



Digitized Presence: Refracted Spiritual Realities in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract — Presence has often been tied to physical proximity. In contemporary Nigerian Christianity, however, this assumption is increasingly difficult to sustain. This paper argues that digital mediation does not simply extend worship into virtual space; it reconfigures what counts as spiritual presence in the first place. Existing scholarship tends to treat media as channels of transmission or as sites of hybrid practice. While useful, such approaches do not go far enough. They leave largely unexamined the question of how presence itself is being reconstituted. Drawing on interpretive engagement with livestream services, WhatsApp prayer exchanges, and social media devotional practices, the paper develops the concept of refracted spiritual presence. The argument is that digital platforms do not merely carry religious content; they reshape the conditions under which presence is recognized, experienced, and authorized. In this setting, participation no longer depends on co-location. Acts such as typing “Amen,” sharing prayer messages, or joining a livestream become part of a wider field of mediated yet effective religious practice. At the same time, this transformation is not without tension. The increased circulation of spiritual content raises questions about commodification, visibility, and the shifting grounds of authority. What emerges is not the disappearance of presence, but its redistribution across interfaces, interactions, and everyday digital routines.

Keywords - *Digital religion, mediated ontology, Nigerian Christianity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Presence has long been understood as something that requires physical closeness. In Christian worship, being in the church, hearing the preacher, or participating in rituals has

traditionally been considered essential for encountering the sacred. In Nigeria, where Christianity—especially Pentecostal and charismatic forms—is deeply woven into social, cultural, and everyday life, this assumption has been dominant. Churches are not only sites of spiritual encounter but also centers of social interaction, moral instruction, and communal affirmation. Yet, the rapid growth of digital technologies is challenging this traditional view. Livestreamed services, WhatsApp prayer groups, and social media devotional activities now allow believers to participate in worship without ever being physically present. These developments raise important questions about the nature, efficacy, and legitimacy of spiritual presence in digitally mediated spaces [1].

Scholars have debated the meaning and impact of these changes. Some argue that digital media simply extend religious practice into new spaces. From this perspective, online services or prayer chains are secondary or supplementary; the sacred continues to reside in physical rituals, ordained clergy, and institutional authority [2, p. 45]. Others suggest that digital religion produces hybrid practices that blend online and offline participation, allowing flexibility and broader access to worship [3, p. 102], [4], [5]. While these interpretations acknowledge the vitality of digital engagement, they often assume continuity rather than transformation. They leave largely unexplored the ways in which digital platforms actively reshape the conditions for recognizing, experiencing, and authorizing spiritual presence.

Evidence from Nigeria suggests that digital media do more than transmit religious content; they participate in shaping religious experience itself. Typing “Amen” in a WhatsApp prayer chain, sharing devotional messages on social media, or joining a livestreamed Sunday service are not merely symbolic acts. Each of these practices sustains

spiritual efficacy and contributes to the distribution of authority within religious communities [6, p. 9]. Such developments raise a set of interrelated questions: can spiritual presence exist without physical co-location? Who gains authority in digitally mediated worship? How do platforms shape the recognition and circulation of sacred power? These questions reflect ongoing contestations over what counts as “real” religious experience in the digital age.

This paper frames these questions as a contestation between two perspectives. On one side is the enduring assumption that spiritual presence depends on embodiment, ritual performance, and institutional authority. On the other side is evidence that digital mediation refracts presence, producing a mediated ontology in which spiritual efficacy circulates across platforms and interfaces [5, p. 108]. In Nigeria, where digital Christianity is diverse—ranging from TikTok sermons and WhatsApp prayer chains to fully livestreamed Sunday services—these tensions are particularly visible. Believers move between digital and physical spaces, often negotiating authority, visibility, and legitimacy in ways that disrupt traditional hierarchies.

To capture these shifts, this paper introduces the concept of refracted spiritual presence. The term describes how spiritual presence is transformed through digital mediation while remaining experientially real and effective. It emphasizes that the sacred is not diminished by distance or platform mediation; rather, it emerges in new ways, distributed across interactions, circulation, and platform-conditioned engagement. This approach moves beyond studies that simply describe digital practices and instead attends to their ontological implications: how digital technologies reconstitute the very nature of spiritual presence and participation.

Focusing on Nigerian Christianity provides both local grounding and broader relevance. The country is highly connected digitally, with widespread use of social media, smartphones, and messaging apps for religious purposes. It is also home to vibrant Pentecostal and charismatic movements, whose worship practices are visually rich, emotionally intense, and relationally structured. The combination of high religiosity and digital engagement makes Nigeria an ideal context for examining the transformation of spiritual presence. By foregrounding these realities, the paper contributes to wider debates in digital religion, showing that technology is not a neutral channel but a constitutive agent in shaping spiritual experience [7, p. 15].

At the same time, this study recognizes ambivalences and tensions. Digital mediation can empower believers, enabling access and participation across distances, but it also introduces challenges. Visibility-driven authority, the commodification of spirituality, and platform algorithms that shape who is seen and heard all affect the distribution of religious power. Ethical concerns also arise around digital access, inclusion, and the authenticity of mediated experience. Considering these factors ensures that the analysis is both descriptive and critically engaged, reflecting the contested nature of presence in digital religion.

Arguing that digital religion in Nigeria reconfigures spiritual realities, this paper shows that mediated presence is both virtual and spiritually effective. Moving beyond models that treat media as simple conduits, it examines how digital platforms reshape authority, practice, and the ontology of presence, offering a new framework for understanding spiritual engagement in contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

II. RELATED WORKS

Research on digital religion has grown substantially, but much early work treats technology as a neutral tool rather than a transformative force in religious experience. Scholars like Campbell (2013) describe online worship, social media prayers, and livestreamed sermons as extensions of traditional practice, assuming that spiritual presence and authority remain anchored in physical spaces and institutional hierarchies. While these studies illustrate the scale and popularity of digital engagement, they tend to overlook how digital platforms actively reshape what it means to be spiritually present. Hoover (2006) and Lövheim (2011) extend this perspective by examining hybrid practices that combine online and offline participation, highlighting how young believers negotiate identity, belonging, and authority across spaces [3], [8], [9]. However, these analyses still frame online activity as complementary rather than constitutive of religious experience.

Recent scholarship moves beyond this instrumental view to suggest that digital media actively shape spiritual experience. Meyer (2010) argues that mediation does not merely transmit presence but transforms it, introducing the concept of refracted spiritual presence [10]. Actions such as typing “Amen” in WhatsApp groups, sharing devotional content, or participating in livestreamed services carry spiritual efficacy and contribute to relational authority. Latour’s (2005) actor-network approach reinforces this by showing that human and non-human actors co-construct meaning, positioning platforms as active participants in shaping what counts as effective spiritual engagement [4].

Within the African context, studies illustrate how digital religion is locally embedded. Megwas et al. (2025) document Nigerian Christians using WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok to organize prayer groups, share devotionals, and participate in livestreamed worship [6]. Kazira and Pasura (2026) demonstrate that digital mediation redistributes spiritual authority, allowing clergy, lay leaders, and ordinary believers to gain visibility in ways that bypass traditional hierarchies [5]. These works collectively indicate that digital religion is not a mere replication of offline rituals but a reconfiguration of spiritual presence, highlighting the interplay between mediation, relational networks, and authority structures.

Other research critically examines risks and inequalities. Ewoh (2025) notes that platform dynamics can commodify spirituality and privilege certain users, while Zuboff (2019) highlights algorithmic influences on visibility and recognition [7], [11]. These findings underscore that refracted presence is unevenly distributed, shaped by both technological affordances and social structures. They also

highlight the need for methodologies that capture both experiential and structural dimensions of digital engagement.

This study builds on these insights by combining ethnographic observation of online religious spaces with digital interaction analysis, allowing for a detailed assessment of how presence, authority, and participation are enacted and distributed. Unlike earlier descriptive studies, this approach foregrounds the constitutive role of digital platforms, recognizing mediated spiritual practices as effective and relational rather than merely supplementary. It aligns with methods used by Megwas et al. (2025) in the Nigerian context but extends their work by explicitly theorizing refracted spiritual presence and linking platform dynamics to relational authority and participation [6].

The concept of mediated ontology underpins this framework. Drawing from actor-network theory, mediated ontology suggests that spiritual presence is actively shaped through digital technologies, which structure attention, interaction, and recognition. In practice, livestreamed sermons, WhatsApp prayer groups, and social media engagement enable believers to exercise authority, participate in worship, and sustain spiritual efficacy even without physical co-location [5]. Refracted spiritual presence captures how these practices redistribute presence, transform authority, and make spiritual experience relational, performative, and platform-dependent.

This framework also incorporates ethical and critical considerations. Digital platforms can empower participation but may reinforce inequalities, commodify spiritual practices, or privilege certain users over others. Understanding these dynamics is essential for interpreting how Nigerian digital Christianity both reproduces and transforms relational and institutional realities. By integrating descriptive, analytical, and critical perspectives, this study situates its methodology within existing literature while advancing a nuanced framework for examining digitally mediated spiritual presence.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how digital platforms shape spiritual presence in contemporary Nigerian Christianity. The aim is to explore lived experiences, practices, and perceptions, focusing on how believers experience, recognise, and exercise spiritual authority in online worship spaces. Rather than measuring participation quantitatively, the study emphasises the relational, performative, and mediated dimensions of digitally refracted spiritual presence.

A. Data Sources

Data were collected from a combination of primary and secondary sources to capture the full spectrum of digital religious engagement. Primary sources included livestreamed church services, WhatsApp prayer groups, TikTok sermons, and Facebook devotional pages. Observations spanned prominent churches, including the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Foursquare Gospel Church, and

NSPPD led by Pastor Jerry Eze. These platforms provided direct insight into how believers interact with spiritual content, respond to clergy and peers, and perform acts of faith in digital environments.

In RCCG livestreamed services, for instance, participants frequently type "Amen" or "Hallelujah" in chat sections, while others post prayers, testimonials, or questions. In Foursquare's TikTok devotional videos, viewers engage through likes, comments, and shares, signaling participation and recognition of spiritual authority beyond physical space. NSPPD WhatsApp prayer groups allow continuous engagement throughout the day, with members sending prayer requests, affirmations, and devotional messages. These activities are not merely symbolic; they are understood as spiritually efficacious acts, contributing to a distributed and refracted presence.

Secondary data consisted of digital content generated by these communities. This included recordings of sermons, prayer posts, shared testimonies, devotional messages, and comments. Content analysis focused on the language, symbols, and patterns of engagement that indicate spiritual efficacy, relational authority, and community participation. Coding was conducted to identify recurring practices and interactions that reflect how spiritual presence is performed and recognised online.

B. Population and Participants

The study engaged 25 participants drawn from both clergy and lay members who actively participate in digital worship across Port Harcourt and Lagos. Participants included pastors, youth leaders, church workers, and congregants from Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore participants' perceptions of spiritual presence, the role of digital platforms in worship, and the ways in which spiritual authority is mediated, exercised, and acknowledged online.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing participants to share experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe emergent themes. Participants described their engagement with digital worship in practical terms: typing "Amen" or emojis, sharing devotional posts, leading online prayers, and responding to livestream interactions. These practices provided insight into how presence is distributed and enacted across digital networks and how believers negotiate recognition and authority.

C. Analytical Approach

Data analysis followed an iterative and interpretive approach, integrating observational notes, interview transcripts, and coded digital content. Observations focused on how interactions occurred in real time, how participants responded to spiritual cues, and how platform features shaped visibility, participation, and authority. Coding focused on:

1. Forms of participation - including typing affirmations, sharing content, and leading prayers.
2. Expressions of presence - noting how presence is felt, enacted, and acknowledged.

3. Mechanisms of authority - examining how authority is recognized and distributed among clergy and lay participants.

Comparisons across platforms revealed distinct patterns. Livestreamed services emphasized simultaneity, producing a sense of communal worship in real time. WhatsApp fostered intimacy and sustained engagement, allowing continuous prayer exchanges and informal leadership. Social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook extended the reach of spiritual influence, enabling devotional content to circulate widely and attract recognition from beyond local congregations.

This interpretive approach allowed the study to capture the relational and performative dimensions of digital worship, showing how spiritual presence is mediated, experienced, and authorized rather than fixed or dependent on physical co-location.

D. Ethical and Contextual Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the research. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, and consent was obtained before interviews. Observations were limited to publicly accessible content or closed groups where permission was granted, avoiding intrusive engagement. Care was taken to respect privacy and cultural norms, recognizing that online worship is simultaneously public, intimate, and performative.

The study also acknowledged digital inequalities and access issues. Not all participants had equal access to devices or reliable internet, and these factors shaped participation and visibility. Recognizing these constraints was essential to understanding how mediated spiritual presence is both enabled and limited by social and technological conditions.

E. Alignment with Theoretical Framework

The methodology aligns closely with the theoretical framework of mediated ontology and refracted spiritual presence. Digital ethnography captures the interactions through which presence is distributed [12], [13]; interviews reveal participants' experiences and perceptions [14]; and content analysis identifies patterns that structure authority and efficacy [15], [16]. This multi-method design allows the study to examine how presence circulates across networks, how believers participate and gain recognition, and how authority is negotiated in digitally mediated spaces.

The Nigerian context provides rich empirical grounding. Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Lagos and Port Harcourt exhibit high digital engagement, combining livestreamed services, social media devotionals, and WhatsApp prayer networks. This diversity allows the study to explore both the practical enactment of refracted presence and its broader implications for understanding digital religion.

By integrating multiple methods, sources, and perspectives, the study demonstrates that digital platforms are constitutive of spiritual experience, not merely conduits of religious content. Spiritual presence emerges as distributed, relational, performative, and effective, reflecting the complex

interplay of technology, human agency, and religious practice in contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that spiritual presence in Nigerian digital Christianity is actively produced, experienced, and recognized through digital platforms. Digital worship is not merely a reproduction of offline rituals; it reshapes how presence is felt, performed, and acknowledged. Across the churches studied—including Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Foursquare Gospel Church, Resi Church, and NSPPD led by Pastor Jerry Eze—believers engage in livestreamed services, WhatsApp prayer chains, TikTok devotionals, and other social media practices, creating spiritual effects without needing physical co-location.

Digital engagement demonstrates that spiritual presence is no longer confined to the church building or physical rituals. Acts as simple as typing “Amen,” sharing devotional posts, or reacting to livestreamed content have become valid expressions of participation and authority. These digital practices reflect a refracted spiritual presence, where the sacred is mediated, relational, and performatively effective.

A. Patterns of Digital Worship Participation

Believers interact with digital platforms in diverse ways, each sustaining a sense of presence. In RCCG livestreams, members actively type affirmations such as “Amen” or “Hallelujah” during sermons. Although these contributions may appear minor, they shape communal experience and spiritual efficacy. One RCCG participant noted, “Even at home, I feel like I am in the church. My prayers count, and I can respond with others” (Participant 8, personal communication, January 2026). This demonstrates that digital engagement produces a communal rhythm similar to the physical church, where presence is felt through shared acts of recognition and affirmation.

NSPPD WhatsApp groups, under Pastor Jerry Eze, exemplify continuous interaction and relational intensity. Members post prayer requests, testimonies, and devotional messages daily and affirm one another with emojis or typed prayers. Pastor Jerry Eze observed, “Members lead prayers online and support each other; authority and presence are no longer tied to standing at the pulpit” (Participant 7, personal communication, February 2026). Here, presence is sustained through dialogue, relational networks, and performative acts, illustrating how spiritual efficacy circulates across digital spaces.

Foursquare Gospel Church primarily uses TikTok and Facebook to circulate short devotional videos. Interaction occurs via likes, shares, comments, and duets, which participants understand as spiritually meaningful. Resi Church combines Facebook and YouTube, allowing members to post testimonies, comment on devotionals, react with emojis, and share content within the digital congregation. Both examples show that digital platforms extend authority and participation, creating a mediated spiritual space that is relationally and emotionally vibrant.

The Table 1 summarises these patterns, highlighting the unique “digital signatures” of each church.

Table 1. Digital “signatures” of selected Nigerian churches, showing platforms, participation, presence, and authority

Church	Platform	Participation Style	Expressions of Presence
RCCG	Livestream (You Tube FB)	Real time collective	Typing Amen Hallelujah, Emojis
Four Square Gospel	Tiktok Instagram Reels	Asynchronous, viral	Likes, shares, comments, dust
Nsppd (Pastor Jerry Eze)	Whatsapp, you Tube	Continuous, relational	Prayer requests, typing Amen sharing post
Resi Church	Facebook, YouTube	Interactive, participatory	Emojis, testimonies reposting devotionals

This table shows that participation varies by platform and by church, reflecting both technological affordances and local practices. For instance, WhatsApp allows sustained relational engagement in NSPPD, while TikTok and Instagram Reels create short, highly visible devotional moments for Foursquare members.

B. Refracted Spiritual Authority

Digital platforms also reshape spiritual authority. Traditionally, influence rested with the clergy, but online, authority is distributed more broadly. Active members gain recognition by leading prayers, moderating groups, or sharing devotional content. In NSPPD, those who participate consistently in WhatsApp prayers often become reference points for others. Pastor Jerry Eze notes that this online authority coexists with formal leadership, rather than replacing it.

Similarly, in RCCG and Foursquare, online visibility enhances spiritual influence. Members who are active, consistent, or creative in their contributions gain informal authority. Yet, this authority is uneven: access to devices, reliable internet, and digital literacy determine who is recognized (Ewoh, 2025, p. 15). Online authority is relational and performative, dependent on participation, interaction, and platform features rather than solely on institutional position.

Digital mediation allows for co-construction of authority, where formal clergy leadership intersects with lay participation. In Resi Church, group administrators often share power with active members who lead online prayers or contribute content. Authority is thus distributed across human and technological networks, reflecting the mediated ontology of digital Christianity.

C. Relational and Emotional Dimensions

Digital worship is deeply relational and emotionally charged. Typing, sharing, commenting, or reacting sustains spiritual efficacy. NSPPD WhatsApp groups, for instance, are rich with micro-rituals: emojis, affirmations, and short messages become acts of communal solidarity. RCCG livestreams generate real-time interactions, with viewers clapping, shouting, or typing responses together.

A Foursquare member observed, “Seeing others pray online makes me feel stronger in faith. It feels real, even if I am at home” (Participant 3, personal communication, January 2026). This indicates that emotional and relational dynamics are central to spiritual presence, co-produced by human participants and digital platforms. Presence is performative, arising from interaction rather than mere observation.

D. Platform-Specific Effects

Different digital platforms shape spiritual presence in distinct ways. WhatsApp fosters micro-community, encouraging intimate interactions and ongoing relational engagement. Livestreaming emphasizes simultaneity, creating shared experiences in real time. TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook enhance reach and visibility, allowing devotional content to circulate widely beyond immediate congregations.

Each platform refracts spiritual presence differently, producing diverse forms of engagement. For example:

WhatsApp: Micro-community, ongoing participation, relational depth.

Livestreams: Macro-community, real-time collective worship, synchronous engagement.

TikTok/Facebook: Visibility-driven, viral circulation, asynchronous engagement.

These patterns show that digital technologies actively shape religious experience rather than merely transmitting content. The mediated environment allows presence to be relational, distributed, and performative.

E. Tensions and Ethical Considerations

While digital worship offers new opportunities, it also introduces tensions. Spiritual participation can become visibility-driven, where technologically equipped or highly active members dominate. Platform algorithms affect who is seen, amplifying certain voices and marginalising others (Zuboff, 2019).

Access disparities are also crucial: some believers lack devices, reliable internet, or digital literacy. Digital practices can therefore reproduce social hierarchies in new ways, even as they expand access. Online engagement is not universally empowering but contingent on technological and social conditions.

At the same time, digital spaces allow spiritual participation that would not be possible physically, especially for believers who cannot attend church due to health, distance, or work commitments. These ambivalences illustrate that digital mediation is neither inherently positive nor negative—it reconfigures the conditions for spiritual presence, participation, and authority.

F. Key Findings

From this study, four patterns emerge clearly:

1. Presence is relational, performative, and refracted: Digital interactions sustain spiritual engagement without physical co-location.

2. Authority is co-constructed online: Clergy and lay members share influence, shaped by visibility, participation, and platform features.
3. Platform affordances shape experience: Each technology produces distinct forms of presence, relational engagement, and reach.
4. Tensions remain: Inequalities, visibility-driven authority, and algorithmic mediation highlight both opportunities and constraints.

Nigerian digital Christianity demonstrates a mediated ontology, where spiritual presence is distributed, performative, and effective. Churches like RCCG, Foursquare, Resi, and NSPPD under Pastor Jerry Eze illustrate how digital practices reshape both participation and recognition of authority.

Digital mediation does not weaken spiritual presence; it transforms and redistributes it across platforms, interactions, and social networks. Nigerian Pentecostal and charismatic digital practices exemplify how mediated presence is experienced, sustained, and authorised, highlighting the active and constitutive role of technology in contemporary religious life.

G. Discussion

The findings from Nigerian digital Christianity show that spiritual presence is no longer confined to church buildings or dependent solely on traditional hierarchies. Among RCCG, Foursquare Gospel Church, Resi, and NSPPD under Pastor Jerry Eze, believers participate in worship via livestreams, WhatsApp prayer groups, TikTok devotionals, and other social media platforms [5, p. 108], [6, p. 9]. These practices reveal that digital mediation does more than extend worship into new spaces; it actively reshapes how presence is recognized, experienced, and authorized [10, p. 37], [17].

Digital engagement produces what can be described as refracted spiritual presence—a form of spiritual reality that is mediated, distributed, and enacted. Actions such as typing “Amen,” sharing devotional content, or reacting to livestreams are not simply symbolic. They are active performances that maintain spiritual efficacy [2, p. 45]. In NSPPD, for example, members lead prayers online and affirm each other’s spiritual experiences, showing that authority is no longer tied exclusively to the pulpit (Participant 7, personal communication, February 2026). Similarly, RCCG members interacting in livestreams or Foursquare devotees sharing TikTok devotionals demonstrate that spiritual presence is relational, emerging through interactions between humans and technology [8], [9].

Authority in these digital spaces is co-constructed, challenging traditional understandings [18], [19], [20]. Clergy no longer hold exclusive control over spiritual recognition; engaged lay members gain visibility and informal influence based on their participation [7, p. 15]. This dynamic aligns with mediated ontology, which posits that spiritual realities emerge from the interplay of human actors, technological platforms, and social networks [4, p. 58]. At the same time, authority remains uneven. Access to smartphones, reliable internet, and digital skills shapes who is recognized

and who is marginalized, echoing broader social inequalities [11, p. 62]. Digital mediation, therefore, creates both empowerment and constraint.

Different platforms shape the experience of presence in unique ways. WhatsApp encourages intimate, ongoing participation through prayer chains and shared messages, creating small-scale communities [6, p. 10]. Livestreams emphasize simultaneity, producing a sense of collective worship in real time [5, p. 110]. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook extend reach, allowing devotional content to circulate far beyond local congregations [3, p. 102]. These distinctions illustrate that technology does not merely transmit worship; it refracts presence, producing diverse forms of relational and spiritual engagement.

The emotional and relational aspects of digital worship are also significant. Shared reactions, comments, emojis, and synchronous participation generate communal affect, giving participants a sense of being spiritually connected [7, p. 16]. A Foursquare member noted, “Seeing others pray online makes me feel stronger in faith. It feels real, even if I am at home” (Participant 3, personal communication, January 2026). Such experiences suggest that digital spaces can cultivate authentic spiritual engagement that feels experientially meaningful even without physical co-location.

At the same time, digital mediation introduces tensions and ethical challenges. Visibility-driven authority may privilege technologically equipped members, while algorithms influence who is seen and recognized [11, p. 64]. Unequal access to devices, data, and digital literacy can reinforce social hierarchies in new ways [21]. Yet, these platforms also expand spiritual access, allowing participation from those who cannot attend physical services [6, p. 11]. Ethical engagement with digital worship requires acknowledging both its enabling potential and its limitations.

From a theoretical perspective, these observations extend the framework of mediated ontology. Digital technologies do not simply deliver content; they actively shape what counts as present and effective [10, p. 38]. Refracted spiritual presence demonstrates that digital worship is constitutive: it produces spiritual reality rather than merely reflecting an existing one. Nigerian Pentecostal and charismatic practices show that mediated presence is performative, relational, and spiritually efficacious, generating new forms of authority [22], recognition, and participation [5, p. 112].

For religious leaders, scholars, and policymakers, this understanding has clear implications. Churches need to recognize that authority and presence are increasingly distributed across digital platforms and that sustaining engagement requires both technological and relational literacy [7, p. 17]. Scholars can apply the refracted presence framework to study spiritual mediation in other contexts, while policymakers and digital inclusion advocates should consider how access and literacy shape participation in religious life [2, p. 48].

Looking at the findings as a whole, Nigerian digital Christianity produces a mediated ontology in which spiritual presence is simultaneously virtual, relational, and effective. Distance does not diminish presence; it is redistributed,

experienced, and sustained through interaction with both technology and community practice; they reshape how spiritual presence [23], authority, and participation are produced. In Nigerian Christianity, particularly within Pentecostal and charismatic movements such as RCCG, Foursquare Gospel Church, Resi, and NSPPD under Pastor Jerry Eze, digital engagement has become a site of real spiritual enactment. Actions such as typing “Amen,” sharing devotionals, and participating in online prayer chains function as forms of active spiritual participation rather than symbolic gestures. The examples of RCCG, Foursquare, Resi, and NSPPD illustrate how digital practices transform participation, authority, and relationality, highlighting the active and constitutive role of digital platforms in contemporary spiritual life [5, p. 114], [24], [25].

V. CONCLUSION

This study shows that digital platforms do not simply extend religious. The concept of refracted spiritual presence explains how spiritual reality is redistributed across digital platforms, interactions, and networks. Presence is relational, performative, and mediated, while authority is co-constructed through visibility, responsiveness, and participation. Platform affordances shape engagement: WhatsApp sustains intimate micro-communities, livestreams enable synchronous worship, and social media expands visibility and reach. These dynamics confirm that mediated presence remains experientially real and socially effective beyond physical co-location.

However, digital transformation also introduces inequalities. Uneven access to devices, data, and digital literacy limits participation, while platform algorithms and visibility dynamics can privilege certain actors, subtly reshaping authority structures. Digital religion therefore operates within both expansion and exclusion.

Theoretically, Nigerian digital Christianity reflects a mediated ontology in which spiritual presence is actively shaped through technology. Refracted presence highlights the interplay of mediation, performance, and relationality, offering a framework for understanding contemporary worship beyond physical boundaries.

For further research, there are several recommendations among others: (1) Churches should train at least 70% of members annually in basic digital participation skills; (2) Churches should provide subsidised data or devices to at least 30% of digitally excluded members; (3) Each church should maintain at least three coordinated platforms (WhatsApp, livestream, social media) for weekly engagement; (4) Leaders should establish and publish one clear digital ethics policy within 12 months; and (5) Scholars should conduct at least one longitudinal or comparative study on digital Christianity every two years.

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