

THE DIGITAL PULPIT: NAVIGATING FAITH, AUTHORITY AND DIVISION IN NIGERIA'S ONLINE RELIGIOUS SPHERE

By

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Abstract

The adoption and proliferation of digital media in Nigeria has been profoundly reshaping the religious landscape in the country. This is creating a vibrant and contentious online sphere where faith, authority and commerce intersect. This paper investigated the transformation of religious authority within this digital public sphere and the consequent construction of what it terms "digital moral economies" as a normative framework that guide social and economic behavior within online religious communities. Through an interdisciplinary framework that integrates mediatization theory, the concept of moral economy, and theories of influence, this study addressed how religious leaders establish and negotiate authority online, what specific moral economies are constructed, and how these digitally mediated frameworks influence social development, gender dynamics, and civic engagement. The analysis reveals that while digital platforms democratize religious discourse and offer new opportunities for empowerment, particularly for women, they also exacerbate intra-faith divisions, facilitate the spread of misinformation, and create new avenues for financial exploitation. The paper finds that the digital religious sphere is a complex space where traditional values and capitalist logics are both reinforced and challenged, leading to contradictory impacts on social progress. This research contributes a nuanced analysis to the underexplored field of African digital religion, introducing the concept of digital moral economies as a critical lens for understanding the intricate interplay of technology, faith, and society. The findings underscore the urgent need for policymakers, civil society, and religious leaders to develop sophisticated strategies for navigating the challenges and harnessing the opportunities of digital faith for equitable and sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Digital Pulpit, faith, morality, economic exploitation

Introduction

The pervasiveness of digital media has irrevocably altered the landscape of human interaction and religion, a cornerstone of Nigerian society which has not been immuned to this transformation (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). With an internet penetration rate of 45.5% as of early 2024 (DataReportal, 2024), Nigeria presents a fertile ground for the burgeoning field of digital religion studies (Chiluwa, 2012). The country's deeply religious populace, coupled with its vibrant and often chaotic digital public sphere, creates a unique and compelling context for examining the ways in which faith is being reshaped, contested, and reimagined online (Chiluwa, 2013). This digital metamorphosis intersects with a host of critical contemporary issues, including the governance of technology, the proliferation of misinformation, the establishment of online ethical frameworks, and the emergence of new forms of social and political mobilization (Scheid, 2025). The study of this phenomenon is, therefore, not merely an academic exercise but a matter of urgent social and political importance.

This paper sought to address a significant lacuna in the scholarly literature: the relative dearth of research on African digital religion, particularly in a country as influential as Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2012; Chiluwa, 2013). While the broader field of digital religion has expanded significantly in recent years, the specificities of how these new dynamics unfold in African contexts have remained largely underexplored (Chiluwa, 2013). The central problem this paper investigated is the transformation of religious authority in Nigeria's digital public sphere and its subsequent influence on the construction of what this paper terms "digital moral economies"—the ethical and normative frameworks that guide economic behavior and social relations within online religious communities (Keane, 2021). As religious leaders and their followers increasingly migrate to the digital realm, they are not simply replicating offline practices, rather, they are actively creating new forms of authority, community, and moral reasoning that have tangible and often profound consequences for social development, interfaith relations, and intra-faith cohesion (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Campbell & Bellar, 2022).

This paper aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1 To analyze how religious leaders establish, negotiate, and maintain their authority within Nigeria's diverse and often contentious digital public sphere.
- 2 To investigate the specific moral economies constructed and promoted by these online religious communities, and how they shape the economic and social lives of their followers.
- 3 To examine how these digitally mediated moral economies influence broader social development outcomes in Nigeria, particularly in the realms of gender, health, and civic engagement.
- 4 To assess the implications of these transformations for governance, especially in relation to the challenges of misinformation and the regulation of online religious content.

By addressing these objectives, this paper provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the complex interplay between religion, technology, and society in contemporary Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design, drawing upon a comprehensive and systematic review of existing literature. The research methodology centered on a critical synthesis of scholarly works to build a coherent and in-depth understanding of the digital religious landscape in Nigeria. This approach was appropriate for the study's objectives, which were to analyze and interpret existing knowledge, identify theoretical gaps, and propose a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of digital moral economies.

The research process involved a multi-stage literature search and selection strategy. Initial searches were conducted on major academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science, using keywords such as "digital religion," "religious authority," "Nigeria," "moral economy," "social media," and "Pentecostalism." The search was then expanded to include more recent publications (2023-2025) to address the reviewer's feedback and ensure the paper reflects the current state of the field. The selection criteria for sources included academic rigour, peer-review status, relevance to the research questions, and contributions to the overall understanding of the topic. In addition to academic sources, the study also incorporated data and reports from reputable organizations such as DataReportal and the Pew Research Center to provide empirical grounding and context.

The analytical framework of the study was guided by the theoretical concepts of mediatization, moral economy, and networked authority. These concepts are used to structure the analysis of the literature and to develop the central argument for the paper. The study's findings are presented in a thematic and narrative format, with each section of the paper addressing a specific research objective. The limitations of this study include its reliance on existing literature and the absence of primary data collection. The focus was primarily on the Christian, and specifically Pentecostal, context in Nigeria, which did not capture the full diversity of the country's religious landscape.

Literature Review

A comprehensive understanding of digital faith and moral economies in Nigeria requires an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on scholarship from digital religion studies, the anthropology of religion and economy, and African studies. This review synthesizes key literature in these areas to build a foundation for the paper's central arguments.

The scholarship on digital religion has moved beyond the initial question of whether online religious practices are "authentic" (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Instead, the focus has shifted to a more nuanced examination of how digital media transforms religious life. Heidi Campbell's work has been foundational in this regard, proposing that digital religion acts as a "bridge" connecting and extending online and offline religious practices and spaces (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). This perspective is crucial for understanding the Nigerian context, where online religious engagement often complements, rather than replaces, offline community participation (Chiluwa, 2012). A recent systematic review by Grigore and Cobzeanu (2025) confirms this trend post-pandemic, highlighting that while digitalization has become integral to religious life, it has not rendered physical co-presence obsolete.

A central theme in this body of literature is the transformation of religious authority. Scholars have argued that the internet and social media disrupt traditional, hierarchical models of religious authority by enabling new voices and perspectives to emerge (Cheong, 2013; Andok, 2024). This "democratization" of religious discourse, however, is not without its complexities. Pauline Hope Cheong (2013) has shown that while digital technologies can challenge established authorities, they can also be used to reinforce and extend their reach, creating new forms of "networked authority." More recently, scholars have introduced the concept of "platformized religious authority," which emphasizes how the specific affordances and logics of social media platforms shape the performance and legitimation of religious leadership (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2025). The rise of religious influencers and "pastorpreneurs" in Nigeria, who leverage social media to build personal brands and attract global followings, exemplifies this dual dynamic (Ojo, 2018).

The concept of "moral economy," first introduced by E.P. Thompson (1971) to describe the normative frameworks governing economic relations in pre-capitalist societies, has been adapted by anthropologists to analyze the ethical dimensions of economic life in contemporary contexts. Webb Keane (2021), in his work on religion and moral economy, argues that religious worldviews provide powerful resources for critical reflection on economic practices and values. Religious traditions, he contends, often posit an alternative to the purely instrumental rationality of the market, grounding economic action in a broader moral and cosmological framework (Keane, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where religious beliefs and values deeply permeate all aspects of life, including the economy (Ojo, 2018). The literature on moral economy provides a valuable analytical lens for examining how online religious communities in Nigeria construct and circulate their own distinctive ethical frameworks for economic behavior, from tithing and charitable giving to entrepreneurship and wealth creation (Sandikci, 2021).

Nigeria's religious landscape is characterized by its dynamism and the prominent role of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (Ojo, 2018). These movements, with their emphasis on personal experience, prosperity, and media-savvy leaders, have been particularly adept at harnessing the power of digital technologies to expand their influence (Adogame, 2010). Innocent Chiluwa's (2012) research on online religion in Nigeria highlights the emergence of the "Internet church" and the widespread claims of "cyber miracles," demonstrating the deep integration of digital media into the country's religious fabric. More recent scholarship confirms the continued and intensified use of social media by Pentecostal churches in Nigeria (Afolabi & Oderinde, 2024). The gendered dimensions of this digital transformation are also a growing area of research. For instance, some studies reveal that while digital platforms offer women new opportunities to exercise authority and bypass patriarchal structures, they also reinforce traditional gendered expectations (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024; Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the shift to online religious practices, making digital platforms an even more central arena for religious life and community formation in Nigeria (Rogers & Powe, 2022).

The credibility and influence of religious leaders in Nigeria make them powerful actors in shaping public opinion and behavior (Viskupič & Wiltse, 2022). This authority, however, can be a double-edged sword, particularly in the context of the digital media ecosystem. Research has shown that misinformation, especially concerning health and politics, often spreads through religious networks, with potentially devastating consequences for social development (Gbule, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic brought this issue into sharp focus, as religious leaders played a significant role in both promoting and discouraging vaccine uptake (Hicken et al., 2024). The spread of religious populism and the use of digital platforms to mobilize political support, as seen in the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests, also pose significant challenges for governance and democratic stability in Nigeria (Ubong, 2024). Understanding how religious authority is constructed and exercised in the digital public sphere is therefore crucial for addressing these pressing social and political issues.

Theoretical Framework

To adequately unpack the complex interplay of religious authority, moral economies, and social development in Nigeria's digital public sphere, this paper employed a multi-faceted theoretical framework. This framework integrates insights from the mediatization of religion, the concept of moral economy, and theories of platformized authority and influence to provide a robust analytical lens for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

The theory of mediatization offers a powerful tool for understanding how the logic of digital media shapes and transforms religious practices, beliefs, and authority structures (Hjarvard, 2012). Mediatization theory posits that media are not merely neutral channels for communication but are active agents that reshape social institutions from within (Hjarvard, 2012). In the context of religion, this means that the affordances of digital platforms—such as interactivity, virality, and algorithmic curation—fundamentally alter how religious leaders communicate, how communities are formed, and how authority is constructed and contested (Lövheim, 2016). This paper applies mediatization theory to examine how Nigerian religious leaders adapt their messaging and practices to the logic of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and how this process of adaptation, in turn, reshapes the nature of their authority (Zhang, 2025).

Building on the anthropological concept of moral economy, this paper introduces the conceptual framework of "digital moral economies." Digital moral economies are defined as the ethical and normative frameworks for economic and social behavior that are constructed, circulated, and contested within online religious communities (Keane, 2021; Sandikci, 2021).

These frameworks provide followers with a moral compass for navigating the complexities of contemporary economic life, offering guidance on everything from consumption and charitable giving to entrepreneurship and investment (Sandikci, 2021). This concept allows for a nuanced analysis of the specific moral logics that underpin the economic practices of digital faith communities, moving beyond a simplistic understanding of online religion as either a force for development or a tool of exploitation. A key focus of this framework is the tension between the globally circulating prosperity gospel, which often emphasizes individual wealth creation, and more traditional, communally oriented moral economies that prioritize collective well-being and social justice (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011; Barron, 2022).

The transformation of religious authority in the digital age is inextricably linked to new modes of establishing authenticity and exercising influence (Lakeland, 2006). In the disintermediated environment of social media, traditional markers of authority, such as institutional affiliation and theological training, are often less important than the ability to project an authentic and relatable persona (Kraus, 2010). This paper extends this analysis by incorporating the concept of "platformized religious authority" (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2025). This concept suggests that authority is no longer just networked but is actively co-produced by the interactions between religious actors, their followers, and the algorithmic logics of the platforms themselves. It draws on theories of influence and credibility to analyze how Nigerian religious leaders cultivate a sense of authenticity in their online interactions, using personal testimonies, behind-the-scenes glimpses into their lives, and direct engagement with followers to build trust and rapport (Kraus, 2010). It also examines the relationship between authority and influence, exploring how the credibility and authenticity of online religious leaders translate into the ability to shape the beliefs, behaviors, and economic decisions of their followers (Noy & O'Brien, 2025).

The Nigerian Digital Religious Sphere

Nigeria's digital religious landscape is a vibrant, complex, and rapidly evolving space, shaped by the country's unique social, cultural, and technological dynamics (Chiluwa, 2012). As of early 2024, Nigeria had 103 million internet users, representing a 45.5% penetration rate (DataReportal, 2024). This massive online population, which spends an average of 3 hours and 23 minutes per day on social media, ranking fifth globally (Punch, 2024), provides a fertile ground for the digital expression of faith. This section provides an overview of this landscape, examining the key platforms, actors, and practices that define it.

The digital religious landscape in Nigeria is dominated by a handful of globally popular social media platforms. As of the third quarter of 2024, WhatsApp was the most used platform, with over 95% of internet users engaging with it (Statista, 2025). Facebook follows, with over 51 million users as of April 2024 (NapoleonCat, 2024), serving as a central hub for religious communities to share information, stream services, and engage in discussions (Chiluwa, 2013). YouTube is another key platform, particularly for the dissemination of sermons and other forms of religious video content (Fuadi, 2025). The visual nature of Instagram makes it a popular choice for religious influencers and "pastorpreneurs" seeking to cultivate a personal brand and showcase a desirable lifestyle (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). Finally, WhatsApp plays a crucial, if less visible, role in the digital religious ecosystem, serving as a platform for more intimate forms of communication and community building within smaller, closed groups (Chiluwa, 2013).

The digital religious landscape in Nigeria is populated by a diverse array of actors, from established religious leaders and institutions to new, digitally-native influencers and entrepreneurs (Ojo, 2018). Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors, with their emphasis on media-savvy communication and personal charisma, have been particularly successful in

translating their authority into the digital realm (Adogame, 2010). They use social media to broadcast their sermons, share testimonies of miracles and financial breakthroughs, and cultivate a sense of intimacy and direct connection with their followers (Chiluwa, 2012). The digital environment has also created new opportunities for women to exercise religious authority (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). While still facing significant barriers within traditional religious institutions, women are using digital platforms to build their own followings and establish themselves as credible and influential voices in the religious public sphere (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019). Authority in these digital spaces is not simply a top-down phenomenon; it is actively negotiated through likes, shares, comments, and other forms of audience engagement, creating a more dynamic and participatory religious culture (Cheong, 2013).

Digital platforms have enabled the formation of new kinds of religious communities that transcend geographical boundaries and traditional institutional affiliations (Hutchings, 2011; Foltz, 2003; Dawson, 2013). These “virtual congregations” and online fellowships provide a space for believers to connect with one another, share their faith, and find a sense of belonging (Hutchings, 2011). Engagement within these communities is often highly interactive, with members actively participating in discussions, sharing prayer requests, and offering support to one another (Chiluwa, 2013). This has led to the emergence of a hybrid form of religious practice, where online engagement is seamlessly integrated with offline activities (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). For many Nigerians, particularly young, urban, and educated individuals, these digital religious communities offer a more flexible, personalized, and participatory alternative to traditional forms of religious observance (Chiluwa, 2012).

The dynamism and accessibility of Nigeria’s digital religious landscape also present significant challenges, particularly in the realm of interfaith and intrafaith relations. The digital space has, in many ways, amplified existing tensions and created new ones. The relative anonymity of online interactions can embolden individuals to express extremist or intolerant views that they might not voice in face-to-face encounters (Scheid, 2025). This has led to an increase in hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric, which can have real-world consequences. The digital space has also become a battleground for competing religious ideologies, with different groups using social media to proselytize, debate, and critique one another. This can lead to a hardening of religious identities and a deepening of sectarian divides.

One of the most significant but underexamined consequences of the digital transformation of religion in Nigeria is the exacerbation of intra-faith divisions and doctrinal disputes. The rise of online religious influencers has created a new class of religious authorities who are not necessarily accountable to any institutional or denominational body (Cheong, 2013). This has led to a fragmentation of religious authority and a proliferation of competing theological interpretations. Doctrinal disputes that might have once been confined to a particular church or denomination can now play out in the full glare of the public on social media, with followers taking sides and engaging in heated and often acrimonious debates. Among Pentecostal churches, which constitute a significant portion of Nigeria’s religious landscape, these digital disputes have become particularly pronounced (Gaiya, 2002). Disagreements over the authenticity of miracles, the legitimacy of particular prophets, and the proper interpretation of scripture are now played out on Facebook and YouTube, with thousands of followers watching and commenting. This public airing of disagreements can lead to a weakening of institutional authority and a decline in trust in traditional religious leaders. When a follower sees their pastor being publicly criticized by another religious leader on social media, it can create doubt and confusion about whose authority should be trusted.

The digital space has also created new opportunities for financial exploitation, with some self-proclaimed prophets and pastors using their online platforms to solicit donations and sell a variety of spiritual products and services (Barron, 2022). This has led to a growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment among some Nigerians, who see the digital religious sphere as a marketplace of charlatans and hucksters. The lack of any regulatory mechanism or institutional oversight means that there are few consequences for those who engage in fraudulent or exploitative practices.

Digital Moral Economies and Social Implications

This section explores the formation and impact of digital moral economies in Nigeria, directly addressing the second and third objectives of this paper. It examines the specific ethical frameworks articulated by online religious leaders, their influence on the economic behavior of followers, the gendered dimensions of this phenomenon, and its broader implications for civic participation and social development.

Online religious leaders in Nigeria articulate a diverse and sometimes contradictory set of moral economies. The most prominent of these is the prosperity gospel, which frames wealth and material success as signs of divine favour and moral righteousness (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011). Through slickly produced videos, motivational quotes, and personal testimonies of financial breakthroughs, digital "pastorpreneurs" promote a vision of faith that is deeply intertwined with capitalist logics of accumulation and individual achievement (Barron, 2022). However, this is not the only moral economy at play. Many online religious communities also emphasize more traditional values of communal solidarity, mutual support, and charitable giving (Sandikci, 2021). They promote ethical consumption practices, encourage followers to invest in their communities, and articulate frameworks for labour and economic justice that challenge the excesses of neoliberal capitalism (Sandikci, 2021). The digital environment allows for the circulation and contestation of these different moral economic visions, creating a complex and dynamic ethical landscape.

The moral economies constructed in Nigeria's digital religious sphere have a profound influence on the economic behavior of followers. The practice of tithing and online giving is a central feature of many digital religious communities, with leaders using a variety of persuasive techniques to encourage financial contributions from their followers (Barron, 2022). Beyond direct giving, the teachings of online religious leaders also shape their followers' investment and consumption decisions, with many seeking guidance on everything from starting a business to managing their personal finances (Sandikci, 2021). These digital communities also serve as important sites for the formation of social capital and economic networks. Followers connect with one another, share business ideas, and provide mutual support, creating new opportunities for economic advancement that may not be available through traditional channels (Avnimelech & Zelekha, 2023).

The emergence of digital moral economies in Nigeria has significant implications for gender relations and women's economic empowerment. While traditional religious institutions in Nigeria have been predominantly male-dominated, with women relegated to supportive roles, digital platforms have created new opportunities for women to exercise religious authority and build independent economic enterprises (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024; Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019). Female religious leaders have leveraged digital platforms to build substantial followings, often by offering a different style of religious communication that emphasizes emotional connection, practical spiritual guidance, and personal testimony (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). These women have used their platforms to establish themselves as credible religious authorities, often by demonstrating their spiritual power

through testimonies of healing, prophecy, and divine intervention (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019). Some have also used their digital presence to launch commercial enterprises, including online prayer services, spiritual consultations, and the sale of religious materials and merchandise (Avnimelech & Zelekha, 2023). However, the opportunities presented by digital platforms for women's religious authority are constrained by persistent gendered expectations and power dynamics (Tsuria, 2020). Female religious leaders often face pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, emphasizing their roles as nurturers, wives, and mothers even as they exercise religious authority (Tsuria, 2020). The prosperity gospel, with its emphasis on male headship and female submission, can also reinforce patriarchal norms, even as it offers women new avenues for economic advancement (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011). Furthermore, women's authority in digital spaces is frequently challenged or undermined by male religious leaders and followers, who may question the legitimacy of women's spiritual authority or attribute their success to male mentors or family connections (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). This creates a situation where women's empowerment is real but also constrained and contested.

The spread of misinformation through religious networks has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges posed by the digital transformation of religion in Nigeria (Rogers & Powe, 2022). The credibility and authority of religious leaders make them powerful actors in shaping public opinion and behavior, particularly in contexts where trust in government institutions and mainstream media is low (Viskupič & Wiltse, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this dynamic became starkly apparent, as religious leaders played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward vaccines and other public health interventions (Gbule, 2022). Some religious leaders promoted vaccine hesitancy by framing vaccination as a form of spiritual contamination or as part of a global conspiracy to control African populations (Hicken et al., 2024). Others promoted unproven treatments or discouraged followers from seeking medical care. These messages spread rapidly through religious networks, contributing to lower vaccination rates in some communities and potentially contributing to preventable deaths (Rogers & Powe, 2022). The challenge of addressing health misinformation in religious contexts is particularly acute because it requires engaging with deeply held beliefs about the nature of illness, healing, and divine intervention.

Digital religious communities have also emerged as important sites for civic mobilization and political engagement in Nigeria. Religious leaders and communities have used digital platforms to mobilize support for various causes, from advocacy for social justice to political campaigns (Rogers & Powe, 2022). The 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria, for example, saw significant participation from religious communities, with religious leaders using their platforms to encourage civic engagement and political activism (Ubong, 2024). This mobilization capacity of digital religious communities represents both an opportunity and a challenge for democratic governance. On the one hand, it demonstrates the potential for religious communities to contribute to civic engagement and social change. On the other hand, the mobilization capacity of religious leaders can also be used to promote divisive political agendas or to undermine democratic processes.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the rapidly evolving landscape of digital religion in Nigeria, demonstrating that the digital mediation of faith is not peripheral but central to contemporary religious life and public discourse. By analyzing the transformation of religious authority and the emergence of digital moral economies, the study has shown how online religious spaces have become key arenas for negotiating legitimacy, shaping norms, and influencing socio-economic and political realities.

The findings reveal that digital platforms enable both the expansion of established religious authority and the rise of new, digitally mediated leaders, contributing to a more fragmented and contested religious field. These online communities function not only as spaces of worship but also as sites where moral economies are constructed and circulated, shaping followers' economic practices, social behaviours, and civic orientations. While these dynamics generate opportunities for social capital formation and mobilization, they also pose risks, including exploitation, inequality, and the amplification of misinformation. The digital religious sphere thus operates as a complex domain capable of both mitigating and intensifying social tensions.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the emerging field of African digital religion studies by introducing the concept of digital moral economies as an analytical framework for understanding how religious authority, technology, and socio-economic life intersect. Its interdisciplinary approach offers a foundation for further inquiry into the governance, ethical, and developmental implications of digitally mediated faith communities.

Future research should pursue longitudinal analyses to track the evolution of these moral economies over time, comparative studies across African contexts, and platform-specific investigations into how technological affordances shape religious practice and authority. Such research would deepen understanding of how digital infrastructures influence religious life and public engagement.

Cumulatively, digital religion in Nigeria represents both a transformative opportunity and a significant challenge. Its capacity to mobilize communities, shape moral discourse, and influence public life underscores the need for thoughtful engagement by religious leaders, civil society actors, and policymakers. A context-sensitive approach that respects religious freedom while promoting ethical responsibility is essential for navigating the complexities of faith in the digital age. Understanding these dynamics is not merely an academic exercise but a necessary step toward fostering a more informed, accountable, and socially constructive digital public sphere.

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