



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES EDUCATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

This study examines social media as a tool for enhancing Christian Religious Studies (CRS) education among undergraduates in Nigeria, with particular reference to Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Kaduna State. The study investigates the extent to which social media facilitates access to CRS learning resources, promotes academic engagement and collaborative learning, enhances students' motivation, and contributes to improved learning outcomes. The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), which explains how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence users' acceptance and utilisation of technology. The study adopts a quantitative survey research design, with data collected from undergraduate students offering CRS-related courses at ABU, Zaria, through a structured questionnaire. The findings indicate that social media platforms are widely used by students for accessing academic materials, communicating with lecturers and colleagues, discussing course-related issues, and engaging in collaborative learning. The findings further indicate that students perceive social media as useful for improving access to CRS resources, sustaining academic interaction beyond the classroom, and supporting flexible learning. However, distractions, misinformation, inappropriate content, privacy concerns, and inconsistent internet access constitute significant challenges to effective educational use. The study concludes that social media constitutes a potentially valuable complementary pedagogical tool for enhancing CRS education when systematically integrated into teaching and learning practices. The study recommends that CRS lecturers and university administrators should develop clear guidelines for educational social-media use, promote digital literacy, encourage academically focused online interaction, and integrate credible digital resources into CRS instruction.

Keywords: Social Media; Christian Religious Studies; Undergraduate Education; Technology Acceptance Model; Ahmadu Bello University

Introduction

Social media has become an important component of contemporary higher education, transforming how students communicate, access information, collaborate, and participate in learning. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and other networked applications have increasingly moved beyond their traditional social functions to become informal and formal educational spaces. Research on educational technology indicates that digital technologies can support behavioural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of student engagement when they are

integrated purposefully into teaching and learning (Bond et al., 2020; Nkomo et al., 2021). Similarly, systematic evidence indicates that social media can facilitate communication, collaboration, resource sharing, and interaction between students and lecturers (Al Balushi et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, the increasing availability of smartphones and internet-enabled communication has created opportunities for universities to supplement conventional classroom instruction with digital learning. Empirical studies among Nigerian undergraduates have reported educational uses of social networking platforms, although the academic consequences of such use vary according to the intensity, purpose, and context of use (Aiyende & Omojola, 2021; Onojah et al., 2020). Recent evidence also suggests that social-media use should not automatically be regarded as academically beneficial because excessive or non-academic use may interfere with students' learning activities (Tafesse, 2022).

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) education provides a particularly important context for investigating these developments. CRS involves biblical knowledge, theological interpretation, ethical reflection, historical understanding, critical engagement with religious issues, and the application of Christian principles to contemporary society. Social media can potentially extend CRS learning beyond the physical classroom through digital discussions, video resources, electronic texts, online seminars, peer interaction, and lecturer–student communication.

This study therefore investigates social media as a tool for enhancing CRS education among undergraduates, using Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State, as the empirical setting. The study focuses specifically on students' utilisation, academic engagement, access to learning resources, collaboration, motivation, and perceived learning outcomes.

Statement of the Research Problem

The expansion of social media among university students has created new possibilities for teaching and learning, but its educational value cannot be assumed merely from its popularity. Students may use the same platforms for academic discussions and resource sharing as well as entertainment, social interaction, and activities unrelated to their studies. Empirical evidence has consequently produced mixed findings concerning the relationship between social-media use and academic performance. For example, Tafesse (2022) found a non-linear relationship in which moderate use was associated with better academic performance while excessive use was associated with poorer performance. Nigerian studies have similarly identified both educational opportunities and challenges associated with students' social-media use (Aiyende & Omojola, 2021; Dakasku et al., 2021).

A further problem is the limited subject-specific evidence concerning the use of social media for Christian Religious Studies education among Nigerian university undergraduates. Existing studies have frequently examined general academic performance, information sharing, or broad higher-education contexts rather than the distinctive requirements of CRS teaching and learning. Research on social media and religious studies in Nigeria has also examined contexts such as secondary-school CRS teaching, leaving a need for university-level empirical investigation (Kosoko-Oyedeko & Ishola, 2025).

Consequently, this study investigates how undergraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University use social media for CRS learning and whether such use contributes to academic engagement, access to learning resources, collaboration, motivation, and perceived learning outcomes.

Conceptual Clarification

Social Media

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, distribute, exchange, and interact with content within networked environments. Unlike traditional one-way media, social-media platforms facilitate participatory communication in which users can simultaneously act as consumers and producers of information. In higher education, this participatory character creates opportunities for students to communicate with peers, interact with lecturers, share educational materials, participate in discussions, and develop learning communities (Bond et al., 2020).

Christian Religious Studies Education

Christian Religious Studies education refers to the systematic teaching and learning of Christian beliefs, biblical texts, history, theology, ethics, religious practices, and their implications for individual and social life. At university level, CRS education extends beyond memorisation of biblical information to include critical interpretation, theological reasoning, historical analysis, ethical reflection, and engagement with contemporary religious issues.

Social Media-Based Learning

Social media-based learning describes the purposeful use of social-networking and interactive digital platforms to facilitate educational activities. Such activities may include lecturer–student communication, peer discussion, collaborative assignments, distribution of lecture materials, educational videos, online debates, and access to digital resources. Onojah et al. (2020) found that Nigerian undergraduates demonstrate capacity to use social media for learning, although social uses remain significant.

Academic Engagement

Academic engagement refers to the behavioural, cognitive, and affective involvement of students in learning activities. Digital technologies may support these dimensions by increasing interaction, participation, communication, and access to learning materials (Nkomo et al., 2021).

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes refer to demonstrable changes associated with educational participation, including knowledge acquisition, understanding, critical thinking, participation, academic achievement, and ability to apply learned concepts. In this study, social media is therefore understood not simply as a communication medium but as a potential complementary pedagogical resource for enhancing CRS learning.

Theoretical Framework: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Fred D. Davis (1989) provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining students' acceptance and educational use of social media. Davis proposed that two central beliefs perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use—V6are fundamental determinants of users' acceptance of information technology. The original

model was developed to explain why individuals accept or reject technological systems and to identify beliefs that influence technology-use behaviour.

Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a particular technology will improve performance. Applied to this study, CRS undergraduates may perceive social media as useful when they believe that it helps them obtain course materials, communicate with lecturers, participate in academic discussions, collaborate with colleagues, understand difficult concepts, prepare for examinations, or improve learning outcomes.

Perceived ease of use refers to the extent to which a person believes that using a technological system will require little effort. In the context of CRS education, students are more likely to use social media educationally when they find the relevant platforms accessible, understandable, convenient, and relatively easy to navigate.

Davis's original research provided empirical support for the importance of these constructs in explaining technology acceptance. The study developed and validated measures of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use and demonstrated their relationship with technology usage.

The relevance of TAM to the present study is reinforced by later research. Venkatesh and Bala (2008), through TAM3, expanded attention to determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use and emphasised interventions that can improve effective technology adoption.

More recent studies have applied TAM directly to educational social-media use. Ajibade et al. (2022) examined social networking for e-learning in higher education using perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Their study is particularly relevant because it investigated technology adoption within a Nigerian higher-education context. Similarly, research on social-media usage in higher education has demonstrated relationships between students' perceptions of usefulness, behavioural intention, actual use, and perceived performance impact.

For this study, TAM provides a logical explanation of why some students may employ social media extensively for CRS learning while others may use it primarily for non-academic purposes. If students perceive social media as useful and easy to use, they may be more willing to incorporate it into their academic routines.

The model can therefore be operationalised through four principal dimensions: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, behavioural intention/educational utilisation, and perceived learning benefit. These variables can be measured using Likert-scale questionnaire items and subjected to appropriate descriptive and inferential analysis.

The study does not assume that TAM automatically establishes academic improvement. Rather, TAM provides a theoretical explanation for students' acceptance and use of social media, while the empirical component determines whether such use is associated with engagement, resource access, collaboration, motivation, and learning outcomes.

Thus, TAM is suitable because the central issue is not merely whether social media exists, but why students accept it as an educational resource and how its perceived usefulness and usability relate to its educational utilisation.

Social Media and Contemporary Higher Education

The integration of social media into higher education reflects a broader transformation from teacher-centred instructional models towards more interactive and digitally mediated learning environments. Social media platforms allow students to communicate synchronously and asynchronously, exchange information, create discussion groups, access multimedia materials, and maintain academic interaction beyond scheduled classroom periods. Bond et al. (2020) demonstrate that educational technologies have become closely associated with different forms of student engagement, while Nkomo et al. (2021) show that digital technologies can support behavioural, cognitive, and affective engagement.

Social media also alters the spatial and temporal boundaries of university learning. A student can participate in a discussion about a biblical passage through a WhatsApp group, watch a lecture or theological explanation through YouTube, receive an academic article through a digital group, or discuss an assignment with colleagues without being physically present in a classroom. Such flexibility is particularly significant in higher education, where students increasingly combine classroom instruction with independent and collaborative learning.

However, the educational role of social media should not be romanticised. Al Balushi et al. (2022), in a systematic review of empirical research, found that social media provided innovative possibilities for higher education during the COVID-19 period, but also identified policy deficiencies and methodological limitations in the literature. This suggests that the presence of social media within universities does not automatically produce educational improvement.

The pedagogical value of social media depends on how it is designed and used. Lecturers need to establish clear academic objectives, identify credible digital resources, moderate discussions, and distinguish educational communication from informal social interaction. Students similarly require digital literacy to evaluate the reliability of information encountered online.

For CRS education, these considerations are particularly important because religious information circulated through social media may vary considerably in quality and interpretation. Academic use therefore requires lecturer guidance, source evaluation, responsible participation, and appropriate integration with established scholarly materials. Social media is most appropriately viewed as a complement to formal CRS instruction, rather than a replacement for lecturers, textbooks, libraries, and scholarly databases.

Social Media as a Digital Pedagogical Tool

Social media can function as a digital pedagogical tool when its affordances are deliberately connected to instructional objectives. Its educational functions include communication, content distribution, collaboration, discussion, feedback, peer learning, and access to multimedia resources. These functions correspond with the broader movement towards learner-centred approaches in higher education.



WhatsApp, for example, can support course-based discussion groups through which lecturers distribute announcements, reading materials, assignment instructions, and discussion questions. YouTube can provide access to recorded lectures, documentaries, interviews, biblical presentations, and historical materials. Facebook and Telegram can support communities of learners where students exchange ideas and educational resources. Such applications can therefore extend classroom interaction into digitally mediated spaces.

Research in Nigeria provides empirical support for some of these possibilities. Aiyende and Omojola (2021), studying students at the University of Port Harcourt, found that students used social media to access information and support academic activities. Onojah et al. (2020), using 450 Nigerian undergraduates, investigated students' proficiency in using social media for learning and demonstrated that social media has an identifiable educational dimension within Nigerian undergraduate life.

The pedagogical effectiveness of these platforms, however, depends on purposeful instructional design. A social-media group created for a course without clear learning objectives may become dominated by non-academic conversations. Conversely, a lecturer who provides structured questions, reading tasks, feedback, and deadlines can transform an informal platform into an extension of the classroom.

Social media can also support formative assessment. Lecturers may post questions, request brief responses, organise peer feedback, or use polls to identify students' understanding of particular topics. Such activities can increase opportunities for interaction between formal assessments.

For CRS, the pedagogical possibilities include online interpretation of biblical passages, theological debates, historical discussions, ethical case analysis, group presentations, and sharing of relevant scholarly resources. Nevertheless, students must be trained to distinguish academically credible resources from unsupported religious claims, misinformation, or misleading interpretations.

Thus, the pedagogical value of social media lies less in the technology itself than in the quality of its educational integration.

Christian Religious Studies Education in Nigerian Universities

Christian Religious Studies occupies an important position within religious and humanities education in Nigeria because of the country's complex religious, cultural, historical, and ethical environment. University-level CRS education engages students with biblical studies, Christian theology, church history, Christian ethics, African Christianity, contemporary religious issues, and the relationship between Christianity and society.

The teaching of CRS traditionally relies on lectures, textbooks, scholarly articles, classroom discussions, seminars, assignments, examinations, and library research. Digital technologies have increasingly complemented these conventional approaches. Social media introduces another layer by enabling students and lecturers to maintain academic interaction outside the formal classroom.

The digital transformation of religious education became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kosoko-Oyedeko and Ishola's study of CRS teachers in Lagos State found that teachers employed platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom during the pandemic, although the study focused on secondary-school teachers rather than university undergraduates. This distinction is important because university-level learning requires greater emphasis on independent research, critical thinking, scholarly evaluation, and academic argumentation.

At university level, social media can therefore support rather than replace conventional academic resources. A lecturer may use a WhatsApp group to direct students to a journal article, while students subsequently undertake independent reading and classroom discussion. Similarly, a YouTube presentation may introduce a historical issue, but students should critically evaluate it against scholarly literature.

The potential relevance of social media to CRS is also connected with the changing nature of religious communication. Recent research on digital Christianity in Southeast Nigeria indicates increasing exposure to and engagement with faith-based social-media platforms (Megwas et al., 2025). This demonstrates that social media is not only an educational technology but also an important environment in which contemporary religious ideas circulate.

Consequently, CRS educators need to equip students with both religious literacy and digital literacy. Students should learn how to identify reliable theological sources, compare interpretations, evaluate evidence, and participate responsibly in digital religious discussions.

Social Media Use among CRS Undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University

The study's empirical setting is Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Kaduna State. The university provides a relevant environment for investigating social media and CRS education because undergraduate students operate within a technologically mediated educational environment while simultaneously engaging with conventional classroom instruction.

The investigation should establish the frequency and purpose of students' social-media use. Frequency alone, however, should not be interpreted as evidence of educational effectiveness. The questionnaire should distinguish between academic and non-academic uses. Relevant indicators include joining course groups, downloading materials, communicating with lecturers, discussing assignments, watching educational videos, sharing academic links, participating in online discussions, and seeking clarification from peers.

Onojah et al. (2020) demonstrated that Nigerian undergraduates possess identifiable levels of proficiency in using social media for learning, suggesting that the platforms have educational potential. Similarly, Dakasku et al. (2021) found evidence of positive academic effects associated with social-networking-site utilisation among undergraduates at Yobe State University, while also recommending orientation and skills development.

For ABU students, the study should therefore investigate whether social media is being used deliberately for CRS learning or merely incidentally. The distinction is important because students

may belong to course-related WhatsApp groups but rarely use them for meaningful academic interaction.

The empirical instrument should measure frequency of use, duration, preferred platforms, academic purposes, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, interaction with lecturers, peer collaboration, and access to CRS resources.

The resulting data would establish the actual pattern of social-media use among the respondents rather than relying on assumptions about Nigerian university students generally.

A major contribution of the study would therefore be its subject-specific and institutional focus. Rather than asking whether Nigerian university students generally use social media, it asks how students in the ABU context use social media in relation to CRS education and what educational functions students associate with such use.

Social Media and Students' Academic Engagement in CRS

Academic engagement encompasses students' behavioural participation, cognitive investment, and affective involvement in learning. Digital technologies can influence all three dimensions by increasing opportunities for communication and interaction. Nkomo et al. (2021) synthesised research on student engagement with digital technologies and identified the importance of technology-mediated learning environments in contemporary higher education.

In CRS education, social media may increase behavioural engagement when students participate in course discussions, respond to lecturer questions, submit tasks, and exchange academic materials. Cognitive engagement may be promoted when students are required to interpret biblical texts, compare theological perspectives, analyse ethical issues, and defend positions in structured online discussions. Affective engagement may emerge when students experience learning as interactive, accessible, and connected to their everyday digital environment.

Nevertheless, engagement should not be equated with online activity. A student who frequently posts messages may not necessarily demonstrate deep academic engagement. Consequently, an empirical study should distinguish between the frequency of participation and the educational quality of that participation.

The questionnaire can measure indicators such as participation in CRS discussions, frequency of asking academic questions online, response to lecturer prompts, peer interaction, completion of online academic activities, and willingness to continue academic discussions beyond the classroom.

The study should also examine whether students perceive social media as increasing their confidence to participate. Some students who are reluctant to speak in large classrooms may find digital communication less intimidating. At the same time, online environments can create new problems, including passive participation, distraction, misinformation, and superficial responses.

Therefore, the central empirical question is not whether social media increases activity but whether it contributes to meaningful academic engagement. The distinction strengthens the scholarly

quality of the study because it moves beyond technological enthusiasm towards measurable educational outcomes.

Social Media and Access to CRS Learning Resources

Access to learning resources is an important component of university education. Traditional CRS resources include textbooks, journal articles, biblical commentaries, theological dictionaries, historical documents, library collections, and scholarly databases. Social media can complement these resources by providing channels through which students discover, receive, discuss, and share educational materials.

Students may receive electronic books, articles, lecture notes, links to scholarly websites, recorded lectures, documentaries, and other multimedia materials through social-media platforms. Such access can reduce the temporal limitations associated with conventional classroom instruction because students can retrieve materials when required.

However, increased access does not necessarily mean increased quality. Social media contains both scholarly and non-scholarly information. A student may encounter an academically credible theological lecture alongside an unsupported religious claim. Consequently, digital information literacy becomes essential to CRS education.

Lecturers have an important role in guiding students towards credible resources. They can provide links to recognised journals, academic publishers, university repositories, digital libraries, and reputable theological resources. They can also teach students how to evaluate authorship, evidence, publication venue, date, references, and scholarly credibility.

The empirical study should therefore measure not simply whether students access materials through social media, but the types of materials accessed and the extent to which those materials support coursework. This distinction is particularly relevant to international journal standards because it transforms a general claim about "access" into measurable educational behaviour.

Previous Nigerian research indicates that students use social media to obtain information relevant to academic activities (Aiyende & Omojola, 2021). The present study extends this discussion to CRS by examining whether social media expands students' access to materials specifically relevant to religious studies.

The study may consequently provide evidence on whether social media operates primarily as an informal information source or as a structured gateway to credible academic resources.

Social Media and Collaborative Learning in CRS

Collaborative learning occurs when learners work together to construct knowledge, solve problems, discuss ideas, and complete academic tasks. Social media provides technological affordances that can facilitate such interaction by allowing students to communicate and exchange information in real time or asynchronously.

In CRS education, collaborative learning can involve group interpretation of biblical passages, analysis of ethical cases, discussion of theological arguments, preparation of seminar



presentations, and peer review of assignments. Students can distribute responsibilities, share sources, and provide feedback before presenting their work formally.

The interactive nature of social media can also reduce the isolation associated with individual learning. A student who encounters difficulty understanding a theological concept can ask peers for clarification or initiate a group discussion. Such interactions may support peer-assisted learning.

However, effective collaboration requires structure. Without clearly defined tasks, online groups may become dominated by a small number of active students while others remain passive. There may also be disagreement, misinformation, or conflict arising from different theological interpretations. Lecturers should therefore establish rules for respectful academic communication and evidence-based discussion.

Research on higher education generally indicates that social technologies can facilitate communication and collaboration, but their educational effectiveness depends upon the design of the learning activity (Al Balushi et al., 2022). Thus, simply creating a WhatsApp or Telegram group should not be considered equivalent to implementing collaborative learning.

For the ABU study, collaborative learning can be measured through indicators such as frequency of group discussions, sharing of CRS materials, peer explanation of difficult concepts, group assignment coordination, peer feedback, and participation in online academic communities.

The study can consequently determine whether social media is merely a communication channel or whether students actually employ it as a collaborative learning environment.

Social Media and Students' Motivation to Learn CRS

Student motivation influences persistence, participation, attention, and willingness to engage with academic activities. Social media may affect motivation because it provides familiar, interactive, multimedia-rich environments that differ from conventional classroom instruction.

The integration of videos, images, discussion forums, hyperlinks, quizzes, and peer communication can make particular learning activities more interactive. For CRS students, digital materials can provide access to historical documentaries, biblical maps, archaeological resources, theological lectures, interviews, and discussions of contemporary ethical issues.

However, motivation should not be interpreted solely in terms of entertainment. Educational motivation concerns students' willingness to invest effort in understanding course content and completing learning tasks. A platform may be attractive without necessarily improving learning.

The empirical questionnaire should therefore assess whether students believe that social media encourages them to read CRS materials, participate in discussions, ask questions, complete assignments, explore additional resources, and continue learning outside scheduled classes.

Evidence from higher education research indicates that students' perception of the usefulness of technology is an important factor in their willingness to adopt it. Ajibade et al. (2022), using TAM-

related constructs in Nigerian higher education, examined perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in relation to social networking for e-learning. These findings provide theoretical support for investigating students' perceptions rather than measuring only frequency of usage.

The study should consequently investigate whether students who perceive social media as useful for CRS learning also report greater motivation to engage with CRS activities. Such analysis would connect the empirical evidence directly with the Technology Acceptance Model.

Social Media and Academic Performance in CRS

Academic performance is one of the most important questions in research on educational technology. Although social media may increase communication and access to resources, it cannot automatically be assumed to improve academic achievement.

Empirical evidence demonstrates this complexity. Aiyende and Omojola (2021) reported academic uses and perceived benefits of social media among University of Port Harcourt students. Dakasku et al. (2021) reported a positive impact of social-networking-site utilisation on undergraduate academic performance at Yobe State University. Similarly, Ugama et al. (2022) found positive predictive relationships for Facebook and Instagram usage among computer science students, although the significance of the relationships differed across platforms.

At the same time, Tafesse (2022) provides an important qualification. Using automated mobile-app usage data, the study found an inverted U-shaped relationship between social-networking-site use and academic performance: moderate use was associated with better performance, whereas higher levels of use were associated with poorer performance. This finding indicates that the educational consequences of social media may depend on intensity and purpose rather than simple presence or absence.

For the ABU study, academic performance should preferably be measured using objective academic indicators where access and ethical approval permit. If official scores are unavailable, students' perceived improvement should be explicitly labelled as perceived academic performance, rather than actual achievement.

The study should examine whether students who use social media for CRS learning report improved understanding, examination preparation, assignment completion, retention, and academic achievement.

This approach allows the research to distinguish between social-media exposure, educational use, and actual learning outcomes, thereby strengthening its empirical contribution.

Interactive Teaching and Learning of CRS

Traditional university teaching can sometimes be characterised by one-directional communication, particularly in large classes. Social media introduces additional channels through which lecturers and students can interact. These channels can include questions, announcements, discussion threads, polls, shared videos, digital assignments, and feedback.

Interactive teaching is especially relevant to CRS because many topics require interpretation and discussion rather than simple transmission of information. Biblical interpretation, Christian ethics, African Christianity, church history, religious pluralism, and contemporary theological issues can benefit from structured dialogue and critical questioning.

A lecturer may, for example, post a biblical passage and ask students to identify its historical context before the next classroom meeting. Students can contribute preliminary interpretations online, after which the lecturer can identify misconceptions and address them during the formal lesson.

Such integration creates a blended pedagogical environment in which social media complements classroom teaching. The platform becomes an extension of instructional practice rather than an independent replacement for academic teaching.

Evidence from social-media research indicates that these platforms can facilitate student–lecturer communication and collaboration. Ajibade et al. (2022) specifically examined social networking for e-learning in Nigerian higher education through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Omotehinwa et al. (2021) similarly investigated lecturers' and students' perceptions of social media for teaching and learning at Achievers University, Owo, using TAM-related constructs.

The ABU study should therefore investigate whether students perceive social media as improving communication with lecturers, clarifying difficult CRS topics, receiving feedback, participating in discussions, and maintaining academic interaction outside classroom hours.

The ultimate issue is educational integration: social media should be evaluated according to whether it strengthens instructional communication and learning rather than according to its popularity among students.

Challenges and Ethical Issues in Social Media-Based CRS Education

Despite its potential benefits, social media presents several challenges for higher education. The first is distraction. Students may enter an academic platform but become distracted by entertainment, advertising, personal conversations, or unrelated content. Tafesse's (2022) finding of a curvilinear relationship between social-media use and academic performance illustrates why excessive use deserves attention.

A second challenge is misinformation. Religious information circulated online may lack scholarly evidence or may present particular theological interpretations as universally authoritative. CRS students therefore require critical digital literacy to evaluate claims.

A third concern is privacy and data protection. Students and lecturers may share personal information, photographs, academic records, or other materials without fully understanding the implications of digital permanence and redistribution.

Fourth, unequal internet access and data costs may create disparities between students. Although smartphones have expanded access to digital communication, students differ in connectivity, device quality, financial capacity, and digital skills.

Fifth, academic integrity can be affected when social-media platforms facilitate plagiarism, unauthorised sharing of examination materials, contract cheating, or copying of assignments.

Sixth, inappropriate communication can undermine academic environments. Religious discussions may become contentious where students hold different theological, denominational, cultural, or ideological positions. Clear rules for respectful communication are therefore essential.

The systematic review by Al Balushi et al. (2022) identified inadequate institutional policy as one obstacle to effective pedagogical use of social media. This suggests that universities should not leave social-media integration entirely to individual students or lecturers.

For CRS specifically, ethical use should include respect for religious differences, responsible citation, protection of personal information, avoidance of discriminatory language, and careful verification of religious claims.

The empirical study should therefore measure not only benefits but also the extent to which students experience distraction, misinformation, connectivity problems, privacy concerns, academic dishonesty, and other risks.

Empirical Review of Social Media and Christian Religious Studies Education

Existing empirical literature demonstrates growing interest in social media as an educational resource, but the evidence remains heterogeneous across countries, disciplines, platforms, and educational contexts. A systematic review by Al Balushi et al. (2022), covering empirical studies of social-media use in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that social media provided innovative possibilities for online learning and communication. However, the review also identified the absence of clearly defined institutional policies as a barrier to effective pedagogical integration.

In Nigeria, Onojah et al. (2020) investigated the proficiency of undergraduates in using social media for learning. Using 450 students, the study established that social media had an educational dimension among Nigerian undergraduates, although students' social uses of these platforms remained important. This study is relevant because it demonstrates that social media competence can be investigated empirically rather than assumed.

Aiyende and Omojola (2021) examined social media and academic performance among students at the University of Port Harcourt. Their findings indicated that students used social media to obtain information and support academic activities. The authors recommended institutional guidance concerning appropriate use.

Dakasku et al. (2021) investigated social-networking-site utilisation and academic performance among undergraduates at Yobe State University. The study reported a positive relationship between utilisation and academic performance and recommended orientation and skills development.

Ajibade et al. (2022) investigated social networking for e-learning in higher education using TAM constructs. Their focus on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use is directly relevant to the present study because it provides an empirical basis for examining why students accept social media for educational purposes.

Tafesse (2022), however, provides an important counterpoint. Using automated mobile-application usage data rather than relying solely on self-reported responses, the study found an inverted U-shaped relationship between social-networking-site use and academic performance. This suggests that moderate use may be educationally beneficial while excessive use may become counterproductive.

At the disciplinary level, Kosoko-Oyedeko and Ishola examined the use of social media in teaching Religious Studies during the COVID-19 pandemic among CRS teachers in Lagos State. The study found the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom, demonstrating that social media can support religious education. However, its population consisted of secondary-school teachers rather than university undergraduates.

Recent research on digital Christianity in Southeast Nigeria further demonstrates the growing importance of faith-related social-media environments, although this literature focuses on religious exposure and engagement rather than university CRS pedagogy (Megwas et al., 2025).

The empirical gap therefore lies in the limited subject-specific investigation of social media as a pedagogical resource for university-level CRS, particularly among undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University. Existing studies provide evidence on general academic performance, e-learning, social-media adoption, or secondary-school religious education, but they do not sufficiently integrate these dimensions within a university CRS context. The present study addresses this gap by examining social-media use, academic engagement, resource access, collaboration, motivation, perceived learning outcomes, and associated challenges among CRS undergraduates at ABU.

Conclusion

Social media has become an important component of contemporary university learning, offering opportunities for communication, resource sharing, collaboration, interaction, and flexible access to educational materials. The literature reviewed indicates that its educational value is neither automatically positive nor inherently negative. Rather, outcomes depend substantially on the purpose, intensity, quality, and context of use.

Within Christian Religious Studies education, social media can provide additional opportunities for students to access scholarly and multimedia resources, participate in discussions, collaborate with colleagues, communicate with lecturers, and continue learning beyond the physical classroom. The Technology Acceptance Model provides an appropriate theoretical lens for explaining how students' perceptions of usefulness and ease of use influence their acceptance and utilisation of social media for academic purposes.

The empirical gap identified in the literature concerns the limited subject-specific evidence on social-media use among university-level CRS students in Nigeria, particularly within the context of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The proposed study therefore provides an opportunity to



generate institution-specific evidence concerning students' patterns of use, engagement, access to resources, collaboration, motivation, learning outcomes, and challenges.

Recommendations

The study has the following recommendations:

- I. CRS lecturers should integrate social media purposefully into teaching and learning by using appropriate platforms for course discussions, distribution of scholarly resources, academic announcements, formative activities, and feedback.
- II. Ahmadu Bello University should develop institutional guidelines for educational social-media use covering academic communication, privacy, responsible participation, intellectual property, and appropriate online conduct.
- III. Digital literacy training should be provided to CRS students and lecturers to enable them to evaluate online religious information, identify credible academic sources, avoid misinformation, and use digital resources responsibly.
- IV. CRS departments should develop moderated online learning communities through platforms such as WhatsApp or Telegram, with clearly defined academic objectives, discussion rules, and lecturer supervision.
- V. Students should be encouraged to distinguish academic use from excessive non-academic use of social media, with emphasis on using digital platforms for research, collaborative learning, scholarly communication, and access to credible CRS resources.

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