Research Article

From Print To Platform: Religious Communication, Philosophy, and The Remaking of Youth Identity in Igboland, Southeastern Nigeria

Rev. Emmanuel Metu Egbule[1], Kizito Izuchukwu Okoli[2], Kalu Chukwuma Amogu[3], Andrew Chukwuma Otteh[4], Philemon Chukwu Ajah[5], John Onyeka Egwuonwu[6], Johnpaul Chinedu Enemuo[7], Chika R. Okorie[8], Elekwachi Jeremiah Iheaka[9], Stephen Uche Okah[10]

[1]PhD. Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Email: emmanuel.egbule@funai.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0266-1331
[2]PhD. Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Email: izk.okoli@unizik.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5025-4744
[3]PhD. Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Email: kalu.amogu@funai.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3039-7721
[4]PhD. Department of Philosophy, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Email: andrew.otteh@funai.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7466-0366
[5]Department of History and Strategic Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Email: chukwu.philemon@funai.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5044-5856
[6]PhD. Department of Religion and Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Email: jo.egwuonwu@unizik.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3800-9358
[7]PhD. Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Email: jc.enemuo@unizik.edu.ng
[8]PhD. Department of Mass Communication, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebony State, Nigeria. Email: ruchy220@gmail.com, chika.okorie@funai.edu.ng
[9]PhD. Department of Religion and Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Email: ej.iheaka@unizik.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8230-9643
[10]PhD Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Email: okah.stephen@funai.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0530-4962

Abstract

Religious communication in Igboland, southeastern Nigeria, has changed considerably, from the circulation of traditional religious beliefs through established cultural practices to the print culture introduced by Christian missionaries and, more recently, digital platforms enabled by developments in information and communication technology. This study examines these changes, focusing on their implications for youth identity in the region. It explores the relationship between religious media, Igbo philosophical thought, and how young people understand and negotiate their religious, cultural, and social identities. The study argues that these developments are better understood as a process of coexistence and adaptation than as a straightforward replacement of older forms of communication by newer ones. Drawing on qualitative research and relevant scholarship on Igbo philosophy, digital religion, and youth identity, it examines how young people encounter religious messages, interpret competing expectations, and negotiate ideas about personhood, communal belonging, moral responsibility, and contemporary life. It also considers how digital platforms shape religious visibility and authority while providing opportunities for engagement with religious ideas beyond conventional institutional settings. By bringing religious communication into conversation with Igbo philosophical perspectives, the study contributes to understanding the relationship between technological change, cultural continuity, and youth agency. It argues that digital religion in Igboland is best understood through the continuing interaction between inherited beliefs, changing media practices, and young people's evolving understandings of identity.

Keywords: Religious Communication; Digital Religion; Youth Identity; Igbo Philosophy; Igboland.

Introduction

Religious communication has over the history, remained imbedded in a people's everyday lives, interconnecting with socio-cultural and philosophical processes through which a people acquire knowledge, negotiate moral values, identity, being, and develop a sense of belonging. In Igboland of Southeastern Nigeria, the circulation of religious ideas has a long history shaped by indigenous religious traditions, Christian missionary activities, literacy, and the expansion of religious institutions. The introduction of Christianity and Western education, with the accompanying information dissemination channels, created new avenues through which religious teachings were circulated in local communities. Yet, the reception of these new communication outlets did not make the local people to abandon their existing one; in most cases, it resulted to tensions, encounters, and negotiations between the new doctrines and Igbo belief and communication practices (Okwu 2010; Anyanwu 2026). The subsequent emergence of digital communication has added another dimension to this historical experience, raising questions about how religious knowledge is produced, circulated, and interpreted by younger generations. The transition of religious communications from printed materials to digital platforms, therefore becomes significant; media are not neutral channels through which ideas pass unchanged. Their influence include in the accessibility of information, relationship between communicators and audience, and the circumstances of attaching meanings to messages.

Scholars, including Campbell and Tsuria (2022) emphasized the impact of religious communication and recommended the study of digital media as part of contemporary religious practice rather than treating online religion as part of offline religious life. Similarly, Afolabi and Oderinde (2024) focused on the adoption of online media by Nigerian Pentecostal churches to reach young people, while Megwas et al's (2025) investigated the exposure to and use of faith-based social media outlets among Christian bodies in southeastern Nigeria. These scholarship are foundational to understanding the evolving nexus between digital communication, religious institutions and young audiences. However, the expansion of digital religious communication raises questions that cannot be merely answered by a description of online evangelism or measuring media exposure. These questions include; how do young people in Igboland interpret the moral assumptions and philosophical ideas conveyed through religious messages? How do they negotiate these ideas alongside family expectations, cultural traditions, peer relationships, and personal aspirations? The significance of seeking answers to these questions is because of the complex intersections of religious belongings and cultural identity in the region. It therefore becomes expedient to examine the relationship between religious teachings and the Igbo viewpoints on personhood, communal responsibility, morality, and the good life among Igbo youths.

Therefore, the main focus of this study is to understand how young people interpret and negotiate the meanings embedded in the messages communicated through different media and how digital platforms have transformed religious communications overtime. It also examined the relationship between changing forms of religious communication and the remaking of youth identity in Igboland. Specifically, it seeks to trace the movement from print-based religious communication to digital platforms; explore the philosophical and moral ideas communicated through these media; investigate how young people negotiate religious and cultural identities; and analyze the ways they reproduce, reinterpret, or challenge established religious and social expectations. Its contribution to scholarship lies in bringing historical media change into discourse with religious communication, philosophical interpretation, and youth identity. Rather than assuming that digital media automatically produce cultural transformation, the study examines the processes through which young people engage with religious ideas and negotiate their significance within their everyday social worlds.

Religious Communication in Igboland: From Print Culture to Digital Media

The historical trajectories of religious communication in Igboland can best be described as a part of a broader transformation in the production, circulation, and interpretation of religious knowledge. The coming of Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries introduced new forms of religious instruction, literacy, and textual authority which developed within existing traditional social and cultural structures. Therefore, the activities of Christian missionaries in a bid to transmit Christian doctrines reflect the act of negotiations over languages, educational system, socio-cultural structures, and traditional religious belongings. This explanation aligns with Kalu's (1990) study which contested the belief that Christianization privilege European missionaries alone, drawing attention to the complex circumstances surrounding conversion in Igboland. The perspective helps the current study to situate religious communication within the actions of and responses of local African communities, rather than framing them as passive recipients of external influence. The study frames the print culture of the Christian missionaries as an important instrument in the transformation of religious communication. The production and circulation of religious books, Bible translations, catechisms, hymnals, and educational materials helped establish durable forms of religious instruction. Yet the relationship between printing and religious change was not straightforward. For instance, Van den Bersselaar's (1997) argued that missionary attempts to establish a standard written form of Igbo positioned language itself as a site of religious negotiation. The development of written Igbo was neither culturally neutral nor universally accepted. Decisions about orthography and the selection of dialects reflected particular missionary priorities, while local responses revealed competing understandings of language and education. Religious print therefore helped disseminate Christian ideas while also participating in the construction and contestation of linguistic and cultural identities.

Similarly, in recent years, technological development, including expansion of digital media has improved religious communication channels, thereby altering the conditions under which religious messages circulate. For example, social networking sites, messaging applications, video-sharing platforms, and live-streamed services allow religious content to move beyond the physical boundaries of churches and the circulation limits of printed publications. Looking at this development, Campbell and Tsuria (2022) argued that digital religion represent interconnections between online practices and established forms of religious life. Digital communication therefore, does not

necessarily displace institutional authority; rather, it extends religious institutions' reach while creating opportunities for alternative interpretations, competing voices, and more participatory forms of engagement in present-day Igboland. Scholars, including Megwas et al. (2025) demonstrate how Christians in the region encounter, understand, and use religious content on social media. Similarly, Popoola (2026) showcased how the Onitsha-based Pentecostal prophet, Chukwuemeka Ohanaemere Odumeje, uses public performances to gain visibility through digital media. These studies further demonstrated how social media can bring religious activities into popular culture and influence how people perceive and judge religious leaders and their authority. Therefore, the transition from print to platform represent a continuous negotiation and adaptation process whereby existing outlets such as printed scriptures and devotional publications coexist with emerging outlets, including digital sermons, short videos, and online religious discussions.

Religion, Philosophy, and Youth Identity: A Conceptual Engagement

Religion, philosophy, and identity of the Igbo are closely related, although with some differences. Individually, religion offers narratives, moral teachings, ritual practices and explanations of human existence through which the Igbo interpret their everyday existence. While philosophy in this context, is framed as involving the assumption about personhood, destiny, morality, responsibility and the good life that inform religious and cultural understandings. And Identity, framed as connoting an individual's understand of themselves in relation to the ideas embedded in religious and philosophical worldviews, and the social worlds they inhabit. Examining youth identity in Igboland therefore requires attention not only to religious affiliation but also to how young people interpret the values and expectations associated with religious belonging. This study, therefore presents Igbo philosophical thought as a useful starting point for inquiry. Scholars have explored the relationship between Igbo personhood, individuality, spirituality, and communal life. For example, Okafor (2020) investigated the concept of chi as a frame through which individual distinctiveness can be considered alongside communal relationships. Obioha (2020) similarly, studied authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought and its relation to community, values, and well-being. These studies demonstrate two things: personal identity in Igboland is not exclusively an individual possession; and belonging to a community does not erases personal agency. Personal identity therefore enhances how young Igbo people negotiate their aspirations and convictions within relationships shaped by family, religion, community, and changing channels of religious communication. Therefore, religious ideas mold young people's identities alongside the media, institutions, and social relationships through which they circulate. This aligns with Musa and Lando (2022) who were concerned about how online religious communities can both strengthen communal relationships and unsettle established structures of religious authority. Digital platforms consequently create spaces in which young people may encounter competing interpretations of faith, participate in religious communities beyond their immediate surroundings, and publicly express or reconsider their beliefs.

The implications for youth identity extend beyond whether young people accept or reject particular religious teachings. Identity formation may involve selective appropriation whereby a young person can retain a religious affiliation while questioning particular teachings, reconcile Christian commitments with aspects of Igbo cultural life, or reinterpret inherited expectations through encounters with digital communities. Online participation have the potentials of widening the range of voices available to young people. It also positions young people as interpreters who participate in shaping the meanings of religious and cultural ideas, rather than merely receiving them. Yet, access to alternative perspectives does not necessarily translate into independence from established authorities such as religious leaders, family members, and peer groups.

Religious Communication and the Changing Experiences of Young People

Churches and other religious institution remain significant spaces of social networking and moral instruction among young people in Igboland. The emergence of digital platforms introduced additional ways of participating in these activities, making it fascinating and accessible for young people to encounter sermons, devotional messages, biblical interpretations, and religious debates beyond conventional worship settings. Consequently, religious communication has constituted an increasingly complex aspect of young people's social experience through making religious messages readily accessible, and offering flexible conditions under which those messages are encountered, interpreted, and understood. However, accessing religious content easily and steadily does not automatically translate to religious understanding, personal conviction or behavioral change. Rather, it opens a conversation about how young people incorporate, reinterpret, or distance themselves from the messages they

encounter. Campbell's (2012) concept of networked religion identifies interconnected features of online religious life, including networked community, narrated identities, shifting authority, convergent practices, and the interaction of multiple sites of religious engagement. This framework challenges the assumption that religious experience is confined to physical congregations or that online participation necessarily weakens institutional religion. A young person may attend church, follow a preacher on social media, share devotional messages through Tiktok, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and WhatsApp, and discuss religious questions with peers in different settings. A participant during interview pointed that "while the use of social media platforms have helped to make Christian teachings available and appealing to the young people in Onitsha, it also exposes them to competing interpretations of faith, (Ubah I. personal communication, July 10, 2026). Okeke A. (personal communication, April 17, 2026) added that contemporary religious communication channels make religious experiences, doctrines and convictions to be distributed and negotiated across several social environments. Rather than contained within a single institution, they build sense of brotherhood across denominations. These responses corroborated Afolabi and Oderinde (2024) who examine how Pentecostal churches in Nigeria use online media to reach young people, drawing attention to the strategic relationship between digital communication, evangelism, and the circulation of religious services and products. The study, alongside the oral responses cited above demonstrate that digital religious communication is not an end, rather a means for religious renegotiation, social networking, and identity formation.

Churches and religious entrepreneurs also actively shape the content available to young audiences, adapting their communication to the opportunities offered by internet platforms. Young people's experiences are therefore formed within an environment where personal religious exploration intersects with organized efforts to attract attention, cultivate affiliation, and sustain institutional visibility. The use of mobile phone further complicates the relationship between religious communication and everyday life among young people in Igboland. Exploring the integration of mobile phones into Christian religious experience in Nigeria, Nwankwo (2022) demonstrated that users hold different views about their place in worships and religious practices. For some young people, mobile devices support devotional routines, access to sermons, and continued contact with religious communities. While for others, the same devices raise concerns about distraction, the appropriateness of phone use during worship, or the reliability of online religious teachings. These differences suggest that the significance of digital communication lies both in what technology makes possible and how its uses are evaluated within particular religious settings.

Another interesting area of concern in the transformation of religious communication is about authority. In conventional or institutionally organized settings, religious communication are often mediated through formal instructions, clergies, regulated publications and established interpretative traditions. Contrarily, digital platforms expand the range of visible religious voices, enabling young people to encounter preachers, interpretations, and negotiate their religious convictions and identity beyond their immediate congregations. Uwandu K. (personal communication, August 13, 2026) recounted "while media platforms are useful and cannot be denied the credit it deserves, fact remains that it has eroded a lot in the original Christianity we were raised with. These days, anyone who could buy phone and internet access claims to a priest. But I am wondering how one could be a priest without a church with a named address. And that is why you see variant interpretations of the scriptural verses and other doctrinal teaches." While the above remains observable, this study argues that the expansion of religious communication channels does not directly translate to the disappearance of instituted religious authorities. As Campbell (2010) argued, online religious authority needs to be examined through the roles, structures, beliefs, and texts that sustain it. A preacher's digital visibility may reinforce established authority, while the circulation of competing interpretations may provoke questions about credibility and legitimacy. Young people's agency thus operates within continuing relationships of influence rather than in a space free from institutional or social constraints. Similarly, Megwas et al. (2025) pointed to the relevance of distinguishing between encountering religious content, knowing about it, and using it. These are different dimensions of engagement and should not be collapsed into a single measure of religious influence. Moreover, findings concerning Christians cannot automatically be generalized to all young people in Igboland, whose religious affiliations, levels of participation, and relationships with digital media may differ.

A further consideration is that young people's religious experiences are inseparable from the cultural and social environments in which they live. Okoye V. (personal communication, August 14, 2026) explained: "Although my children's attitudes have changed considerably, apparently reflecting what they emulate from their digital pastors and the teachings they encounter on their university campuses, the fact remains that, given how they were raised, none of my daughters would be seen wearing trousers, nor would any of my sons style their hair in the way their

Pentecostal pastors have taught them to believe is right. There are limits to how far these religiously-induced socio-religious practices can be adopted in my family." This demonstrate that religious messages about morality, dressing, success, gender, family obligations, and personal responsibility may intersect with expectations shaped by parents, peers, education, economic uncertainty, and Igbo cultural values. Therefore, digital communication can make alternative interpretations more accessible, but it does not determine how those interpretations will be received. Hence, young people may accept some teachings, reinterpret others, or reject messages they consider incompatible with their everyday experiences.

Philosophical Negotiations and the Remaking of Youth Identity

In a typical Igbo community, young people's religious identities are formed within a social setting shaped by familial relationships, community obligations, religious institutions, cultural traditions, and increasingly accessible digital communication channels. These elements, therefore makes the influence on young people to be pointing at different directions. Religious teachings may affirm certain cultural values while questioning others, just as young people may embrace religious affiliation without accepting every moral position advanced by the religion's authorities. The remaking of identity, therefore, involves neither the wholesale abandonment of tradition nor the uncomplicated adoption of new religious ideas, rather, a process of selective appropriation, reinterpretation, and sometimes resistance. Igbo philosophy offers an important conceptual resource for examining these negotiations, offering explanation to the relationship between individuality and communal life which is particularly relevant. This aligns with Okafor's (2020) study which challenges interpretations that reduce African personhood to communal conformity. His analysis presents individuality and social relationships as interconnected rather than mutually exclusive dimensions of human existence. Obioha (2020) as well considered authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought through community, values, and well-being. Similarly, a participant, Uwalaka N. (personal communication, April 17, 2026) emphasized an Igbo philosophy embedded in a proverb that "Na iru di iche-iche aputaghi na obughi otu ime muru" [differences in facial look does not invalidate the same maternity of brothers or kinship]. This perspectives buttresses the Igbo philosophy of accommodating personhood and communal bond equally. The viewpoint makes it possible to approach youth identity without assuming that young people must choose between personal autonomy and cultural belonging. Their identities may instead emerge through the continuing negotiation of personal aspirations, collective expectations, and moral commitments. This distinction matters when considering the encounter between Christianity and Igbo philosophical traditions. Religious conversion and participation do not necessarily erase earlier cultural frameworks; neither should Igbo culture be treated as a uniform body of beliefs that remains unchanged over time. Individuals may interpret Christian ideas about destiny, responsibility, morality, and the proper conduct of life through existing cultural understandings, while religious teachings may also reshape how those understandings are expressed. Ude's (2021) philosophical comparison of the Igbo concept of chi and Hegel's notion of the cunning of reason, for example, explores the relationship between destiny, individual responsibility, and communal life. Although this comparison does not establish how contemporary young people themselves understand these concepts, it illustrates the philosophical complexity of questions concerning agency and the forces believed to shape human lives.

Emerging digital communication channels introduce new circumstances in which these questions can be explored and contested. Young people can encounter multiple religious interpretations beyond their immediate congregations, compare the teachings of different preachers, and participate in communities organized around particular understandings of faith. Evidence from Mattes et al. (2025), demonstrate the foregoing. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 41 young believers in Vienna, the scholars demonstrated that digital spaces can simultaneously reinforce some religious boundaries and blur others. Their findings also show that online engagement can provide resources for negotiating identities that are difficult to express or sustain in particular offline settings. Although the study concerns a different social and religious context, its analytical contribution is relevant: digital participation may expand the resources available for identity negotiation without eliminating the influence of established communities. The implications for Igboland should therefore, be examined with attention to the particular philosophical and social expectations through which young people understand themselves. Digital religious messages about prosperity, marriage, gender relations, personal discipline, success, and divine purpose may affirm some aspirations while placing others under moral scrutiny. A young person might use online religious content to justify a personal decision, reconsider a practice learned within the family, or strengthen an existing commitment. Another might encounter the same message as an expression of authority that conflicts with

personal experience. These possibilities indicate why media exposure alone cannot explain identity formation. What matters is the interpretive work through which messages acquire meaning within particular lives. Japheth et al. (2025) examined the socio-religious implications of digital culture for Nigerian youth and identified both opportunities for self-expression and concerns about cultural and religious identity. Their discussion reinforces the need to avoid one-sided accounts of digital media as either inherently liberating or necessarily destructive. Nevertheless, the broad category of Nigerian youth encompasses diverse cultural, religious, and socioeconomic experiences. The central analytical issue is consequently the relationship between religious ideas, philosophical interpretation, and the exercise of youth agency. Young people do not encounter religious teachings in isolation; they interpret them through relationships, experiences, and competing sources of knowledge. Also, the availability of alternative interpretations does not guarantee that established authority will be rejected. Digital platforms may strengthen religious commitments, encourage selective reinterpretation, or intensify disagreement. Understanding the remaking of youth identity in Igboland thus requires attention to both continuity and contestation.

Discussion: Religious Media, Cultural Change, and Youth Agency

The relationship between religious media and cultural change in Igboland represent a process of negotiation rather than a straightforward transition from traditional authority to digital freedom. The transition from the circulation of traditional religious beliefs through established cultural practices to the print culture introduced by Christian missionaries and, more recently, digital platforms enabled by developments in information and communication technology has altered the conditions under which religious ideas circulate. The implications of this change extend beyond the speed and reach of communication. They concern who can communicate religious knowledge, whose interpretations attract attention, how religious authority is established, and how young people position themselves in relation to competing moral and cultural expectations. This study therefore argue that media change creates new conditions for religious participation without determining in advance the patterns of young people's responses. Religious communication can reinforce or reposition established institutions, enable alternative interpretations, and produce tensions between personal aspirations and collective expectations of the society. These dynamics complicate assumptions that digitalization is tantamount to primarily the transfer of power from conventional institutions to emerging religious digital actors. Churches themselves participate in digital transformation, adapting their communication strategies to reach audiences whose religious engagement may extend across congregational, domestic, educational, and online settings.

The implications for youth agency are particularly important. Access to digital religious content can widen the range of interpretations available to young people, but access alone does not establish independence from conventional religious authorities. A young person may follow several preachers while remaining committed to the teachings of a particular church; another may use online discussions to question a doctrine or reconsider an inherited belief. Both are forms of engagement, although their implications differ. For example, a young participant, Udoka C. (personal communication, June 17, 2026), explained: "I am an Anglican by birth, but I enjoy following Pastor Ebuka Obi's 'Night of Open Heaven' and Pastor Nathaniel Bassey's 'Hallelujah Challenge.' Although I am passionate about these online programmes, they cannot take away the Anglican in me." Another young person, Christopher U. (personal communication, June 17, 2026), recounted: "Being a member of the Catholic Church does not mean that I cannot be a fan of Prophet Odumeje. There are things our priest does not feel comfortable discussing publicly, especially when it comes to political leaders, but Odumeje speaks about them bluntly." In contrast, Uche K. (personal communication, June 17, 2026) stated: "My parents strictly warned us against following some of these online Pentecostal pastors, such as Odumeje, because of how they interpret the Bible and what they sometimes say about the Holy Rosary and other Catholic doctrines." These narratives demonstrate the dynamics of young people's inclinations to religious institution alongside digital preaches which are most times, defined by familial stances and individual volitions. Elalia's (2023) study of Moroccan young people's Facebook profiles illustrates how religious identity is expressed through choices about visibility, privacy, and the presentation of the self.

Cultural change also requires a more careful account of the relationship between individual identity and communal belonging. In Igbo societies, religious and cultural affiliations intersect with diverse aspects of communal and personal everyday livelihood. Digital communication can expose young people to alternative ways of reinterpreting their collective and personal lives, but it does not remove the social consequences of departing from established expectations as seen in Christopher's response cited earlier. Indeed, online religious participation may strengthen

community ties even when it enables selective disagreement with local authorities. As established by Mattes et al. (2025), in Austria, digital spaces can reinforce some religious boundaries while blurring others. The study show that belonging is something negotiated across different contexts rather than as a fixed consequence of religious affiliation. This corresponds with the findings from the current study which indicate that on one hand, digital engagement strengthens denominational identification, expands relationships beyond local communities, and on the other, it enables young people to maintain overlapping religious and cultural attachments. The relationship between digital media and cultural identity is equally complex when gender and public self-presentation are considered. Hotait and El Sayed (2025) in their analysis of 320 TikTok videos from 32 accounts belonging to Muslim women in Germany, demonstrated how creators combine religious and secular forms of expression while negotiating different audiences. This position challenge the assumption that public religious expression must conform to a single, clearly defined identity. It further offers a comparative insight that digital platforms allow religious identities to be communicated through styles, narratives, and performances that may not fit neatly within conventional categories. In Igboland, comparable questions arise around how young people represent faith alongside fashion, popular culture, language, relationships, and aspirations. Responses from parents, including Ijoma C., Nwkoro V., Umeofor J, and Ugwuanyi V., (personal communication, June 17, 2026) pointed that, following different religious leaders online have influenced how their children dress, style their hairs, and speak. Specifically, Umefor mentioned that her son now speaks in a foreign accent similar to that of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of the Christ Embassy, whenever he prays. Ugwuanyi similarly stated that her son always uses jargons related to those of Prophet Odumeje.

However, scholars have cautioned against understanding digital religion as a mere extension of activities already taking place in physical congregations. Kazira and Pasura (2026) for instance studied young Nigerians and Zimbabweans, including Christians, Muslims, and African traditional religious and non-religious participants in the United Kingdom. They established that digital platforms can become important spaces for sustaining religious relationships, reassembling spiritual practices, and renegotiating belonging and authority beyond geographical boundaries or activities of established religious institutions. While this position remains informative, one could ask; whose religious expressions become visible online, and whose are marginalized? If analysis focuses exclusively on prominent churches and popular preachers, it may overlook young people's less visible negotiations with indigenous religious traditions, mixed cultural inheritances, religious uncertainty, or non-religion. The issue of visibility, therefore connects youth agency to the political economy of digital platforms. Online communication gives individuals the opportunities to circulate interpretations without formal institutional approval, yet visibility is not distributed equally. Platform formats, audience expectations, commercial incentives, and algorithmic recommendation can affect which religious messages attract attention. In his discussion of social media users and pious self-fashioning, Marei (2024) warns against a technologically optimistic view of digital religion, highlighting that online spaces can reproduce inequalities and power relations while also creating opportunities to challenge them. Religious communication therefore operates within systems that shape not only what can be said but also what becomes prominent, shareable, and influential. Youth agency should consequently become as real but constrained, a situation whereby young people make choices, yet they do so within social and technological environments that they do not fully control. These comparative insights have important implications for interpreting the transition from print to platform in Igboland. By default, print and digital media do not represent opposition between passive reception and active participation. Printed religious materials have long been read, discussed, selectively interpreted, and incorporated into local practices. Digital platforms alter the scale, speed, visibility, and interactivity of these processes, yet, they do not create interpretation or agency from nothing.

The more productive comparison concerns the conditions under which religious knowledge acquires authority. A printed devotional text may carry the authority of a church, publisher, or recognized religious tradition; a digital sermon may derive influence from a preacher's reputation, the emotional force of the presentation, peer recommendations, or repeated circulation. These forms of authority can overlap, compete, or reinforce one another. A further implication concerns the relationship between religious communication and philosophical change. Messages about prosperity, personal discipline, marriage, gender, destiny, and moral responsibility do more than prescribe religious conduct; they offer particular accounts of what constitutes a worthwhile life. Young people may assess such messages against their own experiences, family obligations, economic circumstances, and understandings of Igbo communal life. Digital communication can make alternative interpretations accessible, but it cannot by itself resolve tensions between individual aspirations and collective values. Furthermore, cultural continuity is not equated automatically with resistance to change. Young people may sustain a sense of Igbo

belonging while revising particular practices or challenging the authority of those who claim to represent tradition. The relevant question is how these negotiations unfold and what forms of reasoning young people use to justify their positions. Ultimately, this study presents religious media as being neither passive mirrors of cultural change nor independent forces that remake youth identity on their own. Their significance lies in the social relationships and interpretive practices through which messages are produced, encountered, evaluated, and incorporated into everyday life. In Igboland, the transition from print to platform offers an opportunity to examine how young people negotiate religious authority, cultural belonging, and philosophical understandings of personhood in a changing media environment. This perspective places youth agency at the center of the analysis without romanticizing it, recognizing that young people can reproduce established norms as well as reinterpret or resist them.

Conclusion

The movement from print to digital platforms has changed how religious messages circulate in Igboland, but it has not rendered earlier forms of religious communication irrelevant as scriptures and devotional publications continue to coexist with online sermons, religious videos, and social media discussions. What has changed is not only how people encounter religious teachings but also the range of voices they can access and the ways they respond to them. Religious communication has consequently become a space where established beliefs, new interpretations, and competing expectations meet. The study also shows that young people's engagement with digital religion cannot be understood simply as acceptance or rejection of religious authority. Some follow preachers outside their denominations while maintaining their existing religious affiliations; others approach online teachings cautiously because of family expectations or differences in doctrine. These actions suggest that religious identity develops through personal choices and social relationships rather than through media exposure alone. The influence of digital religion is therefore shaped by the interaction between young people's aspirations, their upbringing, religious institutions, and the cultural values within which they live. Igbo philosophical ideas about personhood, communal belonging, and moral responsibility offer a useful perspective for understanding these negotiations. They draw attention to the relationship between individual agency and collective expectations without assuming that either completely determines the other. The significance of digital religion in Igboland lies, therefore, not in its capacity to displace tradition but in the new circumstances it creates for interpreting and contesting religious and cultural ideas. Understanding this process requires attention to how young people make sense of the messages they encounter and how they incorporate, question, or resist them in everyday life. The transition from print to platform is ultimately as much about changing interpretations of faith and identity as it is about changing media.

References

1. Afolabi, O. O., & Oderinde, P. A. (2024). Exploring the use of the mass media by youths in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Social Compass, 71(1), 84–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686241239578.
2. Anyanwu, T. C. (2026). ‘Signing letters and scoring goals’: Women’s strategic resistance through petitions and football in colonial Eastern Nigeria, 1929–1960. Women’s Studies International Forum, 115, Article 103280. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2026.103280.
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
4. Campbell, H. A. (2010). Religious authority and the blogosphere. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 15(2), 251–276. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01519.x.
5. 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.
6. Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (Eds.). (2022). Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in digital media (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074.
7. Elalia, N. (2023). Typology of Digital Religious Identity: A Sociological Study of Youth's Religious Expressions on Facebook. Omran, 12 (45), 7-36. https://doi.org/10.31430/TJQC1033
8. Hotait, N., & El Sayed, F. (2025). Beyond the hijab: Performing religious identity on TikTok. Social Compass, 72(2), 204–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686251340897.

9. Japheth, T., Gbule, N. J., & Opara, C. (2025). Shaping identities, shaping futures: The socio-religious impact of digital culture on Nigerian youth. Khazanah Journal of Religion and Technology, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.15575/kjrt.v3i1.2067.
10. Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72(12), 2954–2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031.
11. Kalu, O. U. (1990). Color and conversion: The white missionary factor in the Christianization of Igboland, 1857–1967. Missiology: An International Review, 18(1), 61–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969001800106.
12. Kazira, S., & Pasura, D. (2026). Africa's clicks to faith: Digital religious practices among transnational Nigerian and Zimbabwean youth in the diaspora. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 49(12), 2588–2605. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2026.2624636.
13. Kozinets, R. V. (2015). Netnography. The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118767771.wbiedcs067.
14. Marei, F. G. (2024). God's influencers: How social media users shape religion and pious self-fashioning. Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture, 13(2), 143–172. https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-Bja10140.
15. Markham, A. N., & Buchanan, E. A. (2012). Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0). Association of Internet Researchers. https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf.
16. Mattes, A., Haselbacher, M., Limacher, K., & Novak, C. (2025). Religion and politics of belonging in digital times: Youth religiosity in focus. Frontiers in Political Science, 6, Article 1476762. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1476762.
17. Megwas, N. U., Ihechu, P. I., Benson-Eluwa, V., & Osuagwu, G. A. (2025). Digital Christianity: Evaluating exposure, knowledge, and use of faith-based social media handles by Christians in Southeast Nigeria. International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation, 12(6), 1188–1196. https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.12060095
18. Musa, B. A., & Lando, A. L. (2024). Religion and online community in African contexts. In H. A. Campbell & P. H. Cheong (Eds.), The Oxford handbook of digital religion. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.013.9.
19. Nwankwo, A. O. (2022). Connectivity and communion: The mobile phone and the Christian religious experience in Nigeria. New Media & Society, 24(5), 1161–1178. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820970180.
20. Obioha, U. P. (2020). Authentic personhood in traditional Igbo-African thought. OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies, 16(1), 110–126. https://doi.org/10.4314/og.v16i1.7.
21. Okafor, E. N. (2020). The concept of Chi in the Igbo philosophy of the person. Prajñā Vihāra, 21(2), 62–81. https://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/PrajnaVihara/article/view/5255.
22. Okwu, A. S. O. (2010). Igbo culture and the Christian missions, 1857–1957: Conversion in theory and practice. University Press of America.
23. Popoola, R. O. (2026). Disrupting or dwelling?: Chukwuemeka Ohanaemere Odumeje and Pentecostal performativity in a West African popular and digital culture. Journal of Religion and Popular Culture, 38(1), 12–30. https://doi.org/10.1525/jrpc.2025.2475630.
24. Ude, D. M. C. (2021). "Cunning of reason" and the Igbo concept of Chi: Towards a philosophical rapprochement with Hegel. South African Journal of Philosophy, 40(1), 34–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2021.1885910.
25. van den Bersselaar, D. (1997). Creating 'Union Ibo': Missionaries and the Igbo language. Africa, 67(2), 273–295. https://doi:10.2307/1161445.