



DIGITALISATION AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR INTERPRETING THE MATTHEAN GREAT COMMISSION (MATTHEW 28:19-20) IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHURCHES

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital ministry following the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped how many African churches approach evangelism, worship, and discipleship. Although studies on Matthew 28:18-20 have examined discipleship, baptism, and the missionary mandate of the church, relatively little attention has been given to how digitalisation influences the interpretation and practice of the Great Commission within African contexts. This article addresses that gap by examining the implications of digital ministry for the Matthean understanding of disciple formation. The study employs the grammatico-historical method alongside an African contextual hermeneutical framework, bringing exegetical analysis of Matthew 28:18-20 into dialogue with contemporary discussions on digital religion. Particular attention is given to the participles “going,” “baptising,” and “teaching” as integral components of disciple making. The analysis shows that digital technologies have expanded opportunities for communication, instruction, and pastoral engagement, yet they also expose tensions surrounding embodied presence, sacramental participation, and communal formation. These tensions are further shaped by infrastructural and socio-cultural realities across many African contexts. The article argues that Matthew’s portrayal of disciple making is fundamentally relational, communal, and embodied, thereby positioning digital technologies as valuable extensions of ministry rather than substitutes for the practices through which Christian formation is sustained.

Keywords: Digitalisation; Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); Digital Ministry; Embodied Discipleship; African Church Contexts



Introduction

Digitalisation has become an important tool for churches seeking to proclaim the Gospel in contemporary society. Information and communication technology (ICT) enhance the efficiency and accessibility of many human activities, including religious practice. Churches in technologically advanced contexts have long integrated ICT into ministry structures, supported by reliable infrastructure, trained personnel and organisational capacity. This integration became especially significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many congregations relied on virtual platforms to sustain worship, teaching and pastoral engagement. As Latif, et al. (2021) note, digitalisation enabled churches to preserve and modernise their ministries when physical gatherings were restricted.

Despite these advantages, digitalisation in many African church contexts remains hindered by irregular power supply, weak ICT infrastructure, resistance to organisational change, limited staff competence, and insufficient leadership (Gberevbie et al., 2018; Hai et al., 2020). These challenges not only affect administrative efficiency but also limit the church's capacity to engage in meaningful discipleship, extend its evangelistic reach, and faithfully carry out the mandate of the Great Commission. Other studies engage digitalisation primarily in relation to public service delivery or system implementation challenges (Ehiane et al., 2019; Okudolo & Ojakorotu, 2020; Adeyanju & Akinyemi, 2018; Amaechi & Etoh, 2017). Yet the implications of digitalisation for the interpretation and practical outworking of the Matthean Great Commission have received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to address this gap.

Previous research on Matthew 28:19-20 has examined discipleship identity (Acheaw 2021), the Trinitarian model of baptism (Kuncoro, Susanto & Rimun, 2022), ecclesial responsibility (Stevanus, Arifianto, Poluan & Tanhidy n.d.) and the intended audience of the Commission (Lee & Viljoen, 2010; Smith 2016; Johnson, 2018). Few studies, however, investigate how digitalisation both facilitates and constrains the fulfilment of this mandate in contemporary African settings. This study investigates these challenges with particular attention to their implications for Christian discipleship in digitally mediated contexts.

Matthew 28:18-20 is widely understood as Jesus' final directives to the church, entrusting believers with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples and making disciples through baptism and instruction in his teachings. This raises important questions: What is the central aim of Jesus commission? By what means should disciples disseminate the Gospel? How does digitalisation challenge the intended mode of fulfilling this mandate?

This study employs a qualitative design based on literature review and exegetical analysis. The grammatico-historical method guides the exegesis of Matthew 28:18-20, examining Greek grammar, syntax and historical context to ascertain authorial intent. Complementing this, an African contextual hermeneutical framework connects exegetical insights to contemporary digital practices, drawing on African church case studies, post-pandemic digital ministry research and theological reflections on discipleship formation. This combined approach enables a critical evaluation of digitalisation in relation to embodied and sacramental ministry.

By situating digitalisation within the textual and theological framework of Matthew 28:18-20, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on the relationship between digital ministry and biblical interpretation. The findings aim to guide churches in integrating digital tools responsibly while preserving the relational and physical dimensions central to disciple making, ensuring that the mission entrusted to the church is pursued faithfully and effectively.

Exegesis of Matthew 28:19-20

Matthew 28:18-20 forms the climactic conclusion of the Matthew's Gospel and presents a theological and missional mandate for the church. The passage unites Christological authority, the call to make disciples of all nations, and the enduring presence of Christ with His followers. An exegetical analysis that considers historical context, Greek lexical features, and theological motifs clarifies the meaning of this commission and its relevance for contemporary Christian ministry.

Contextual Overview: Historical and Literary Setting

Within the literary structure of Matthew, the Great Commission appears after the resurrection narrative and functions both as the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry and the inauguration of the church's mission. The setting on a mountain in Galilee evokes significant moments of divine revelation in the Gospel, including the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 verse 1 and the Transfiguration in Matthew 17 verse 1, highlighting the authoritative nature of Jesus' final instruction (France 2007).

Historically, the passage reflects the situation of the Matthean community, a relatively small group navigating social pressures and emerging theological boundaries. The universal scope of the command, expressed through the phrase all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), signals continuity with Israel's vocation while extending the mission beyond ethnic



Israel into a developing global vision of the early Christian movement (Luz 2005). Positioned after Jesus' declaration of universal authority in verse 18, the commission is grounded not in human initiative but in the sovereign authority of the risen Christ.

Core Components of the Great Commission

The central imperative of the passage is encapsulated in the verb μαθητεύσατε ("make disciples"), an aorist active imperative that governs the accompanying participles (Wallace, 1996). Derived from μαθητής ("disciple"), the verb indicates a process of forming committed followers rather than merely producing converts (Turner, 2008). The three participles πορευθέντες ("going"), βαπτίζοντες ("baptising"), and διδάσκοντες ("teaching") function as attendant circumstance participles that describe the means by which disciples are made.

In Classical Greek, μαθητεύω denotes learning from or becoming attached to a teacher, particularly within philosophical or rhetorical communities, emphasising intellectual and ethical formation (Liddell et al., 1996). In the Septuagint (LXX), although comparatively rare, the term is associated with wisdom instruction, indicating a pedagogical bond shaped by covenant identity (Tov, 2001).

Within the New Testament, μαθητεύω appears chiefly in Matthew, where it expresses comprehensive discipleship grounded in obedience to Jesus' teaching and participation in His mission. Early Church writers apply μαθητεύω to catechetical practice, highlighting disciplined adherence to apostolic doctrine and incorporation into the worshipping community (Eusebius, 1999). Thus, μαθητεύσατε in Matthew 28:19 frames the Great Commission as a holistic mandate that forms mature followers through intentional instruction and communal formation.

The participle πορευθέντες ("going"), derived from πορεύομαι, denotes movement in the sense of journeying, proceeding, or conducting oneself. In Classical Greek, the verb frequently expresses purposeful travel, often linked with official or military activity, highlighting intentional rather than incidental motion (Liddell et al., 1996). Within the LXX, πορεύομαι regularly renders Hebrew הלך, conveying covenantal obedience or disobedience in one's life direction and extending the verb's semantic field from physical movement to ethical orientation (Tov, 2001).

In the New Testament, πορευθέντες maintains this dynamic nuance. Although an aorist participle, it functions with imperatival force when paired with the main verb μαθητεύσατε, framing mission as an outward directed initiative (Wallace, 1996). Matthew often presents πορεύομαι in contexts of purposeful journeys that enact divine commission or prophetic fulfillment (Turner, 2008).

Early Church writers employ πορεύομαι and its participial forms to describe apostolic itinerancy and evangelistic outreach, emphasizing deliberate engagement with diverse communities (Athanasius, 4th c.; Eusebius, 3rd to 4th c.). Thus, πορευθέντες in Matthew 28:19 conveys more than spatial departure; it encapsulates intentional, boundary crossing participation in God's redemptive mission. Consequently, the lexical and syntactical features of πορευθέντες support an interpretation of the Great Commission as a call to purposeful, outward focused involvement in forming new disciples.

The participle βαπτίζοντες ("baptising") introduces the sacramental dimension of disciple making. Baptism is performed "in the name" (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with the singular ὄνομα in a triadic formula suggesting early Trinitarian awareness within the Matthean community (Hagner, 1995). The verb βαπτίζω originally denotes immersion, dipping, or submersion, a meaning attested in Classical Greek literature where it conveys ceremonial washing, dyeing, or submergence (Liddell et al., 1996).

Building on this ritual background, in the LXX, βαπτίζω is comparatively rare but occurs in contexts of ritual washing, often signifying purification and covenantal fidelity (Tov, 2001). In the New Testament, βαπτίζω acquires theological significance, symbolising identification with Christ, incorporation into the believing community, and participation in salvation history (Turner, 2008).

Early Church writers emphasised the embodied and communal dimensions of baptism, linking immersion with catechetical instruction and initiation rites (Didache, late first to early second century; Eusebius, 1999). Thus, βαπτίζοντες in Matthew 28:19 underscores a physically enacted, communal, and covenantal process central to the Great Commission and the formation of disciples.

The participle διδάσκοντες ("teaching") highlights the instructional and ethical dimensions of discipleship. The content of the teaching is "all that I have commanded you," indicating comprehensive adherence to Jesus' instructions. The verb διδάσκω in Classical Greek denotes structured, relational instruction, often within schools of philosophy or rhetoric, emphasizing intellectual formation and ethical habituation (Liddell et al., 1996).

Building on this background, in the LXX, διδάσκω typically translates Hebrew verbs associated with moral and religious instruction, linking teaching to covenantal fidelity and wisdom (Tov, 2001). In the New Testament,



διδάσκω conveys both content and relational formation, situating teaching within the ongoing process of discipleship and community life (Keener, 2009). The participle διδάσκοντες thus underscores sustained formation rather than momentary instruction.

Early Church writers applied διδάσκω to catechetical and doctrinal instruction, stressing ethical modeling and communal formation in line with apostolic tradition (Didache, late first to early second century; Eusebius, 1999). Together with πορευθέντες and βαπτίζοντες, διδάσκοντες completes a holistic pattern of discipleship encompassing intentional outreach, sacramental incorporation, and ongoing ethical and doctrinal formation.

Theological Implications for Discipleship

Matthew 28:19-20 portrays discipleship as an intrinsically embodied and relational vocation anchored in the risen Jesus' authority and abiding presence. The imperative μαθητεύσατε, articulated through the attendant participles πορευθέντες, βαπτίζοντες, and διδάσκοντες, depicts disciple making as a holistic process of formative participation rather than the mere conveyance of doctrinal content. Baptism marks incorporation into the triune community, while instruction cultivates ongoing fidelity to Jesus' commands. The promise μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι locates the efficacy of this vocation not in human effort but in Christ's continual presence and agency (Wright, 1995). Such a vision resists reductionist models that construe discipleship primarily as information transfer, foregrounding instead the practices of relational engagement, ethical imitation, and communal embodiment. Although digitalisation may extend communicative reach, it remains unable to supplant the physical, sacramental, and formational dimensions indispensable to authentic discipleship (Keener, 2009).

Bridging Exegesis and Digitalisation: Reading Matthew 28:19-20 in a Digital Age

A closer reading of Matthew 28:19-20 suggests that the Great Commission is concerned not only with the expansion of the Christian mission but also with the manner in which disciples are formed. The central imperative μαθητεύσατε ("make disciples") is accompanied by participles that describe a process involving movement, incorporation, and instruction. These actions are not presented as isolated activities but as interconnected dimensions of Christian formation.

The participle πορευθέντες ("going") functions in relation to μαθητεύσατε and points to purposeful engagement with people in their lived contexts (Wallace, 1996; Turner, 2008). Within Matthew's narrative, mission is consistently associated with encounter, presence, and interaction. The command therefore extends beyond the dissemination of a message to include participation in the social and relational realities of those to whom the gospel is proclaimed.

Likewise, βαπτίζοντες ("baptizing") introduces the communal and covenantal dimension of disciple making. Baptism is performed into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and signifies incorporation into a community shaped by allegiance to the Triune God (Hagner, 1995). The rite assumes shared participation, public witness, and the use of material elements, all of which locate discipleship within the concrete practices of ecclesial life.

The participle διδάσκοντες ("teaching") further indicates that discipleship involves sustained formation in the teachings of Jesus. In both Jewish and Greco-Roman settings, teaching ordinarily occurred within relationships of mentorship and imitation rather than through the transfer of information alone (Keener, 2009; Liddell et al., 1996). Early Christian communities similarly understood instruction as inseparable from participation in a community of practice (Didache; Eusebius, 1999).

Taken together, these participles portray discipleship as a process that combines proclamation, communal incorporation, and ongoing formation. This observation does not invalidate the use of digital technologies in ministry. Rather, it provides theological criteria by which their role may be assessed. As Campbell (2013), Hutchings (2017), and Garner (2019) observe, digital media can extend the church's communicative reach and facilitate new forms of religious interaction. The question raised by Matthew 28:19-20 is whether such forms of engagement adequately serve the broader goal of disciple formation envisioned in the text.

Embodied versus Digital Models of Ministry

The relationship between embodied and digital forms of ministry has become a significant area of debate within contemporary theology, particularly since the expansion of online worship during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Proponents of digital ministry argue that online platforms have enabled churches to sustain pastoral care, teaching, fellowship, and evangelistic outreach across geographical boundaries. Research in digital religion has shown that virtual communities can foster meaningful forms of interaction, collective identity, and spiritual support among participants who may never gather physically in the same location (Campbell, 2013; Cheong et al., 2012; Hutchings, 2017).



These developments have led some scholars to reconsider traditional assumptions about presence and participation. Schmidt (2020), Mpofu (2021), Boniface et al. (2025), and Foley (2021), for example, suggest that extraordinary circumstances may require fresh theological reflection on the possibilities of digitally mediated worship and sacramental practice. Their arguments challenge the view that meaningful religious participation is always dependent upon physical proximity.

Nevertheless, the exegetical findings of this study indicate that Matthew's presentation of disciple making remains closely connected to embodied forms of communal life. The activities described by πορευθέντες, βαπτίζοντες, and διδάσκοντες are situated within patterns of interaction that involve presence, participation, and shared practice. Baptism, in particular, is presented not simply as an act of instruction but as a communal rite of incorporation that takes place within the gathered life of believers (Hagner, 1995). In a similar manner, teaching in Matthew extends beyond the communication of ideas to include the formation of persons through ongoing relationships of learning and obedience.

This does not mean that digital ministry lacks theological value. Digital platforms may assist churches in maintaining communication, extending pastoral care, supporting catechesis, and reaching individuals who might otherwise remain disconnected from Christian communities. Yet the evidence from Matthew 28:19-20 suggests that such practices are most appropriately understood as extensions of ecclesial ministry rather than complete alternatives to gathered Christian life. The Matthean Commission envisages discipleship as a lived and communal reality in which teaching, worship, and incorporation into the people of God occur within relationships of mutual presence and accountability.

For this reason, the challenge facing contemporary churches is not whether digital technologies should be used, but how they may be integrated in ways that remain consistent with the theological vision of discipleship reflected in Matthew's Gospel. The enduring significance of the Great Commission lies not only in its call to make disciples of all nations but also in its portrayal of the kind of community through which such disciples are formed.

Digitalisation and the Challenges to the Great Commission

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in Christian ministry. Across many ecclesial traditions, online platforms became essential for sustaining worship services, pastoral care, discipleship programmes, and congregational communication during periods of restricted physical gathering. This development expanded the church's communicative capacity and enabled forms of engagement that would otherwise have been difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, the rapid integration of digital technologies has also raised important theological and practical questions concerning the nature of disciple-making envisioned in Matthew 28:18-20. The Matthean Commission is framed within practices of presence, instruction, and incorporation into a community of faith, raising the question of how far such practices can be mediated through digital environments.

Christ's Authority and Technological Mediation

The Great Commission begins not with a strategy for mission but with the declaration of Christ's universal authority (Matt. 28:18). This theological foundation is significant because it locates the church's mission in the person and mandate of the risen Christ rather than in particular methods of communication. Digital technologies undoubtedly increase visibility and outreach, yet their effectiveness should not become the primary criterion by which ministry is evaluated. The participle πορευθέντες, βαπτίζοντες, and διδάσκοντες describe disciple-making as a process of relational formation within a community of believers (Wallace, 1996; Dyer, 2020). Consequently, questions of technological efficiency must remain secondary to the theological purpose of forming faithful disciples.

Baptism, Community, and the Limits of Virtual Participation

The challenge becomes particularly evident in relation to sacramental practice. The participle βαπτίζοντες points to baptism as an act of initiation that is both communal and embodied. Within the New Testament, baptism involves physical participation, public witness, and incorporation into the body of Christ (Bietenhard, 1971; Hagner, 1995). Digital platforms may facilitate preparation for baptism and provide opportunities for instruction, but they do not readily reproduce the material and communal dimensions that the rite presupposes.

This issue remains the subject of ongoing debate. Some scholars argue that extraordinary circumstances may justify forms of digitally mediated sacramental participation (Thompson, 2018; Soukup, 2019; Schmidt, 2020; Boniface et al., 2025). Others maintain that the ecclesiological significance of baptism is inseparable from the gathered community. The Matthean text itself offers support for the latter position insofar as disciple-making is presented as incorporation into a visible community of faith rather than merely participation in a virtual network.



African Realities and the Digital Divide

The practical challenges of digital ministry are particularly evident in many African contexts. Access to reliable electricity, affordable internet services, and digital infrastructure remains uneven, affecting both clergy and congregants (Gberevbie et al., 2018). These conditions shape who can participate consistently in online ministry and who remains excluded from it. In addition, levels of digital literacy vary considerably, creating further barriers to sustained engagement (Magezi, 2021).

Beyond infrastructural concerns, cultural expectations regarding worship and fellowship also influence the reception of digital ministry. In many African church traditions, communal worship, personal interaction, and shared religious experience remain central expressions of ecclesial life. Consequently, digital participation is often viewed as a temporary accommodation rather than a complete alternative to physical gathering (Mpofu, 2021). Where online engagement replaces rather than supplements communal worship, concerns emerge regarding accountability, belonging, and long-term spiritual formation (Dunlow, 2021).

Ecclesiological and Ethical Considerations

The growth of digital ministry also raises broader ecclesiological concerns. Online environments can encourage passive patterns of religious consumption in which participants receive content without becoming actively involved in the life of a faith community (Oliver, 2022; Blackmer, 2024). Furthermore, the decentralised nature of digital communication creates opportunities for misinformation, doctrinal confusion, and fragmented expressions of authority (Jung, 2023). These developments do not invalidate digital ministry, but they underscore the need for theological discernment and pastoral oversight.

Taken together, these challenges suggest that digital technologies should be understood as instruments that assist the church's mission rather than as replacements for its communal and sacramental life. The participles “going,” “baptising,” and “teaching” depict disciple-making as a process rooted in relationships, embodied participation, and ongoing formation. Digital platforms can extend aspects of this ministry, but the Matthean vision ultimately points beyond communication alone toward the creation of communities shaped by the presence of Christ and the shared practices of discipleship.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis suggests that debates surrounding digital ministry cannot be resolved solely by appealing to technological effectiveness or institutional necessity. Rather, the theological assumptions embedded within Matthew 28:18-20 provide an important lens through which contemporary digital practices should be evaluated. The Matthean Commission presents disciple-making not as the dissemination of religious information but as participation in a community shaped by Christ's authority, baptismal incorporation, and sustained instruction. This observation raises important questions concerning the extent to which digitally mediated forms of ministry can reproduce the relational and formative dimensions of Christian discipleship.

Recent scholarship on digital religion has demonstrated that online environments are capable of facilitating meaningful religious interaction. Live streamed worship, virtual fellowship groups, social media engagement, and online learning platforms have enabled churches to maintain pastoral relationships and extend teaching ministries beyond traditional geographical boundaries (Campbell, 2013; Dyer, 2020). In this respect, digital technologies have expanded opportunities for participation, particularly during periods of crisis and social disruption. Kabongo (2022) similarly argues that digital practices need not be viewed as competitors to embodied ministry but can function as important instruments for sustaining ecclesial life.

At the same time, the exegetical findings of this study suggest that the Matthean vision of discipleship involves more than communication and access. The participles *πορευθέντες*, *βαπτίζοντες*, and *διδάσκοντες* describe a process that unfolds through presence, incorporation, and ongoing formation within a believing community (Ogden, 2024; Wright, 1995). While digital technologies can facilitate aspects of teaching and pastoral care, the text itself points toward forms of participation that are inherently relational and communal. Consequently, the question is not whether digital tools should be employed in ministry, but how they can be integrated without obscuring the embodied character of Christian discipleship.

This conclusion, however, should not be interpreted as a rejection of digital religion. Studies by Drescher (2016) and Hutchings (2017) document online faith communities in which participants experience accountability, mutual support, and shared spiritual practices. Likewise, discussions surrounding virtual sacramental participation have highlighted the pastoral possibilities that emerge in exceptional circumstances, particularly where physical gathering is impossible (Schmidt, 2020; Mpofu, 2021; Boniface et al., 2025; Foley, 2021). Such perspectives caution against



simplistic distinctions between "real" and "virtual" community. Nevertheless, they do not entirely resolve the theological questions raised by sacramental practices that historically presuppose bodily presence, material elements, and communal witness.

The African context introduces additional considerations that complicate the adoption of digital ministry. Beyond theological concerns, the effectiveness of digital discipleship is shaped by unequal access to technological resources. Persistent challenges relating to electricity supply, internet connectivity, affordability of data, and digital literacy continue to affect participation across many communities (Gberevbie et al., 2018; Hai et al., 2020). These realities mean that the benefits of digital ministry are often distributed unevenly. Furthermore, in many African ecclesial settings, communal worship and interpersonal interaction remain central expressions of religious identity, making the transition to predominantly online forms of engagement both culturally and pastorally complex.

The findings therefore support a hybrid understanding of ministry in which digital technologies are integrated into, rather than substituted for, embodied ecclesial practices. Online platforms can enhance teaching, facilitate communication, and strengthen pastoral networks, yet they function most effectively when connected to tangible communities of worship, mentorship, and sacramental participation. Such an approach reflects the pattern of discipleship evident in Matthew 28:18-20, where formation occurs through ongoing participation in a community gathered under the authority of the risen Christ.

Several practical implications emerge from this analysis. Churches should develop digital strategies that complement rather than replace face-to-face forms of discipleship. Online instruction can support catechesis, mentoring, and pastoral care, while sacramental practices remain rooted in gathered community life. Greater attention should also be given to ethical questions surrounding digital ministry, including accountability, data privacy, ecclesial authority, and equitable access (Oliver, 2022; Blackmer, 2024). In addition, investments in digital literacy and technological infrastructure are necessary if churches are to engage contemporary communication environments responsibly and effectively.

Ultimately, the significance of digitalisation for Christian ministry lies not in its capacity to replace traditional ecclesial practices but in its potential to support them. Matthew 28:18-20 presents disciple-making as a communal and formative vocation grounded in Christ's continuing presence. The challenge for contemporary churches is therefore not whether to employ digital technologies, but how to do so in ways that remain faithful to the theological vision of discipleship embedded within the Great Commission.

Conclusion

This study has examined the implications of digitalisation for interpreting and practising the Matthean Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) within contemporary African church contexts. By bringing the exegetical analysis of the Commission into conversation with debates on digital religion, it has argued that the central activities of disciple making envisioned in Matthew's Gospel are not reducible to the transmission of religious information. Rather, the commands to make disciples through going, baptising, and teaching point to a process of formation that is relational, communal, and embodied.

The findings suggest that digital technologies can extend the church's communicative reach, facilitate pastoral engagement, and support ongoing instruction, particularly where physical access is limited. At the same time, the study has shown that important aspects of Christian discipleship, especially sacramental participation and communal formation, remain tied to forms of embodied interaction that digital environments cannot fully replicate. This tension is particularly significant in many African settings, where communal presence continues to play a central role in religious life and identity formation.

The contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that the question is not whether churches should use digital technologies, but how such technologies should be integrated within the theological logic of the Great Commission itself. Digital ministry is most effective when it serves the broader task of disciple formation rather than becoming an end in itself. Consequently, digital platforms should be understood as supportive resources that complement, rather than replace, the incarnational and communal dimensions of Christian mission.

Future research would benefit from examining how different African denominations negotiate the relationship between digital and embodied forms of ministry, particularly in relation to sacramental practice, long-term discipleship, and community formation. Such work could provide a more nuanced understanding of how churches may engage technological change while remaining faithful to the ecclesiological and theological commitments embedded in the Matthean Commission.



Recommendations for Churches

The findings of this study suggest that churches should approach digitalisation as a resource for ministry rather than as a substitute for the embodied practices central to Christian discipleship. Digital platforms can expand access to teaching, pastoral care, and evangelistic engagement, but their use should remain connected to forms of discipleship that foster personal relationships, communal accountability, and participation in the sacramental life of the church. For this reason, hybrid models that combine online interaction with regular face-to-face worship, mentoring, and fellowship may provide a more sustainable framework for disciple formation.

Church leaders should also ensure that technological innovation is guided by theological reflection on the nature and purpose of the church's mission. Decisions concerning digital ministry ought to be evaluated in light of the authority of Christ and the formative aims of the Great Commission rather than primarily by considerations of efficiency, reach, or visibility. In addition, churches should develop appropriate policies for ethical digital engagement, including issues of accountability, inclusion, privacy, and equitable access, particularly for members in rural and economically disadvantaged communities.

Given the continuing expansion of digital ministry across Africa, investment in digital literacy, leadership training, and technological infrastructure remains necessary to strengthen the church's capacity for effective ministry while preserving the relational and communal dimensions of discipleship (Campbell, 2013; Kabongo, 2022).

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