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Spirituality, Mental Health, and the Digital Age in Nigeria

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Abstract
The link between digital technology, spirituality, and mental health needs deeper scholarly exploration, especially in Nigeria. Spirituality, mental health, and digital technology are increasingly interconnected, shaping how people find meaning and cope with life. While most studies focus on the technical benefits of digital tools, little attention is given to how spirituality and mental health influence the digital age, a gap this desk-based study seeks to address. The paper aims to examine how spirituality and mental well-being shape the digital age in Nigeria's Christian, Islamic, and indigenous communities, guided by Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which emphasises the human search for meaning during psychological or existential struggles, especially in spirituality and mental health. However, the findings show that spirituality and mental health strengthen digital tools for coping and building emotional resilience, which also risk commodifying sacred practices, leading to five key recommendations: i) religious leaders should promote digital literacy for ethical use of faith-based technology; ii) app, developers should design inclusive spiritual apps for broader access, especially, on mental health; iii) faith groups and mental health experts should link wellness tools with spiritual care; and iv) policymakers and designers should set ethical AI standards to protect beliefs; and v) Scholars should encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration for better digital mental health. Conclusively, this paper argues that spirituality and mental well-being can shape and enhance the use of digital technologies in Nigeria's religious communities, provided they are guided ethically and culturally to prevent commodifying sacred practices and support holistic digital health.

Keywords: Digital Spirituality, Ethical Guidelines, Faith-Based Technology, Logotherapy

Introduction

The swift advancement of digital technology has significantly reshaped how people experience spirituality, manage mental health, and seek meaning in life, yet academic inquiry into the interplay of these domains remains underdeveloped. Although existing research has explored the individual impacts of spirituality on psychological well-being and the effects of digital media on mental health, religious practices have shifted online, altering rituals and authority while supporting coping, meaning, and well-being (Fahmi & Aswirna, 2025, pp. 1-16), but there is a lack of integrated analysis that considers their intersection; particularly within diverse and non-Western cultural settings; these integrations remain superficial, adopting practices divorced from their ontological foundations (Cucchi & Qoronfleh, 2025, pp. 1–6). However, this study bridges the gap by examining how spiritual and mental health experiences shape the digital age, providing context-based insights for holistic well-being in Nigeria.

Spirituality is linked to positive health outcomes, especially improved mental health, including reduced depression, suicidality, and substance abuse (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo & Koenig, 2006, pp. 242-250). However, digital wellness strategies such as self-care and goal setting enhance participants' perceptions of their physical, mental, and spiritual health (Craig-Rushing et al., 2021), also, social media-based mobile interventions can improve mental health literacy and resource awareness (Mindu et al., 2023: p. 1453). The paper uses desk research method to examine how spirituality and mental well-being shape the digital age in Nigeria's Christian, Islamic and traditional communities, highlighting how Nigerians find meaning and emotional balance on digital technology. Most importantly, the recommendations benefit religious leaders, app developers, policymakers, and scholars, while the paper contributes to academia by advancing ethical, cultural, and theological understanding of digital spirituality and mental health.

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Theoretical Framework

This study applies Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which centers on the human drive to find meaning, especially during psychological or existential struggles, and also centers on the will to meaning and includes concepts like existential frustration, vacuum, noogenic neurosis, and contrasts with the will to pleasure and power (Joshi et al, 2014, pp.227-253). In the same vein, it offers a useful lens for understanding how spirituality and mental health shape the use of digital platforms for coping, purpose-seeking, and well-being in the digital age.

Intersections of Spirituality and Mental Health

Mental health refers to emotional and psychological well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and cope with life. Similarly, mental health issues stem from genetic, social, and spiritual factors, including trauma, stress, poverty, and disconnection from purpose or community. Spirituality, on the other hand, is the pursuit of meaning and connection, often intersecting with mental well-being; and it also affects recovery from chronic illnesses and shapes medical and psychological interventions (Piedmont, 2004, pp. 213–222). In pursuing a balanced life, individuals face challenges, and both spirituality and cultural constructs can support their mental health and well-being (Mayer & Viviers, 2014, pp. 365–278). However, spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and fasting help individuals cope with stress and emotional challenges by fostering inner peace and resilience, which can also promote spiritual transformation by improving mental health (Gupta et al., 2018, pp. 190–199). Additionally, Dhar et al., (2011, pp. 275–282), affirms that "in 1998, the World Health Organisation expanded its 1946 health definition to include spiritual, physical, mental, and social well-being, not just the absence of illness". Therefore, prayer and meditation enhance emotional regulation, reduce stress, and improve mental clarity, showing clear mental health benefits.

Spirituality is part of religion but remains distinct; religion involves structured beliefs and practices centered on a higher power (Arrey et al., 2016, p. 7), a broad concept involving connection to self, others, nature, or a higher power (Jaysawal, 2023, pp.135–151), often serves as informal mental health resources, especially where access to professional services are limited, supporting emotional balance in both personal and therapeutic settings. Religiousness and spirituality can help reduce depression, especially through intrinsic belief, church attendance, and spiritual coping (Plante & Sharma, 2001, pp. 240–261). Likewise, increased religiosity or spirituality during substance abuse recovery is associated with improved coping, greater resilience, optimism, social support, and lower anxiety (Pardini, Plante, & Sherman, 2001:347–354). Faith communities in Nigeria also promote mental health through prayer, healing, and traditional rituals in Christian, Islamic, and indigenous settings, offering collective support that eases isolation and fosters healing. The term "faith-based health provider" broadly includes all faith-inspired entities, such as religious organisations, leaders, faith healers, traditional healers, herbalists, mission hospitals, psychiatric care, and chaplains (Nanji, 2022, pp. 1–16). These structures provide emotional support and cultural identity, helping individuals build resilience and find meaning through festivals, prayers, proverbs, including moral guidance from their cultural roots.

Biblical concepts of spiritual transformation and mental well-being are deeply intertwined, reflecting God's desire for holistic renewal of the human mind and spirit. Spiritual transformation begins with the inner change that comes through faith in Christ, leading to renewed thinking and emotional stability. As Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2, KJV), highlighting that true change begins within the mind through the work of the Holy Spirit. Also, trauma studies reveal how texts like Lamentations and Isaiah depict collective suffering and promote community healing (Boase & Frechette, 2016, pp. 1-250). This view highlights the Bible's relevance to modern trauma and healing. Likewise, mental well-being in Scripture is linked to trusting God and maintaining inner peace, as affirmed in Philippians 4:6–7, where believers are urged to reject anxiety and embrace divine peace that surpasses understanding. What is often seen as mental illness may simply be a natural response to life's unexpected changes, especially when such changes occur before one is ready to adapt (Chapman, 2025, p. 5). Thus, the Bible presents spiritual transformation not merely as moral reformation but as a holistic process that restores emotional balance, strengthens faith, and aligns human consciousness with God's purpose.

Herbal therapy in African traditions integrates spiritual practices with natural remedies, addressing both physical and psychological distress while reinforcing cultural identity, spiritual grounding, and communal support. Spiritual therapy, offered by traditional and faith healers as well as clergy, includes

practices like exorcism to support mental health (Villatoro et al., 2016, pp. 1–20; Givens et al., 2007, pp. 182–191), while Islamic counselling incorporates Islamic teachings into therapeutic practices to guide mental and spiritual well-being (Rassool, 2015, pp. 321–325; Isgandarova, 2014, p. 1). Similarly, Islamic mental health approaches combine faith, prayer (*Salah*), remembrance of God (*Dhikr*), and ethical living to promote inner balance, coping, and moral guidance. Both practices show that mental well-being is strengthened not only through medical interventions but also through culturally and spiritually informed methods that enhance resilience, meaning, and holistic care. Moreover, research shows that religious practices and local traditions offer significant coping mechanisms for individuals with mental illness (Mohr et al., 2010, pp. 158–172).

Spirituality and the Digital Age

Spiritual practices like worship and meditation are now widely conducted online through live streams, apps, and virtual groups. These platforms offer new ways to connect and participate beyond physical gatherings. Christianity supports science and technology that promote human flourishing, ease suffering, and uplift the vulnerable, as these reflect God's realm, while, meaningful and responsible change, rooted in relational values (Jackelén, 2021:6–18). Mobile apps grant users the ability to customise their experience, which vastly differs from traditional means of practicing religion that ascribe to a predetermined set of beliefs, values, and practices that are often fixed (Singer, 2023). As a result, digital rituals are reshaping how people engage with faith and community. Digital technologies and AI are redefining humanity, urging timely theological reflection on spiritual experience and existential risks. Online platforms have become new sacred spaces, offering virtual churches, retreats, and forums for spiritual expression.

Algorithmic spirituality is evident in apps like Hallow, Abide, Insight Timer, and Sattva, which offer personalised prayer, meditation, and spiritual content across various faith traditions. In online faith networks, virtual *halaqas* (Islamic study circles or gatherings) which are commonly held via platforms like Zoom, YouTube, or Clubhouse, allowing broader participation from global audiences. Also, Quran.com and Muslim Pro provide Qur'an recitations, prayer times, and *Dhikr* (the repeated recitation of God's names to glorify Allah), Using AI-driven recommendations, these platforms reflect how digital technologies are reshaping spiritual practices in a consumer-oriented way. The relationship between spirituality, mental well-being, and the digital age in Nigeria must integrate digital literacy and cultural values to be effective across the society, because social networks and virtual spaces can enhance religion yet also spread misinformation and divisive views, polarising faith communities (Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024, pp. 24–36). Paradoxically, the integration of Islamic principles and spiritual ethics into AI counseling remains underexplored, as most chatbots focus on psychological support without addressing core spiritual and theological aspects of Islamic counselling (Ginanjar & Setiawan, 2025, pp. 23–37; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Although, the digital environments expand access to spiritual experiences and decentralise authority but risk commodifying faith and raising concerns about authenticity, privacy, and technology's impact on belief. Therefore, preserving spirituality requires mindful awareness and relational intelligence in an increasingly technological world (Bingaman, 2020:291–305).

Influence of Mental Health on Digital Technology

Digital technology exerts significant influence on mental health, offering numerous advantages when used mindfully. Tools such as mental health applications, online therapy platforms, and virtual faith communities can promote emotional resilience, social support, and overall well-being. They provide privacy, accessibility, and opportunities for meaningful engagement, especially for individuals experiencing social anxiety or physical limitations, enabling participation in spiritual and social networks (Hardey, 2002, pp. 570-585; Matusitz, 2007, pp. 21–34). In addition, digital technology actively shapes emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, creating new avenues for self-expression, reflection, and personal growth (Verbeek, 2006, pp. 361-380). By facilitating connection, learning, and emotional regulation, digital tools can serve as a vital extension of psychological and spiritual resources, enhancing coping strategies and overall life satisfaction.

However, the pervasive and constant nature of digital engagement also poses risks to mental health. Excessive social media use and overreliance on online platforms can fuel comparison anxiety, undermine self-worth, encourage shallow validation, and increase isolation, stress, or burnout (Zubair & Raquib, 2020, pp. 243-267; Inan, 2013, p. 21). It can also cause fear of missing out (FoMo), and information overload, disrupting emotional balance; distinctively, FoMo is a persistent state of anxiety in which individuals engage in compulsive virtual social comparisons to satisfy cognitive needs and rewards (León, 2025, pp. 1–15). Moreover, internet technologies can contribute to addiction,

manipulation, exposure to misinformation, and erosion of cultural and spiritual values (Tosun, 2023, pp. 141–162). Notwithstanding, while digital platforms expand accessibility and convenience, they often lack the empathy, nuanced understanding, and personal connection required for deep emotional or spiritual healing. Consequently, the benefits of digital technology must be balanced with mindful, ethically guided use to protect psychological, emotional, and metal health.

Integrative Mental Health Practice

Integrative mental health approaches combine biological, psychological, social, and spiritual methods to enhance well-being, demonstrating that character and happiness can improve through targeted interventions (Cloninger, 2006, p. 71). Spirituality enriches these practices by providing meaning, ethical guidance, and emotional grounding, while digital technology increasingly shapes how such care is delivered (Swinton, 2025, pp. 123–130). Telehealth tools and digital platforms enable chaplains and spiritual care providers to reach wider populations, integrate into institutional systems, and offer specialised support, blending faith-based counseling with culturally sensitive and technology-assisted interventions (Winiger et al, 2025, p. 2; Winiger & Sprik, 2024, pp. 186–201). By combining traditional spiritual wisdom with digital resources, integrative practices foster holistic emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

The integration of AI in the digital era is reshaping mental health and spirituality by creating accessible platforms for emotional expression and intervention, reducing stigma, and transforming daily life (Sood & Gupta, 2025, pp.298–312; Singha, 2024, p. 28). AI-driven meditation apps, virtual pastoral support, faith-based mental health apps, and culturally adapted e-therapy platforms broaden access to care while integrating spiritual practices and clinical therapy. Research shows that AI chatbots effectively improve mental health and quality of life, supporting their use alongside traditional therapy (Sturgil et al., 2021, p. 25372). Interestingly, by combining traditional healing, spirituality, and digital innovations, these integrative approaches enhance resilience, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, providing personalised, culturally relevant, and ethically guided support for holistic well-being, especially on mental health in a digitally connected world.

Holistic digital well-being highlights how individuals use tools such as online support groups, faith-based apps, and virtual counseling to enhance their mental, emotional, and spiritual health. AI is reshaping mental health care by improving detection, diagnosis, and treatment (Oladimeji et al., 2023, p. 12), while its potential to enhance access and efficiency, emphasising the need for ethical oversight, regulatory frameworks, and model validation (Olawade et al., 2024). These examples reveal technology's potential to promote healing and growth when used mindfully and ethically. Although, their usage also expose challenges like digital fatigue, overdependence on virtual spaces, and weakened real-life connections, but by exploring settings like youth ministries and online therapy, they provide insights into effective practices and needed improvements with emphasis on the value of cultural awareness and user-focused digital designs for mental health.

Merging spirituality with technology in the digital age risks turning sacred experiences into algorithmic products, raising ethical concerns about belief manipulation and the exclusion of marginalised users. Ensuring ethical use requires safeguarding human dignity, cultural sensitivity, and authentic spiritual depth. Nonetheless, technology has transformed mental health care through teletherapy, mobile apps, and wearables that offer accessible, flexible support and track well-being, but, its integration also raises ethical and practical challenges (Altaf Dar, et al, 2023, p. 423-428). However, bridging the digital divide is still a challenge, as many people lack both access to technology and the skills to use it properly. Furthermore, ethically guided digital platforms can foster care, reflection, and spiritual growth, offering a foundation for future research in mental and spiritual well-being.

Mental Health Digital Platforms: Pros and Cons

i. ***AI-Powered Christian Faith Apps in Nigeria:*** AI-driven Christian applications such as YouVersion Bible App, Bible Gateway, Daily Devotional, and Abide Christian Meditation enhance spiritual growth and emotional well-being through personalised devotionals, prayer reminders, and guided reflections. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, exhibits strong religious influence that shapes social dynamics and affects many aspects of life (Yesufu, 2016, pp. 1–11), and these platforms help some believers maintain consistent faith practices and emotional balance. However, ethical issues such as privacy, data security, and manipulation threaten spiritual well-being (Alkhouri, 2024, p. 290), while excessive AI exposure also heightens mental health challenges (Kim et al., 2023, pp.1–17). Concerns persist that data privacy issues, faith

commercialisation, and algorithmic spirituality may harm emotional well-being, especially, if not well managed.

ii. ***Virtual Pastoral Counselling During COVID-19:*** The COVID-19 lockdowns prompted Nigerian churches to adopt digital platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp for pastoral care. Virtual counselling, prayers, and sermons offered emotional support amid isolation, proving technology's relevance in sustaining spiritual connection. These tools personalise faith for young believers, strengthening connection and community, as AI guidance makes spirituality more relevant in the digital age (Cheong, 2020, pp. 412–431). However, AI's algorithmic content may foster shallow, individualistic spirituality, weakening communal and traditional faith practices (Ndhlovu & Shamuyarira, 2024, pp. 1–14). Moreover, issues of digital access, confidentiality, and the absence of physical fellowship exposed the limitations of online ministry, especially, on mental health.

iii. ***Digital Mindfulness and Meditation Platforms:*** Mindfulness applications such as Headspace and Calm are increasingly used by Nigerian youths for stress relief and emotional regulation, irrespective of their religion. These platforms employ guided sessions and AI feedback to promote calmness and focus. Although, users report improved mental health, tensions arise where Western mindfulness principles conflict with local religious beliefs, highlighting the need for cultural adaptation. In today's tech-driven world, artificial intelligence increasingly shapes how people engage with their faith and spirituality (Chen & He, 2024, pp. pp. 1635–1645), but a major concern is that AI-mediated spirituality may reduce authentic faith experiences to data patterns, resulting in superficial religious engagement (Graves, 2017, pp. 333–351).

iv. ***Online Faith Communities and Support Networks:*** Online faith groups on platforms like Facebook and Telegram have become vital spaces for prayer, Bible study, and emotional support among members of Nigerian Christian denominations such as the Anglican, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches. Members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God moved from using Mixlr and WhatsApp to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for gospel outreach as COVID-19 boosted online religious participation (Oderinde, 2023, pp. 388–411). Likewise, spiritual practices such as counselling, prayer, fasting, Bible study, and Holy Ghost ministrations transitioned from physical gatherings to digital platforms through media integration (Musa & Osunlana, 2023, pp. 75–84). All the digital platforms promote belonging and moral encouragement; however, issues of authenticity, misinformation, and spiritual manipulation persist. Nevertheless, these digital communities remain strong channels for integrating faith with psychosocial support.

v. ***AI Chatbots for Mental and Spiritual Care:*** AI-powered chatbots offering spiritual and emotional guidance now serve as accessible alternatives to traditional counselling. In Nigeria, churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, and Living Faith Church increasingly use these tools to provide biblically grounded comfort and address the stigma surrounding mental health care. Digital religion extends beyond digitised liturgies to the fusion of cultural and social aspects of faith with elements of digital society (Helland, 2016, pp. 177–196), and AI now plays a vital role in this integration. However, while chatbots can answer theological questions, they lack human empathy, raising concerns that AI may promote shallow rather than meaningful spiritual experiences (La Cruz & Mora, 2024, p. 234). Meanwhile, concerns about doctrinal accuracy, emotional authenticity, and ethical data use still undermine their credibility in sensitive spiritual contexts.

vi. ***AI Chatbots for Mental and Spiritual Care in Islamic and Traditional Faiths:*** AI chatbots in Islamic and traditional faith contexts provide accessible mental and spiritual support, offering guidance based on religious teachings, reducing stigma, and reaching individuals hesitant to seek in-person help. For instance, many churches, mosques, and temples now use streaming platforms for online worship, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic (Tabti, 2022, pp. 333–353; Geesaman, 2023, pp. 227–249; Zheng, 2024, p. 79). Additionally, smartphone prayer applications such as Pray.com are widely used to schedule prayers, access sacred texts, and build virtual faith communities (Laird et al., 2024, pp. 2068-2090). These examples show that digital technology increasingly shapes contemporary spiritual experiences. Islamic Psychospiritual promotes holistic well-being across bio-psycho-socio-spiritual dimensions (Abd Razak, 2023, pp. 69–79), and integrating AI offers personalised, ethically guided guidance to enhance human flourishing through data processing and human-like interactions (Yang et al., 2025, pp. 89–98). Hence, AI offers the potential to provide personalised guidance that is consistent with Islamic principles, supporting ethical and spiritually informed decision-making. However, the digital platforms face limitations, including concerns over doctrinal accuracy, emotional authenticity, and ethical use of data, which may undermine trust and the depth of spiritual engagement.

The WHO has created traditional medicine training tools, which African countries have adapted to develop curricula and advance ATM research and development (WHO-AFRO, 2010; Kasilo et al., 2019). Consequently, training programmes are drawing on traditional healers' knowledge to document indigenous psychotherapeutic methods, while healers increasingly use AI to support consultation and integrate spiritual practices. Therefore, integrating Indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, and AI enhances social work in Africa by blending local wisdom with technology to meet community needs (Albert, 2025, pp. 37–47). Although, using traditional healers' knowledge preserves indigenous psychotherapeutic methods, it may risk inconsistencies and limit integration with modern clinical standards.

Conclusion

This study explores how spirituality and mental health influence the digital age in Nigeria's Christian, Islamic, and traditional religious contexts, highlighting that these dimensions not only enhance the use of digital technologies but also achieve their fullest potential when guided by ethical standards and culturally grounded spiritual values. By addressing the gaps in non-Western scholarship, the study promotes integrative models that merge spiritual traditions and mental health with digital innovation, providing both academic insights and practical guidance for interdisciplinary collaboration.

Recommendations

1. Religious leaders should promote digital literacy and ethical awareness in faith communities to ensure safe, informed use of digital tools and reduce the spread of misinformation.
2. App developers should create culturally inclusive spiritual apps to provide diverse global users with accessible and relevant spiritual resources.
3. Faith-based organisations and mental health practitioners should integrate mental health tools into faith-based platforms to promote holistic care that addresses emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs.
4. Policy makers and technology designers should establish ethical guidelines for AI in spiritual contexts to protect users' beliefs, autonomy, and prevent digital exclusion.
5. Academic institutions and interdisciplinary professionals should foster collaboration between theologians, psychologists, and technologists to develop well-rounded approaches to digital spiritual care.

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