



## **Adopting the Renaissance of Digital Technologies in Religious Studies in Nigerian Federal Universities**

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### **Abstract**

Adopting the renaissance of digital technologies is inevitable in all fields of studies, religious studies inclusive. Digital technology has brought a new era of efficiency and learning strategies in human history. It has also become a significant key in deriving global economic, scientific, educational and religious growth in Africa, especially in Nigeria. Consequently, in the face of increasingly fierce global competition, it is essential to take advantage of full benefits and potential offered by the renaissance of digital technologies to remain relevant and competitive. Previous studies on digital technologies have focused mainly on digital strategy, digital transformations, and Artificial Intelligence, with little attention paid to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies. Therefore, this paper examined adopting the renaissance of digital technologies, to understand its relevance to religious studies in federal universities in Nigeria (FUN). This study employed a documentation method for data gathering. Data were sourced mainly from published works on digital technologies. Data were content analysed within the ambit of the connectivist theory of Downes and Siemens. The study showed that by adopting digital technology as a catalyst of change, religious studies procure discovery, exploration, and growth, transcending traditional boundaries to unlock the unlimited possibilities of religious studies in the digital age. The study concludes that adopting the renaissance of digital technologies is relevant to preparing students and educators for the demands of the current digital age. It also recommends relevant training workshops on the use of digital



technologies to acquire digital literacy skills for efficiency in religious studies in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Digital Renaissance, Digital Adoption, Digital Technology, Religious Studies, Nigerian Federal Universities

## **Introduction**

Digital religion studies appeared in the mid-1990s at the time that scholars in both media and religious studies commenced to become aware of the fact that the new technology of computer internetworking invented a unique pace for people to re-present religion in a technological setting (Campbell, 2024). As a result of the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing in adoption of digital solutions across various sectors, Africa is on the cusp of a digital revolution (P23 Africa, 2024). To this effect, adopting the renaissance of digital technologies is inevitable not only in all fields of studies such as engineering, physical sciences, and other relevant educational domains but also in religious studies in Africa, especially in Nigeria. This is because it has brought a new era of efficiency and learning strategies into human history. According to Johnson, Adams, Estrada and Freeman (2019), digital technology has brought about a new period of possibilities, and transformations. Digital technology has also become a significant key in deriving global economic, scientific, educational and religious growth in the world at large, especially in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities.

Religious Studies in Nigeria consist of the study of three major religions: African Traditional Religion, Christian Religion and Islamic Religion. African indigenous religion includes all African beliefs and practices that are regarded as religious before the advent of foreign religions (Christian Religion and Islamic Religion) in Africa. "It is the belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another in Africa. It is the religion that is indigenous to Africans" (Ibezim, 2024, 168). Christian Religious Studies as a field of study focuses mainly on systematic examination of the Christian faith as contained in the Old Testament and



New Testament components of the Bible (Baiyeri, 2019). Islamic Religion is one of the three Abrahamic and monotheistic religions– the others are Judaism and Christianity. It is a religion based on the Quran and the teachings of Muhammad, the founder of the religion. The word *Islam* in Arabic means “submission” or “surrender.” It implies surrender or submission to the will of Allah. The will of Allah, to which Muslims (Islamic believers) must submit, is made known through the sacred scriptures, called the Quran, which Prophet Muhammad claimed to have received from Allah (in Arabic, *Allah* means “God.”) (Rahman, Mahdi, & Schimmel, 2024).

For effective education in religious studies in Nigeria, it is pertinent to understand digital religion in teaching and learning in the current digital era. As Campbell (2023, pp. 218-219) rightly notes, “Digital religion as a term was [...] used to describe the understanding that contemporary religion is being practiced in both online and offline contexts, and these religious contexts intersect with one another in interesting and important ways worthy of further scrutiny.” Thus, the fact that digital technologies have brought a new era of efficiency and learning strategies in human history, the above three major religions in Nigeria require adopting the renaissance of digital technologies to remain relevant and competitive in the current digital age. Previous studies on digital technologies have focused mainly on digital renaissance in tertiary language teaching and learning strategies (Musa, 2024). They also concentrate on digital transformations in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Hariyanti & Kristanti, 2024). Kue, Williams, Perimal-Lewis, and McCauley (2024) deal with the use of Artificial Intelligence/ Machine Learning to detect and minimize medical errors. While some scholars look into the impact of adopting the digital strategy on the competitive advantage in the banking sector (Al Afaishat, Maadhede & Yamin, 2024), others emphasise artificial intelligence applications in Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches (La Cruz & Mora, 2024). However, little attention has been paid to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies. This study is, therefore, designed to examine adopting the renaissance of digital technologies, to understand



its relevance to religious studies in Nigerian federal universities. This study focuses mainly on federal universities that offer religious studies as a course of study. They are chosen because they are being controlled and financed by the federal government. Therefore, FUN ought to serve as a template for state and private universities.

Some of the pertinent questions arising from this study include: What do the terms digital renaissance and digital adoption mean? What are the challenges in adopting digital technology in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities? What is the relevance of adopting the renaissance of the digital in religious studies or the advantages of adopting digital technology in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities? This study aims to provide answers to these questions. The study employs a documentation method for data gathering. Data are sourced mainly from published works on digital technologies in Nigeria. Data will be content analysed within the ambit of the Connectivist Theory of Downes and Siemens.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Connectivist Theory of Downes (2010) and Siemens (2004), which is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, posits that as a result of the introduction of the internet, social media, blogs, and online discussion forums, the approach to educational theory has further radically changed. Learning can no longer be considered an individual trait as there are now networks, resources, and opportunities obtainable that were formerly unimaginable. As noted by Kok (2009), the principle behind connectivism is that learning is reliant on multiple sources of view. The capability to study in this context is influenced by the variety of the network and also the potency of the bonds between the information sources and may also make use of 'non-human appliances' (e.g. virtual and augmented reality). The procedure of identifying these sources is itself component of the learning process and can enable the learner to get a greater understanding of the subject. As a result, the usage of technology with the flexibility and interactivity that it provides has been explained as bringing about an enhanced constructivist



learning environment. Sahin (2012) also avers that by transforming the experience to a learner-led approach, connectivism is a good instance of heutagogy. One of the main strengths of connectivism centers on the fact that it enables flexible learning time. If a learner feels like learning, they can do so at their own convenient time without being dependent on formal and organised programmes that may clash with location difficulties, work, or family commitments. This capability to reiterate learning at the learner's convenience until mastery is achieved is an important attribute particularly as a lack of available time for slow learners has already been identified as a weakness of the traditional constructivist approach. The second strength of connectivism is the fact that it has the prospective to expose the learner to a vast range of information.

However, connectivist theory has three weaknesses. The first one is that it prospective to expose the learner to a vast range of information is also considered a weakness if that information is inexact or the amount of information is overwhelming. The second weakness of this approach centers on the fact that it may place those with a lack of digital literacy skills at a disadvantage. Thirdly, there are also concerns regarding the prospective harmful effects of an addiction to technology and the social isolation that this may foster. Despite these limitations or weaknesses, the present study adopts this theoretical framework to maximize its strengths in adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in religious study in Nigeria. This is to understand the relevance of adopting the renaissance of digital to religious studies in Nigeria. This is necessary because "contemporary religion is being practiced in both online and offline contexts and these religious contexts intersect with one another in interesting and important ways worthy of further scrutiny" (Campbell, 2023, 218-219).

### **Clarification of Terms**

It is pertinent to clarify "digital renaissance and digital adoption," the keywords that form the basis of this study, and to explain how it is employed in this study. The word "renaissance" calls to mind images of



rebirth, renewal, and revival—a period of deep cultural, intellectual, and artistic flourishing in human history. Thus, the term “digital renaissance” sums up the deep cultural, intellectual, and technological transformations that have reshaped educational practices in the 21st century (Warschauer, 2019). UNESCO (as cited in Musa, 2024) avers that in the same way, the Renaissance era marked a resurgence of innovation and creativity in human history, the digital renaissance indicates a parallel revival within the ambit of education, stimulated by the incorporation of digital technologies into teaching and learning practices. The main aim of the digital renaissance is to focus on the imperative to reimagine educational practices in response to the evolving digital landscape (Musa, 2024). Likewise, in the religious context, as it is used in this study, the digital renaissance implies a resurgence of innovation and creativity, driven by the integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning in religious studies and practices in Nigeria. This paradigm shift is not just only about digitizing traditional techniques but also involves a fundamental reimagining of pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, and educational paradigms to harness the full potential of digital tools in fostering religious skill and intercultural competence (Musa, 2024) in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities.

Furthermore, “digital adoption is the process of learning how to use new technology that enables you to take advantage of its full benefits and potential” (Whatfix, 2024, p. 1). It can also be defined as the state where somebody can employ tools such as programs, websites, apps, or software to their full capacity to do various kinds of digital process (Herman, n. d.). Thus, digital adoption usually entails implementing a definite technology solution (Bdc, n. d.). In a religious setting, digital adoption is taken place when a religious organisation facilitates the widespread use of the new technology by her members during implementation with contextually guided onboarding and training, as well as on-demand performance support. As a result, in the face of increasingly fierce global competition, it is essential to take advantage of full benefits and potential offered by adopting the renaissance of digital to remain relevant and competitive



(Hariyanti & Kristanti, 2024) in all fields of studies, especially in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities.

## **Challenges in Adopting the Renaissance of Digital Technology in Religious Studies in Nigerian Federal Universities**

Adopting the renaissance of digital is a vital step for religious studies to remain relevant to contemporary Nigeria in this current digital age. However, in the process, religious studies in Nigerian federal universities often face various challenges that can obstruct their capability to adopt digital technology effectively. In the empirical study of Atsumbe, Rmond and Duhu (as cited in Baiyeri, 2019) in one of the Nigerian federal universities, the first main challenge of adopting digital technologies in religious studies is inadequate infrastructures for effective teaching and learning, especially for e-learning. It is also discovered that internet services could not be easily accessed outside the university campus. Secondly, the study shows that even though the lecturers do possess electronic devices and laptops that could facilitate e-learning; they could not effectively employ those devices to teach. Thirdly, the study depicts that most student who owned electronic devices and laptops were found to be ineffective in using their devices for e-learning purposes. Besides, the study reveals that major challenges associated with adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in religious studies include poverty, poor funding, and poor electric power supply within and without the university. Finally, it is noted that attitudinal problems of resistance to change on the part of lecturers was discovered to hamper the use of e-learning infrastructures for teaching and learning purposes in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities.

The study of Anene, Iman, and Odumuh (2014) in Nigerian universities shows that there are many challenges to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in religious studies. These include infrastructure deficiencies or underdeveloped digital infrastructure, financial and technical challenges, lack of e-learning library domain, lack of online seminars and no discussion with lecturers, no online examination, and





there are limited bandwidths. Moreover, Baiyeri (2019), in his study, notes that even though religious students do not regard it as sinful to use social media for educational purposes and religious inclinations, personal spirituality, parental influence, negative peer pressure, and religious education of the students of religious studies were not found to be hindrances to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in teaching and learning in religious studies, financial challenge and technical challenge such as inadequate of electricity and broadband internet service remain problematic to adopting digital technologies in religious studies in Nigeria. He further considers general issues of weak infrastructure, lack of relevant skills, high cost, limited access to affordable internet connectivity, lack of relevant software, a deficit in well-equipped e-learning centres, inadequate electricity or power supply, low level of computer literacy among support staff, inadequate training of students and staff on e-learning technologies as perennial challenges to adopting e-learning for educational purposes in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities.

In the same vein, Musa (2024) considers digital inequality, technological infrastructure limitations, pedagogical integration challenges, and privacy and security concerns as the key challenges and barriers to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in tertiary language teaching and learning strategies (Musa, 2024). These mentioned challenges and barriers are not only hindering adopting digital technologies in tertiary language teaching and learning strategies, but also hindering adopting digital technologies in religious studies teaching and learning strategies.

In facing these challenges and barriers, religious studies teachers and students need to develop a holistic and sustainable strategy for adopting the renaissance of digital technologies in religious studies. This comprises allocating adequate resources, investing in digital infrastructure, improving technological infrastructures for effective teaching and learning—especially for e-learning, strengthening their online presence, organizing adequate training programmes on digital technologies for both staff and students to develop their digital literacy





skills, provision of unlimited internet facilities, improving data security, and embracing cultural change that supports technological innovation. By overcoming these challenges, religious studies can remain relevant, increase their competitiveness, harness the full potential of digital transformation and maximize the relevance of adopting the renaissance of digital technologies.

### **The Relevance of Adopting the Renaissance of Digital Technology to Religious Studies in Nigerian Federal Universities**

Adopting the renaissance of digital technology opens up important opportunities for religious studies to develop and compete in an increasingly digitally connected society. One of the main opportunities is expanding religious studies' scope. By using online platforms such as websites, social media and digital marketplaces, religious studies educators, students and researchers can acquire the necessary knowledge in their field of study throughout the world without being limited by geographical boundaries. This opens the door to wider effective religious studies (Rogers, 2016). Sinclair (2013) rightly notes that due to the availability of digital technologies in the current digital age, modes of communication and the 'information landscape' has changed significantly within religious studies as a discipline. Chrystides (as cited in Sinclair, 2013, p. 45) also avers that "religion is the second most popular topic to feature in the World Wide Web." This shows that through the use of the Internet such as websites, Facebook pages, blogs or Tweets, it is feasible to have wider and faster access to religious information. These include information about different religious groups, organisations and institutions and their leaders. Moreover, digital technology has considerably broadened opportunities for networking and sharing information with other students and scholars of religion across the world (Sinclair, 2013).

Digital technology is relevant to religious studies because it has many positive impacts on religious practices and beliefs. "Digital technology has significantly impacted religion by reshaping religious practices,



beliefs, and communities” (Insight from top 5 papers, 2024, para. 1). As Campbell (2005, p. 311) notes, “Digital technology has created new opportunities for social interaction and religious experiences and for the development of new cultural practices, patterns of belonging and participation.” He further explains that new expressions of religion comprise “cyberchurches, cybertemples, online rituals (such as e-prayer and virtual pilgrimages), and online religious communities” (Campbell, 2005, p. 311), interactive worship, for example via avatars, webcasting of religious services (Campbell, 2013, p. 1), as well as several websites, Facebook pages, iPhone apps, Twitter accounts, blogs and online forums devoted to religious issues or the provision of religious services. Although some scholars, such as Chryssides, have emphasized some of the limits of religious activities on cyberspace due to the lack of physical sacred space and the absence of the physical presence of officiants or sacred objects (Chryssides, 2007, p. 400), others scholars like Brenda Brasher (as cited in Cowan, 2011, p. 462) have gone to the extent of predicting that “using a computer for online religious activity could become the dominant form of religion and religious experience in the next century.” Whether this prediction will be the case or not, it is significant to keep in mind that how religion is presented, discussed and practiced online also impacts on the ways it is perceived and practiced offline (and vice versa).

Besides, although digital technologies deteriorate interpersonal communication and good human relations necessary in sustaining African Indigenous Religion and traditional education by exposing the youths to social vices and encouraging religious syncretism, it is worthy of note that adopting the renaissance of digital technologies have given room for availability of literature on African Traditional Religion and education (Ibezim & Chukwuma-Offor, 2024, p. 166). It is essential to understand that digital technologies provide useful information on African culture, religion and traditional education to researchers on the internet. Indeed, digital technologies have made African indigenous religion and education to shift from the traditional stage of having no written records to the digital religion and education. As a result,



information concerning the African traditional religion and education can be easily retrieved from the internet these days. Therefore, digital technologies are functional in making data or information on African tradition education and religion accessible to students and young adults in this current digital age (Ibezim & Chukwuma-Offor, 2024, pp. 173-174).

In addition, adopting the renaissance of digital technology has also assisted religious studies' scholars to improve their efficiency and learning strategies. By implementing e-learning, e-library, PowerPoint presentation and virtual presentation, religious studies' students and researchers can reduce the time and costs required to achieve their educational goals. According to Hauck (2024), cost savings are inevitable due to the fact that more efficient processes and digital tools can reduce operational costs over time. Likewise, increased efficiency gives room for automating routine tasks, saves time and reducing errors in every sector. Similarly, Cowan (2011, p. 146) affirms that in religious studies, digital technology "brings us into contact with a considerably wider range of informants and deeper pool of data than we might otherwise expect," and at relatively low cost, vast speed and without the need to travel. This gives room to have access to current and relevant academic materials and to focus more on their academic pursuit without having the barrier of geographical boundaries (Hariyanti & Kristanti 2024).

Adopting the renaissance of digital facilitates better decision-making in religious studies. This is possible through digital adopting because easy access to data helps scholars and religious adherents make informed decisions quickly (Hauck, 2024). Researchers of digital religion studies affirm that "early technologies such as the World Wide Web, email, newsgroups, and discussion forums were becoming spaces facilitating religious conversations and experimentation with new manifestations of religious rituals" (Campbell, 2024, p. 222). In the same vein, Stephen O'Leary explained how technology of the internet as at the time he wrote his article was helping to set up "a new form of sacred space, as both traditional religious groups and new forms of religion engaged online,



and cyberspace gave rise to both Christian discussion groups and the creation of technopagan rituals” (O’Leary, 1996, 786). Brenda Brasher (as cited in Campbell, 2024, p. 222) also notes that the cyborg as a religious concept helpful to religious studies scholars, enabling them converse about the nature of humanity in an increasingly technologized society. These notions suggest that the internet and the emerging technologies invented new possibilities for religious discourse and intensified public consciousness of various facets of religion that could potentially have cultural and institutional impact.

Another relevance of adopting renaissance of digital technology in religious studies is that it increases competitiveness. By following the latest technology trends such as artificial intelligence, data analysis and the Internet of Things, religious studies’ students and scholars can create competitive advantages in their studies, services or educational programmes. This allows them to compete with their colleagues and stay relevant in a rapidly changing society (Denning, 2018).

Moreover, adopting the renaissance of digital is essential for success in religious studies. Digital renaissance stresses the significance of digital literacy and fluency in the workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hockly, 2021). As the global economy turns out to be increasingly reliant upon digital technologies, proficiency in digital skills is necessary for success in almost all fields, including religious-related professions. Thus, incorporating digital literacy and digital citizenship skills into religious studies curricula is imperative to prepare students for the demands of the digital age and equip them with the adequate skills and competencies required to flourish in a globalized, interconnected world (Musa, 2024). Other relevance of adopting renaissance of digital technologies in religious studies include increasing religious adherent engagement through more personalized and interactive digital experiences, as well as developing new ideas and services based on data analysis and members’ feedback. By utilizing digital technology creatively and innovatively, religious studies can take big steps in developing their religious communities and expand their impact in an increasingly connected global society. Therefore, adopting digital technology is not only a



necessity but also an inevitable opportunity for religious studies educators, students and researchers who want to develop and survive in this digital era (Rogers, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The study considers financial and technical challenges as the two types of challenges in adopting digital technologies in religious studies in Nigerian federal universities. While the financial challenge includes poverty, poor funding, and high cost of digital facilities, technical challenges include infrastructure deficiencies or underdeveloped infrastructure which hinders effective teaching and learning, limited access to affordable internet connectivity, lack of relevant digital skills, attitudinal problems of resistance to change on the part of scholars, deficit in well-equipped e-learning centres, inadequate electricity or power supply, low level of computer literacy, inadequate training for students and staff on e-learning technologies as perennial problems to adopting the renaissance of digital technologies for religious studies purposes in Nigeria. By overcoming these challenges, religious studies can remain relevant, increase their competitiveness and harness the full potential of digital transformation.

The study shows that adopting the renaissance of digital technologies is relevant to religious studies because the opportunities presented by digital technologies are significant. Firstly, it has expanded religious studies' scope. Secondly, it has significantly impact religion by reshaping religious practices, beliefs, and communities. Thirdly, it has given room for availability of literature on African Traditional Religion and education. Besides, it has assisted the scholars of religious studies to improve their efficiency and learning strategies, as well as facilitates cost savings. Moreover, it facilitates better decision-making and increases competitiveness in religious studies. Lastly, it increases religious adherent engagement through more personalized and interactive digital experiences, and also develops new ideas and services.

The study also reveals that by adopting digital technology as a catalyst of change, religious studies procuring discovery, exploration, and growth,



transcending traditional boundaries to unlock the unlimited possibilities of religious studies in the digital age. Thus, incorporating digital literacy and digital citizenship skills into religious studies curricula is not only imperative but also relevant to prepare students for the demands of the current digital age and equip them with the skills and competencies necessary to flourish in a globalized, interconnected world (Musa, 2024).

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends that adopting the renaissance of digital technology is a new trend in religious studies for efficiency and learning strategies that must be imbibed for its relevance in all fields of studies, especially in religious studies in Nigeria. The study also recommends relevant training workshops on the use of digital technologies and acquisition of digital literacy should be mandatory to both students and educators in religious studies in Nigerian universities. Besides, the study recommends that government should allocate adequate resources in religious studies by investing in digital infrastructure for the sake of improving technological infrastructures for effective teaching and learning, especially e-learning in Nigerian universities.

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