fraser's (1990) concept of participatory parity and her account of subaltern counter publics are also relevant. Digital groups can operate as alternative publics in which people excluded from dominant religious institutions develop interpretations, identities, and collective claims. Nas (2022) shows how the Women in Mosques movement used online activism to challenge gendered religious space. However, counter public visibility can provoke resistance. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that popular feminism and popular misogyny are co-constituted within economies of visibility. In religious contexts, women's public piety or teaching may generate support while also attracting gendered scrutiny intended to restore conventional boundaries.

Platform power

Platforms are not neutral containers. Van Dijck et al. (2018) describe a platform society in which datafication, commodification, and selection organise public communication. Bucher (2012) identifies algorithmic power in the production of visibility and the threat of invisibility. Recommendation systems favour content predicted to hold attention, while creators adapt language, aesthetics, timing, and controversy to remain visible. Noble (2018) further demonstrates that algorithmic systems can reproduce social hierarchies while appearing objective. Applied to digital religion, platform power changes what counts as influence. Expertise may be overshadowed by emotional intensity, production quality, celebrity, or frequent posting. Minority languages and locally specific theological vocabulary may be poorly recognised by automated moderation. Content that provokes anger can receive more engagement than careful teaching. The legitimacy of a religious message is consequently shaped not only by doctrine and community recognition but also by opaque infrastructures optimised for commercial objectives. Taken together, networked religion, intersectionality, participatory parity, and platform power provide a multi-level framework. Networked religion explains the online-offline continuity of practice; intersectionality identifies differentiated barriers; participatory parity evaluates inclusion; and platform power reveals how technical and commercial infrastructures distribute visibility.

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369

www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

Research Methodology

The paper adopts a critical integrative literature review. This method is appropriate for an interdisciplinary question involving religious studies, gender studies, communication, platform governance, and digital inequality. An integrative review permits the comparison of theoretical and empirical studies while retaining attention to context and conceptual development (Snyder, 2019). The analytical corpus consists of 23 scholarly works and four institutional reports published principally between 2012 and 2025, with foundational earlier works retained for intersectionality and counter public theory. Sources were purposively selected for direct relevance to at least one of five areas: digital religion, gendered religious authority, digital inclusion, algorithmic or platform power, and online safety. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, official institutional publications, Nigerian studies, and comparative research from other religious and Global South contexts. The institutional reports were produced by the GSMA, ITU, UNESCO, and UN Women. The analysis followed three stages. First, each source was examined for its account of access, participation, authority, visibility, exclusion, and harm. Second, recurring claims were coded and compared across Christian, Muslim, and cross-cultural studies. Third, the themes were synthesised into four dimensions: access; visibility; authority; and safety-accountability. These dimensions form the Digital Religious Power and Inclusion Framework presented later in the paper. This is a conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review or an empirical survey of platform users. It does not estimate the prevalence of particular experiences. Its value lies in integrating fragmented evidence and producing propositions that can guide future empirical research, organisational policy, and conference discussion. The emphasis on Nigeria is supported by available studies, but the diversity of Nigerian religious traditions and regional contexts requires caution against overgeneralization.

Discussion of Findings

Access: From connection to meaningful participation

Digital media can reduce the importance of physical distance, fixed schedules, mobility, and building-based restrictions. Fahm (2025) reports that Yoruba Muslim women use online classes and messaging platforms to pursue Islamic education with increased flexibility. Comparable research on Islamic learning shows that social media can expand access to teachers and create new networks of knowledge, although questions of populism and authority remain (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020; Wahid, 2024). For Christians, digital services and discussion spaces can sustain religious participation for people unable to attend physically. These benefits are conditional. Meaningful access requires an affordable device, reliable electricity, sufficient data, digital literacy, privacy, language competence, and control over when and how a device is used. ITU (2025) data show that internet use remains stratified by gender, income, and settlement. GSMA (2025) identifies affordability, literacy, relevance, safety, and family or social approval as important barriers to women's mobile internet use. The religious implications are significant. A shared phone may expose private counselling or study-group participation. Limited data may confine users to text and audio while leadership visibility increasingly rewards video. Poor connectivity may exclude rural participants from real-time deliberation even when recordings are later available. Access is therefore graduated rather than binary. At the lowest level, a person receives forwarded religious content. At higher levels, the user searches, comments, creates content, moderates a group, teaches, raises funds, and participates in decisions. Each level demands more resources and autonomy. Gender inclusion policies should assess where participants are positioned on this ladder rather than counting group membership or page followers.

Visibility: The politics of being seen and heard

Visibility is a scarce and governed resource. Platforms rank religious voices through recommendation systems, search results, follower networks, paid promotion, moderation, and engagement measures. Bucher's (2012) analysis of algorithmic visibility explains why users continually adjust their behaviour to avoid becoming invisible. Religious communicators may simplify complex doctrine, personalise messages, use sensational titles, or engage controversy because platform systems reward attention. This visibility economy can benefit women who are skilled communicators and who build trust through consistent interaction. Lövheim and Lundmark (2019) show that authenticity and relationality can support women's religious authority online. Febrian (2024) demonstrates that visual presentation is central to the construction of influencer authority. Yet the same requirements can create gendered burdens. Women may be assessed more heavily through appearance, domestic respectability, marital status, voice, clothing, and emotional style. A male leader's confidence may

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369
www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

be read as authority, whereas a woman's confidence may be framed as arrogance or religious impropriety. Commercial platform logic also favours those able to produce high-quality content, post frequently, purchase data, and pay for promotion. This can privilege urban, affluent, institutionally supported creators. Low-bandwidth users, minority-language speakers, and persons who avoid visual exposure for safety or religious reasons become less visible. The result is a two-stage inequality: unequal access determines who enters, and algorithmic selection determines who is noticed after entry.

Authority: New pathways and persistent hierarchies

Digital religion pluralises the sources from which believers obtain guidance. Bunt (2018) documents the transformation of Islamic authority through cyber-Islamic environments, while Cheong (2017) emphasises changing communicative authority in religious organisations. Online users compare clerics, influencers, institutions, peers, and searchable archives. Authority can become distributed, personalised, and networked. Women can use this opening to demonstrate knowledge and build communities without first obtaining access to a male-controlled physical platform. Muttaqin (2020) shows how social media creates space for Muslim women's identities and new religious authority, although gender bias persists. Nas (2022) illustrates how online activism can turn gendered religious space into a public issue. In Nigeria, Fahm (2025) identifies expanded autonomy and learning opportunities for Muslim women, while Oloba and Blankenship (2025) find that female Christian leaders broaden their communication and influence online. However, authority remains hybrid rather than fully democratised. Institutional position, theological education, age, family lineage, denomination, and male endorsement interact with follower counts, visual competence, and audience intimacy. Nigerian female leaders may be visible but still receive less recognition than male leaders (Oloba & Blankenship, 2025). Moreover, popularity can be mistaken for expertise. When engagement metrics are treated as proof of spiritual legitimacy, the platform's commercial ranking system becomes an unacknowledged participant in religious credentialling. This produces a central paradox. Digital media weaken some gatekeepers while creating others. Traditional gatekeeping by religious institutions is supplemented by platform gatekeeping, influencer networks, monetisation systems, and audience surveillance. Inclusion therefore requires transparent ways of recognising expertise without simply restoring exclusionary hierarchies or accepting popularity as truth.

Safety and accountability: The unequal cost of participation

Participation carries gendered risks. Women and girls face harassment, stalking, non-consensual image use, impersonation, sexualised abuse, doxing, and coordinated attacks. UNESCO (2023) warns that generative artificial intelligence can intensify technology-facilitated gender-based violence through synthetic media, automated harassment, and discriminatory systems. UN Women (2022) similarly identifies online violence as a barrier to women's public participation and rights. Religious discourse can intensify these risks because criticism may be presented as defense of sacred values. Women who interpret texts, claim leadership, discuss sexuality, or challenge institutional practice can be attacked simultaneously as women and as allegedly deviant believers. Intersectional factors affect the severity of harm: minority status, age, disability, ethnicity, poverty, and public visibility may increase exposure while reducing access to remedies. Safety is not achieved merely by advising women to be cautious. Such advice can shift the burden from institutions and perpetrators to potential victims. Sustainable participation requires community rules, trained moderators, confidential reporting, evidence preservation, pastoral and psychological support, clear escalation pathways, and platform responsiveness. Religious leaders must distinguish good-faith theological disagreement from humiliation, threats, and gendered abuse. Platforms must provide context-sensitive moderation and meaningful appeals, including support for Nigerian languages and local religious terminology.

Belonging, difference, and digital religious publics

Digital religious inclusion also concerns relations among faiths and internal differences within a tradition. Haq and Kwok (2024) find that social media can increase exposure to religious others while also reinforcing stereotypes, selective exposure, and polarisation. Platform affordances allow believers to encounter diversity, but shallow or hostile engagement may harden group boundaries. Women and minority voices may become symbolic battlegrounds through which communities display moral purity. Counter publics can provide protection and solidarity. Closed women's groups, youth networks, disability fellowships, and minority-faith forums may create spaces in which participants speak with reduced risk and develop collective interpretations. Fraser (1990) helps explain their democratic value. Yet closed spaces should

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369
www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

not become the only locations in which marginalised groups can participate. Inclusion also requires access to the main arenas where religious priorities, resources, and policies are decided. The Nigerian context demonstrates both promise and limitation. Digital platforms can connect Muslim and Christian women to knowledge and leadership networks, but regional inequality, data costs, patriarchal norms, and uneven institutional recognition continue to shape participation. The evidence does not support either technological optimism or pessimism. Digital media can redistribute power, but only through the interaction of user agency, community norms, institutional reform, and platform accountability.

Digital Religious Power and Inclusion Framework

The synthesis supports a four-dimensional framework for evaluating digital religious spaces. The dimensions are sequential but mutually reinforcing. Weak access reduces visibility; limited visibility constrains authority; insecurity produces withdrawal; and lack of authority prevents marginalised participants from changing the conditions of access and safety.

Dimension	Core question	Mechanisms of inclusion	Mechanisms of exclusion	Indicative measures
Access	Who can enter and participate consistently?	Affordable data, device autonomy, low-bandwidth options, accessible design, digital literacy, local languages	Cost, shared devices, poor electricity, inaccessible interfaces, limited skills, household restrictions	Independent device use, participation frequency, accessibility compliance, language availability
Visibility	Whose content is discovered and amplified?	Transparent ranking, diverse recommendations, captions, searchability, fair moderation	Algorithmic invisibility, pay-to-reach systems, visual bias, language errors, unequal production resources	Reach by gender and location, removal and appeal outcomes, recommendation diversity
Authority	Whose knowledge and leadership are treated as legitimate?	Fair recognition, transparent credentials, participatory governance, audience trust	Patriarchal endorsement, celebrity metrics, institutional exclusion, harassment-driven silence	Leadership roles, speaking time, decision influence, recognition beyond follower counts
Safety-accountability	Who can participate without disproportionate harm and obtain redress?	Codes of conduct, trained moderators, confidential reporting, survivor support, platform accountability	Gendered abuse, doxing, impersonation, weak moderation, victim-blaming, opaque appeals	Incident response time, remedy rates, recurrence, user confidence, safeguarding audits

The framework advances three propositions. First, access without visibility creates nominal inclusion. Participants may be present but unheard. Second, visibility without authority creates spectacle rather than influence. Marginalised voices may attract attention while remaining excluded from decisions. Third, authority without safety is unstable. A person who must endure disproportionate abuse to speak cannot participate on equal terms. The desired outcome is participatory parity across all four dimensions.

Policy and Practical Recommendations

Religious organisations

Religious organisations should adopt gender-responsive digital governance policies that cover official pages, livestreams, messaging groups, teaching platforms, fundraising, counselling, and the personal accounts of authorised representatives. Policies should define acceptable conduct, prohibit gendered abuse, establish confidential complaints procedures, and specify consequences. Moderators require training in safeguarding, theological disagreement, privacy, and technology-facilitated violence.

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369
www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

Leadership and content decisions should involve women, young people, persons with disabilities, rural members, and minority groups. Gender balance should apply not only to public speakers but also to administrators who control passwords, data, schedules, budgets, and moderation. Organisations should provide low-bandwidth audio and text alternatives, captions and transcripts, accessible documents, and predictable publication schedules. Digital participation should complement rather than replace accessible physical participation. Religious institutions should also clarify how online teachers and influencers are recognised. Transparent information about qualifications, institutional relationships, funding, sponsorship, and content ownership can help audiences distinguish expertise from popularity. Such transparency must not be used to exclude emerging voices; mentoring and fair pathways to recognition should accompany it.

Platform companies

Platform companies should publish clearer information about recommendation, demonetisation, content removal, and appeal processes. Gender and language audits should test whether religious content by women or in Nigerian languages is disproportionately suppressed, misclassified, or exposed to abuse. Local expertise is essential because automated systems may not understand theological vocabulary, coded insults, or the distinction between documentation, criticism, and incitement. Safety tools should include effective controls for mass harassment, impersonation, doxing, non-consensual imagery, and synthetic media. Reporting mechanisms must be usable on low-cost devices and weak connections. Platforms should preserve evidence for legitimate complaints while protecting privacy. Accessibility features such as captions, screen-reader compatibility, alt text prompts, adjustable text, and audio alternatives should be treated as core infrastructure rather than optional additions.

Government, regulators, and civil society

Public policy should address affordable connectivity, reliable electricity, rural coverage, digital literacy, disability access, and women's control of devices. Responses to online violence must protect freedom of expression and religious liberty while providing clear remedies for threats, stalking, impersonation, and image-based abuse. Overbroad regulation that permits political or religious censorship would undermine the inclusion it claims to protect. Civil society organisations and universities can establish digital safety clinics, support research, train faith-community moderators, and provide public resources in major Nigerian languages. Partnerships among religious organisations, women's groups, disability organisations, technology experts, and legal practitioners can develop context-sensitive safeguarding standards.

Research agenda

Future research should combine digital ethnography, interviews, content analysis, and platform data. Studies should compare Christian, Muslim, and indigenous religious settings across Nigeria's geopolitical zones and disaggregate findings by gender, age, disability, location, language, education, and income. Researchers should examine not merely who posts, but who is recommended, believed, monetised, invited to lead, and able to obtain redress. Longitudinal studies are needed because platform rules and audience practices change rapidly. Research should also include people who withdraw or remain silent, since visible users cannot represent those excluded by cost, fear, or social pressure. Ethical protocols must protect participants whose religious and gender identities make them vulnerable. Finally, participatory research should involve affected communities in defining inclusion and evaluating proposed interventions.

Conclusion

Digital religious spaces are neither inherently emancipatory nor inherently oppressive. They are contested environments in which religious traditions, social inequalities, user agency, institutional rules, and platform infrastructures meet. Digital media can enable women to gain knowledge, narrate faith, form communities, challenge spatial exclusions, and establish relational authority. Nigerian evidence from Christian leadership and Muslim women's learning confirms these possibilities. At the same time, male authority, unequal connectivity, reputational policing, engagement-driven algorithms, and technology-facilitated violence can reproduce or intensify exclusion. The paper's principal contribution is to distinguish four requirements of digital religious inclusion: access, visibility, authority, and safety-accountability. These requirements move analysis beyond the assumption that connectivity equals empowerment. Access asks who can participate; visibility asks who is seen; authority asks who can influence belief and decision-making; safety-accountability asks who bears the risks and whether remedies exist. Inclusive digital religion must therefore be intentionally designed and governed. Religious organisations must reform their own digital practices; platforms must accept responsibility for ranking,

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369

www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

moderation, accessibility, and safety; governments must improve meaningful connectivity while protecting rights; and researchers must produce intersectional evidence. The ethical test is not simply whether religious messages travel farther, but whether digital transformation enables more people to participate with dignity, credibility, security, and real power.

References

Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002772

Bucher, T. (2012). Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society, 14*(7), 1164-1180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812440159

Bunt, G. R. (2018). *Hashtag Islam: How cyber-Islamic environments are transforming religious authority*. University of North Carolina Press. https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469643168.001.0001

Campbell, H. A. (2012). Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 80*(1), 64-93. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074

Campbell, H. A. (2017). Surveying theoretical approaches within digital religion studies. *New Media & Society, 19*(1), 15-24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649912

Campbell, H. A., & Evolvi, G. (2020). Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 2*(1), 5-17. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149

Cheong, P. H. (2017). The vitality of new media and religion: Communicative perspectives, practices, and changing authority in spiritual organization. *New Media & Society, 19*(1), 25-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649913

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), 139-167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Fahm, A. O. (2025). Beyond the madrasah: Digital pedagogies and Nigerian Yoruba Muslim women's engagement with Islamic knowledge. *Comparative Woman, 4*(1), Article 5. https://repository.lsu.edu/comparativewoman/vol4/iss1/5

Febrian, H. (2024). Visualizing authority: Rise of the religious influencers on Instagram. *Social Media + Society, 10*(4), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850

Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text, 25/26*, 56-80. https://doi.org/10.2307/466240

GSMA. (2025). *The mobile gender gap report 2025*. https://www.gsma.com/gender-gap-2025/

Haq, S. U., & Kwok, R. Y. (2024). Encountering "the other" in religious social media: A cross-cultural analysis. *Social Media + Society, 10*(4), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241303363

Hjarvard, S. (2016). Mediatization and the changing authority of religion. *Media, Culture & Society, 38*(1), 8-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615412

International Telecommunication Union. (2025). *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2025*. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/pages/facts/default.aspx

Lövheim, M., & Lundmark, E. (2019). Gender, religion and authority in digital media. *ESSACHESS - Journal for Communication Studies, 12*(2), 23-38. https://essachess.com/3/index.php/jcs/article/view/205

Muttaqin, A. (2020). Women's identity in the digital Islam age: Social media, new religious authority, and gender bias. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies, 8*(2), 353-388. https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i2.7095

Nas, A. (2022). "Women in Mosques": Mapping the gendered religious space through online activism. *Feminist Media Studies, 22*(5), 1163-1178. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1878547

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press.

Oloba, B. L., & Blankenship, A. M. (2025). Gender dynamics in online religious leadership in Nigeria: Investigating how digital platforms shape communication, authority, and influence. *Religions, 16*(1), Article 5. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010005

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research, 104*, 333-339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Solahudin, D., & Fakhruroji, M. (2020). Internet and Islamic learning practices in Indonesia: Social media, religious populism, and religious authority. *Religions, 11*(1), Article 19. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019

Tsuria, R. (2020). Digital divide in light of religion, gender, and women's digital participation. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, 18*(3), 405-413. https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-03-2020-0028

Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369

www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026630

UN Women. (2022). *Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls*. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls

UNESCO. (2023). *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in an era of generative AI*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387483

van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.001.0001

Wahid, S. H. (2024). Exploring the intersection of Islam and digital technology: A bibliometric analysis. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 10*, Article 101085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085