

# CYBERSPACE FOR PEACE

## Countering Social Media Narratives on Religious Intolerance in Kano

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# ABSTRACT

Kano state is the most populous state and the commercial nerve of Northern Nigeria. It was ranked highest in Islamic affiliation and has witnessed several religious crises in the past, mainly due to the heterogeneous nature of its population. The continued growth of social media platforms as a primary source of information dissemination which them to become breeding ground for sensationalized narratives that brings religious division. These narratives are often wrongly presented in a way that they misrepresent actual religious teachings and promote religious/ethnic differences. Utilizing a qualitative and quantitative methods of data generation, using in-depth interviews Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and standardized and well-structured questionnaire distributed within Kano metropolis, this paper examined the ways through which social media has contributed to division among the major religious communities in Kano State. Situating the paper within the theories of technological determinism and social learning, findings revealed that, the emergence and growth of social media platforms as primary channels for information dissemination has inadvertently fostered a fertile ground for sensationalized narratives, leading to religious discord. These narratives frequently distort genuine religious teachings, fueling religious and ethnic divides and perpetuating an environment of distrust and hostility not only among followers of various faiths but also within a particular faith. The paper recommends amongst other thing the implementation of educational and awareness campaign programs aimed at increasing the citizen's awareness about the dangers of religious intolerance. The paper also recommends government at various levels, community and religious leaders, non-governmental and civil society organizations to facilitate and support interfaith dialogues and collaborations between religious leaders and communities to create understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation across different faiths.



# BACKGROUND

Nigeria is a deeply religious state. Its population is spread between Muslims, Christians, and Traditionalists. Freedom of religion is enshrined in Section 38 of the Nigerian Constitution, giving every Nigerian the right to practice whatever religion deemed fit (Temitayo, 2020). Northern Nigeria, a region with a rich and diverse history, also grappled with the complex issue of religious intolerance for decades. This issue manifests in various forms, impacting on individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. For instance, Jurji (2014) argued that religion in the North is manipulated by the Northern elites, as a means of gaining access to power and control of materials, which largely responsible for the conflicts in the Region. The paper noted that poverty and illiteracy, the involvement of Government in religious matters and the none-implementation of panel reports triggered religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria.

Kano state is the most populous state and the commercial nerve of Northern Nigeria. Within the thirty-six-state system of Nigeria, Kano ranks highest in Islamic affiliation (Paden 1973). The state has witnessed several religious crises in the past, mainly due to the heterogeneous nature of its population. Recently, the state is witnessing a rise in religious tension mostly caused by narratives circulating on various social media platforms. The spread of misinformation, divisive rhetoric and the promotion of religious stereotypes have contributed so much to the escalating problem of religious intolerance in the state.



# BACKGROUND

In 2022, the then Executive Governor of Kano state, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje inaugurated a 23-member committee on religious tolerance at an inter-religious conference in the government house in Kano State (Punch 2022). The committee, which was set up following the governor's commitment to promoting and consolidating religious tolerance in the state, was inaugurated after two similar conferences were held with the same goal of promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among followers of the different religions in the state.

The continued growth of social media platforms as a primary source of information dissemination has also made them to become breeding ground for sensationalized narratives that brings religious division. These narratives are often wrongly presented in a way that they misrepresent actual religious teachings and promote religious/ethnic differences thereby fostering an atmosphere of mistrust and animosity between members of different faiths. The influence of such misinformation on everyday relationships, communal harmony, and national unity cannot be overstate. Also, the lack of effective mechanisms to deal with false narratives on social media poses a big challenge. Especially how fast information spreads in the digital age, coupled with the difficulty of verifying how true this information is even making the problem worse (Inobemhe, et al).

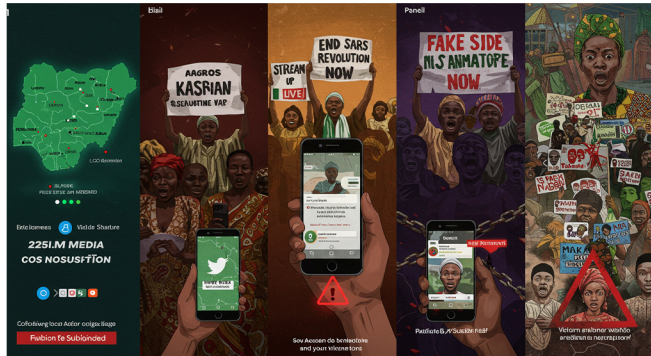
This research seeks to go into the details of this issue by examining the ways through which social media has contributed to division among the major religious communities in Kano State. Our aim is to find out the various causes of these narratives, and then find actionable recommendations and interventions that promote coexistence, mutual respect, and understanding among the diverse religious communities in the Kano.





## BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a country filled with people of different beliefs, ideologies, and opinions. It is the most populous country in Africa, as of 2023 Nigeria have over 225 million phone subscribers and a heavy internet penetration which has been aided by the affordability of GSM phones and its accessories. The Nigerian Communications Commission has also stated that over 157 million have access to the internet with Broadband penetration at 45.57% of September 2023. This essentially means that the new age of media is already in the hands of the population. Social media is a media that runs on the internet and it allows users to create content and interact with one another. With internet access and the capabilities of social media, news can travel much faster than it previously did. In the past, news was commonly spread by word of mouth. Now, within a few clicks, a large event can become international news. Social media has already been used to organize events of national importance. Some major examples being End SARS Protest, Revolution Now and so many others. The origination of this events came from social media (Twitter), The progression of the movement was then spread via other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Blogs.



## BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

With these facts in mind, it is important to consider the roles of social media in content spread and organization, and its future influence in Nigeria's social climate.

With the new wave of information and communication technology, there has also been a considerable spike in the use of social media in Nigeria and also an increasing rate at which people are able to access the internet. The impact of social media on religious intolerance in Nigeria can already be seen given some of the recent events that happened before and after the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. These social media platforms are now serving as direct reflection of public opinion and is thus a tool used by extremist groups to recruit members to their organizations. An example is the Boko Haram group And IPOB Militias who have Twitter accounts and use internet forums to share propaganda. This promptly led to the Nigeria Communications Commission putting a temporary ban on Twitter in fear it would fuel violence in the country.

On the 23th of January 2024, Premium times, an online newspaper reported that X (Twitter) has degenerated to a platform for spreading hate and ethnic dog whistling. It was contained on the post that charlatans and ethnic entrepreneurs who before now had no audience have suddenly gained traction amassed huge Following and become the leading Voice in senseless battle for religious Supremacy.

A study has shown that in central Nigeria's Plateau State, false information on Facebook is said to have caused an inter-ethnic crisis (Ojebode, 2018). The use of a graphic image of a mutilated baby, killed in Congo Brazzaville in 2012, was shared with the claim that the act was perpetrated by the Fulanis against the Beroms in Jos, in 2018. The media reported that Berom youths took to the streets and systematically sought out Fulani men for reprisal attacks, with the authorities believing the Facebook post contributed to the attacks. The same image has been used to stoke deadly crises in other regions of Africa (Ojebode, 2018). This type of false information has intensified the regional and religious crisis in Nigeria further dividing the peace and unity among Nigerians. In a related Study by Sadiku (2018) reported that in June 2018, the gruesome murder of over 86 people in 11 communities in Barkin Ladi, Rirom and Jos South Local Government areas of Plateau state was spread on social media as a retaliation carried out by the Miyetti Allah group. However, a new report later revealed that the killings had nothing to do with the Miyetti Allah group. But by then, the spread of fake news stories associated with the killings caused further deaths.

Siddiki (2019) found that a certain story about the Fulanis disguising to attack people in some parts of Osun State.

On the 12th may 2022, A female student of Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto state was killed. According to the report on channels TV, it was

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN NIGERIA

The emergence of Internet has democratized religion by exposing individuals to different competing viewpoints and provide access to dissenters and to those who present opposing ideas. The availability of information online has led to individuals belonging to different religious beliefs to doubt and question other religious faith (Ozukum, 2021). With the digital age, the availability and use of social media have a common place. As there are many positive impacts created by different social media platforms, so also are the negative impacts. Social media have made it possible to disseminate religious messages to different parts of the world. One can access these messages and in so doing come to terms with the beliefs of other religions. This could help in religious tolerance and respect. Apart from this, social media have been used in disseminating false information, bias and prejudices against a particular religion or religious authorities (Ozukum, 2021).



## PURVEYORS OF SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES ON RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN KANO

Social media narratives shape public opinion, influence discussions, and can have a significant impact on how people perceive certain topics, including religious intolerance. Social media narratives can be powerful tools for spreading information and shaping opinion, which is why it's important to critically evaluate the narratives we come across and promote understanding and empathy. There are several drivers of social media narratives on religious intolerance, one of the main drivers is the anonymity and distance that social media provides. People may feel more comfortable expressing their true thoughts and feelings without facing immediate consequences. Religious leaders have also been known to use social media to incite violence and promote intolerance. Poverty and inequality are also important drivers of religious intolerance, as they can create conditions that lead to conflict and division. When it comes to social media narratives on religious intolerance in Kano, there are various factors that can drive them. These factors include misinterpretation of religious teachings, political tensions, psychological influence, and socio-economic factors.

Olupona (2014) suggests that a major challenge facing the Nigerian state is how the practice of religion in the country increasingly inhibits the democratic process and governance. According to him, the most central issue today is how religious differences are affecting governance and public life. The politics of representation, which used to be dominated by ethnic affiliation, is today dominated by religious identity, a situation that influences public discourse concerning the survival of the country's democracy. There has been a drastic shift of religious intolerance from the religious assembly to the civil assembly and this has become a recurring decimal in successive regimes. In this case, political struggle has continued to maintain religious character and sentiment in the Nigerian public space. Evidences abound in the country's political space that religious intolerance has become a veritable tool in the hands of most Nigerian politicians both at the federal and state levels to manipulate the electorate and maintain hegemony of political power or to reclaim political power from opponents (Tar & Shettima 2010; Atoi & Kume 2022).

Social media also facilitates interfaith dialogue, which can influence religious identity. Through social media, individuals can engage in conversations with people of different faiths, broadening their understanding of other religions. This exposure to diverse religious perspectives can challenge individuals to reflect on their own beliefs, potentially leading to a shift in their religious identity. However, it's important to note that the impact of social media on religious identity can be both positive and negative. While it can promote understanding and tolerance, it can also lead to the spread of misinformation and religious intolerance.

## PURVEYORS OF SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES ON RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN KANO

Social media influencers, while not always the direct source, contributed immensely to the spread of religious intolerance through various psychological mechanisms such as echo chambers and In-Group Favoritism and Out-Group. Influencers who promote religious intolerance can become a source of validation for these views, creating echo chambers where users are primarily exposed to content that reinforces negative stereotypes about other religious groups (Sunstein, 2009). Influencers who promote religious intolerance can trigger these emotions through their content, fostering a hostile environment towards religious minorities.

The #EndSARS protest in Nigeria showcased how psychological influencers effectively mobilized social media narratives to drive collective action against police brutality. They utilized emotional appeals, identity formation, narrative framing, information dissemination, counter-narrative management, and resilience building to galvanize widespread support, organize protests, counter misinformation, and sustain momentum despite government repression. Through strategic use of social media, influencers mobilized diverse communities, amplified voices, and catalyzed a movement for social change.

In Kano, some specific socioeconomic factors that can contribute to social media narratives on religious intolerance include disparities in income and wealth distribution, limited access to quality education and healthcare, high unemployment rates, and competition for resources and opportunities. These factors can create a sense of frustration and inequality among different religious groups, which may be reflected in social media discussions.



## YOUTH, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN KANO

Social media platforms have become potent tools for disseminating religious knowledge and fostering a sense of community among Kano's youth. Imams and Islamic scholars leverage Facebook Live, YouTube channels, and WhatsApp groups to deliver sermons, host online lectures, and engage in real-time discussions with followers (Abdul-Rahim, 2020). This extends their reach beyond the confines of physical mosques, creating a more accessible and interactive learning environment, as highlighted by Abdullah (2017).

For instance, a prominent Kano Imam known for his engaging preaching utilizes Facebook Live to deliver daily Tafsir (interpretation) of the Quran during Ramadan. This online broadcast attracts thousands of viewers, particularly young adults who might not regularly attend traditional mosque services. This approach caters to the digital preferences of younger generations and fosters a sense of religious community that transcends physical location, as explored by Essaadi et al. (2019).

Social media platforms offer a platform for Kano's youth to engage in religious debates and discussions that challenge traditional interpretations and lead to a more nuanced understanding of Islam. Islamic forums on Facebook, dedicated WhatsApp groups, and comment sections on religious leaders' posts allow users to pose questions, share interpretations of religious texts, and debate contemporary issues through a religious lens (Hussain & Rahman, 2018).

An illustrative example is a recent heated debate that erupted on a popular Kano-based Islamic Facebook group regarding the permissibility of cryptocurrency in Islam. The discussion featured arguments from both sides, showcasing the diversity of religious thought among Kano's youth and their willingness to grapple with contemporary issues using Islamic principles. This online discourse fosters intellectual engagement and demonstrates how social media can be a platform for evolving religious interpretations, as argued by Awan (2012).



## YOUTH, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN KANO

While social media offers a plethora of opportunities, it also exposes Kano's youth to a wider range of religious ideologies, some of which may be extreme or promote violence.

The delicate balance between accessing religious education and encountering potentially radical content presents a significant challenge for young people and their families (Hassan, 2019).

Another example is the possibility of a Kano youth encountering online content promoting extremist views. Unsure of its validity, they might reach out to a trusted Islamic scholar on WhatsApp for clarification. The scholar, recognizing the dangers of the message, can explain how it contradicts mainstream Islamic teachings. This scenario highlights the importance of media literacy and the crucial role religious leaders play in guiding their communities through the complexities of online religious content, as emphasized by Salman (2017).

Social media plays a surprisingly positive role in facilitating religious practices in Kano. Mobile applications like Quran recitation apps and platforms for finding prayer times allow young people to integrate their faith seamlessly into their daily lives (Amin, 2018). Additionally, social media groups dedicated to charitable giving can encourage acts of philanthropy and strengthen Islamic values like social responsibility (Hassan & Rahman, 2018).



## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a rise in religious tension mostly caused by narratives circulating on various social media platforms. The spread of misinformation, divisive rhetoric, and the promotion of religious stereotypes have contributed so much to the escalating problem of religious intolerance in the country. On the other hand, the rapid growth of social media platforms as a primary source of information dissemination has made it become a breeding ground for sensationalized narratives that brings about religious division. These narratives are often wrongly presented in a way that it misrepresents the actual religious teachings and instead, polarized the existing tension between the two major religions in Kano. This has created an atmosphere of mistrust and hostility between members of different faiths. Also the lack of effective mechanisms to deal with false narratives on social media posed a big challenge. The speed at which information spreads in the digital age, coupled with the difficulty of verifying how true this information are even make the problem even worse.

This paper seeks to go into the details of this issue by carefully examining the ways through which social media has contributed to division among the major religious communities in Kano, namely Christianity and Islam. We aim to find out the various causes of these narratives, and then find actionable recommendations and interventions that promote coexistence, mutual respect, and understanding among the diverse religious communities in the country in order to create a more inclusive and harmonious society where religious differences are celebrated as sources of strength rather than exploited as tools for division.

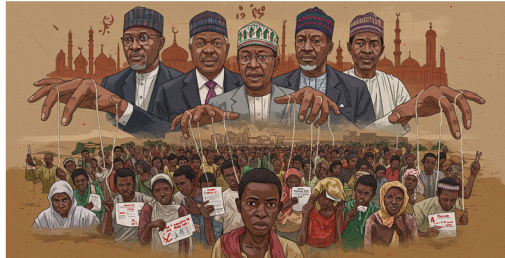


## LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious intolerance has been a centered area of discussion, especially in Northern Nigeria. Various studies have been conducted to know the causes of this menace, and its effect on peaceful coexistence. In a study conducted by Jurji (2014) on religious intolerance, he argued that religion in the North is manipulated by the Northern elites as a means to gain access to power and control of materials, which are largely responsible for the conflicts in the Region.

He further cites Poverty and illiteracy, the involvement of the Government in religious matters, and the non-implementation of panel reports as the engine rooms for the promotion of religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The members of the dominant group use religious conflict as a business enterprise which means that stopping religious conflicts will amount to pushing them out of business and closing their shops. To keep them alive in business, the Government has paid a lukewarm attitude to this unpatriotic parasitic dominant group. This can be a sign of weakness on the side of the Government.

Ewere and Yakubu (2022), observed that, one of the issues serving as an obstacle to Nigeria's progress as a pluralistic polity is intolerance. There are various categories of intolerance in Nigeria. They include religious, ethnic, political and gender intolerance. More acute amongst all these categories is religious intolerance because, the philosophical nature of religion makes it to be easily manipulated and dragged into other issues of public life. They further explained that for Nigerians to experience a progressive change in public life, religious adherents across religious divides must demonstrate a genuine attitude of tolerance towards believers of other faith traditions in the country.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflecting on the issue of religious intolerance and violence in Nigeria's democratic governance, Nwaka (2012) observes that,...the expectation of a peaceful and stable Nigeria with democratic experimentation was dashed when at the dawn of the 21st-century democratization, the country began to witness a resurgence of violent uprising, particularly of religious character.

It is pertinent to state that the Nigerian state is witnessing increasing religionisation of politics and politicization of religion due to the resolve of some political elite to use religion as a vehicle to facilitate their political agenda.

Similarly, Olupona (2014) opines that a major challenge facing the Nigerian state is how the practice of religion in the country increasingly inhibits the democratic process and governance. According to him, the most central issue today is how religious differences are affecting governance and public life.

The politics of representation, which used to be dominated by ethnic affiliation, is today dominated by religious identity, a situation that influences public discourse concerning the survival of the country's democracy.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Donatus and Nkechi (2013) carried out research to examine the development of religious intolerance in Nigeria, their findings revealed that, Nigerians have suffered a lot and are still suffering from a series of religious crises and riots. Bearing in mind the causes of those crises and the failure of the past attempts to bring them under control. The study discovered that these crises and riots had generated negative effects on the well-being of Nigerians and on the quality of assurance needed for rapid development in the 21st century in a country that is highly endowed with abundance human and material resources. Some prominent discoveries made by the paper include: loss of human and material resources, socioeconomic and political instability, fear of insecurity, and wasting of money and time meant for developmental projects on crisis management emanated from religious intolerance in the Nation.

Ezirim, (2021) affirmed that religious intolerance has led to a series of conflicts that have claimed hundreds of lives and the destructions of millions of naira worth of properties.

The colossal loss to violent religious conflicts caused by intolerance in Nigeria did not end with this loss of lives and properties. It has gone beyond the mere loss of hundreds of lives and properties but has affected the fabric of the nation's developmental life.

For instance, many university graduates had stopped accepting to do their one-year compulsory National Youth Service Corps do to heighten level of religious intolerance in the country.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

However, it has become very difficult to speak of progress in Nigeria when our social, political, economic, and religious systems fail to maintain at least a minimum level of social decorum. As that religious intolerance lingers on distrust and suspicion became the order of the day, especially between adherents of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria.

Ibrahim and Suleman (2021) researched on the efforts of politicians, religious and community leaders in combating hate speech; his online survey findings revealed that if clerics can ensure they don't utter hate speech for whatever reason and strongly condemn it regardless of who made it for what purpose it was made when it is done, that alone can be a foundation of addressing hate speech in the society.

Similarly, the online focus group discussion carried out by authors on the awareness of hate speech on social media, the findings indicated that their respondents in North Central Nigeria were familiar with ethno-religious tensions scenarios, particularly on social media.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion, as an institution should serve as means through which certain needs within the society are met. However, it has been viewed as a tool used to promote violence, hence its indication as a double-edged sword (Maregere 2011: pp17–23).

The expression of faith in the public square has faced many challenges within the context of Nigeria. This persistent religious hostility has over the years tarnished the image of the country and undermined its social, political, and economic development.

According to Paul (2019) the most fought-over issues by belligerent religious groups continue to be the calls for the introduction and Spread of Sharia and Islamic Law, the establishment of Christian states, religious freedom, and the rights of marginalized minorities.

Interactions between members of different religious groups are often marked by suspicion and hostility, and conflict usually erupt over Minor issues. With the spread of new information and communication technologies and the vast implementation of social media in Nigeria, both the nature of the conflict and the modes of conduct have been altered.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The digital age connects us like never before, it's strange that mean words about different religions can spread so easily. Young people in Kano, Nigeria, use social media a lot, and this research looks at how these platforms can both bring people together and, by accident, fuel bad feelings between religious groups. By learning more about how young people use social media, we can figure out ways to turn those mean words into positive ones, leading to better understanding and peace between different faiths. Hence, this paper adopts Technological Determinism and Social Learning Theories to explain the influence of social media on religious intolerance in Kano.



## TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM THEORY

Technological determinism is the belief that technology is the principal initiator of the society's transformation. The emergence of this theory is usually attributed to the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who formulated the causal link between the technology and the society. According to the supporters of technological determinism, any social changes are controlled by the technology, technological development, communications technology and media. The modern information society arises as a result of the development of innovations, new technologies and their social and political implications. Since the establishment of this direction in the early 20th century, two different branches separated: radical and moderate (hard, soft) technological determinism.

Technological determinism argues that technology shapes social change. In this case, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are powerful technologies used by youth in Kano. These platforms' algorithms and features can unintentionally amplify intolerant narratives through:

- **Echo chambers:** Algorithms often personalize content based on users' existing interests and preferences, potentially trapping them in "echo chambers" where they're only exposed to similar viewpoints, including ones fostering religious intolerance.
- **Confirmation bias:** Design features like "Likes" and "Shares" can reinforce existing biases and create feedback loops, rewarding and spreading intolerant content further.



## SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social learning theory proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura, posits that individuals learn not only through direct experiences but also by observing and imitating the actions of others. The theory emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in learning and suggests that people can acquire new behaviours and knowledge by paying attention to, remembering, and reproducing the actions of models in their social environment.

Social learning theory helps us change behavior and manage resources sustainably. We learn by observing others, especially when rewarded. This theory goes beyond reinforcement to include attention, memory, and motivation. This explains why Religious conflicts occur, people are immature in responding to differences in religious ideology in the public sphere (Eko & Putranto 2019; Mubarrak & Yahya 2020). The latency of religious conflict that occurs in cyberspace experiences diffusion and becomes a conflict in the real world. The flow of unbalanced information about religious issues in cyberspace has a destructive effect and tends to create intolerance. Religion, which was once a cohesive factor for peaceful coexistence, has become a tool for political manipulation, violence, destruction of life and property (Ushe 2015).

In the context of social media, young people are constantly exposed to narratives and interactions shaping their views on religion. Also because of social media, youth might observe and imitate intolerant narratives and behaviors they see online, especially if they come from influential figures or peers they look up to.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a mixed approach of methodology, namely; the qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach has been carefully selected because it aligns well with the objectives of this study. The quantitative approach of collecting data involves gathering and examining ordinal data such as in-depth interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGDs) and document review. Under this approach, this paper would only utilize the instrument of data collection of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

The in-depth interview is a qualitative research instrument that involves the researcher to have conversation with few selected research participants about a particular topic. As far as this paper is concerned, the chosen participants for this research would be social media religious influencers and prominent religious leaders. The religious influences and leaders are selected to highlights their opinions on religious intolerance on the cyberspace as well as enlighten people as to why people indulge in spreading religious intolerance messages.

The second research instrument for collecting data for this study is focus group discussions (FGDs) which involves bringing together a group of individuals to share their opinions regarding a specific topic. For this study, maximum of 6 to 8 participants will be selected for each session of the focus group discussions. The population size of 6 to 8 participants was selected to identify the means of combating social media narratives on religious intolerance in kano and social media influencers were selected.

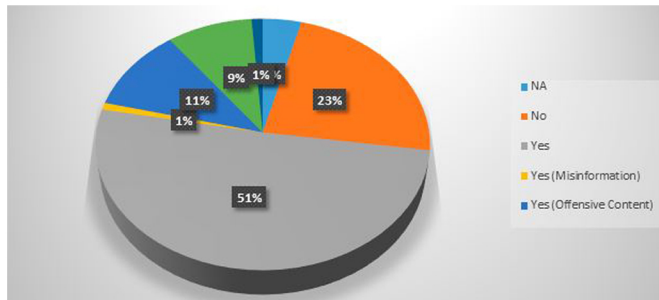
The quantitative research instrument for gathering and analyzing data for this study is survey which is one of the most common quantitative methods of collecting data. According to (Ponto 2015) survey is the collection of information from a sample of individual through their responses to question. In the carrying out the research, data collected through responses gotten from the respondents would be analyzed and interpreted using both status and thematic analysis. The sampling procedure utilized in this study is convenience sampling where the participants are selected based on how easy it is to gain access to participants, that is, participants who are willing to partake in the research.

Finally, this research is limited to the youths in Kano state who are active users of a few selected social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok and Instagram. The study concentrates more on youth because they tend to understand the cyber world more than elderly ones and children as well as they feel the impact of religious intolerance more.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

For the qualitative methods, a total of eight in-depth interviews were conducted with community and religious leaders in Kano metropolis. Similarly, focus group discussions were conducted with social media influencers in Kano. For the quantitative method, three hundred (350) questionnaires were equally distributed in six (6) metropolitan local governments in Kano state. A total of two hundred and ninety-seven (341) questionnaires were retrieved and thus, all subsequent analysis was based on the retrieved figures. Hence, the analysis was done concurrently using both qualitative and quantitative data to complement each other.

Fig. 1: Social Media content that promotes negative stereotypes or misconceptions about a particular religious group



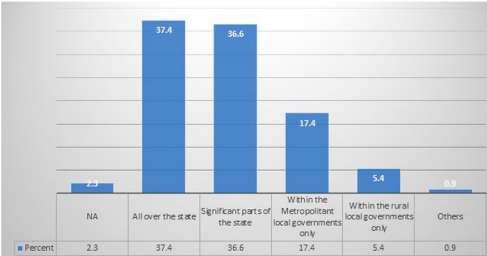
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY DATA, MARCH 2024



# DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

From an analysis of factors that contribute to the spread of divisive narratives on social media, majority of the respondents were of the view that ethnic and religious tensions are the major factors contributing to 23.9% followed by misinformation and disinformation with 22.9% and political instrumentalization with 20.1%. for the in-depth interviews, political manipulation of youth, economic hardship and poverty were identified as the major factors contributing to the spread of these divisive contents. However, data from the focus group discussions revealed that, the presence of religious scholars on the social media served as the major factor, while lack of existing laws in the constitution that fully regulates the conducts of individuals on social media was ranked as second. From the above therefore, this paper holds that the existing ethnic and religious tension, misinformation and disinformation, political instrumentalization, prevalence of religious scholars and lack of regulatory framework were the factors that contributed to the spread of divisive narratives on social media.

Fig.3 The Spread of Religious Intolerance in Kano State



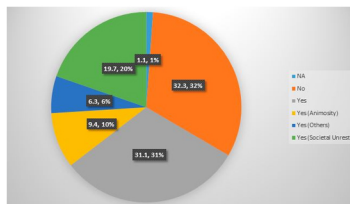
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY DATA, MARCH 2024

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

On the specific ways that government at various level can in promoting religious tolerance, both the survey respondents and the FGD participants have itemized different ways they think government can be of help promoting religious tolerance. The large proportion (19.6%) of the survey respondents said the way is which politicians can promote religious tolerance is to promote religious freedom, 15.9% and 15.1% believed promoting inclusive education and facilitating interfaith dialogues by the government can effectively facilitate the promotion of religious dialogue. Other ways of promoting religious tolerance according to the survey participants include training of Law Enforcement Agencies, protecting places of worships, provision of fund and enacting legislations. Similarly, the most frequently recurring theme amongst the focus group discussion participants are the Facilitation of interfaith dialogues and provision of funds to support campaigns for religious tolerance.

However, data from in-depth interviews revealed that, majority of the respondents believed that organizing events involving leaders from different religious faiths, enacting laws and regulations to prevent religious intolerance, Interfaith initiatives by Christians and Muslims clerics in order to promote religious tolerance through preaching online and offline, revisiting past government committees' reports on peaceful coexistence.

Fig.6 Religion Intolerance Influence on Violence in Kano



SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY DATA, MARCH 2024

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The survey findings depicted in the chart above indicate that the largest portion of respondents (32%) do not perceive religious intolerance as a catalyst for violence in the state. Conversely, approximately 31% of respondents acknowledged that religious intolerance fosters violence in Kano state, citing its role in breeding animosity and societal unrest. Remarkably, insights from in-depth interviews align with this sentiment, with respondents attributing religious intolerance to disturbances of peace, chaos, loss of life and property, and human rights violations. Furthermore, participants in focus group discussions highlighted how religious intolerance in Kano facilitates political manipulation along religious lines and escalates violent reprisals following religious conflicts.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The emergence and growth of social media platforms as primary channels for information dissemination has inadvertently fostered a fertile ground for sensationalized narratives, leading to religious discord. These narratives frequently distort genuine religious teachings, fueling religious and ethnic divides and perpetuating an environment of distrust and hostility not only among followers of various faiths but also within a particular faith. The impact of such misinformation on interpersonal relationships, communal cohesion, and national solidarity cannot be underestimated.

The analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered sheds light on the prevalence of social media content promoting negative stereotypes about religious groups, particularly evident in Kano State. A significant portion of respondents encountered such content, attributing it to offensive language, religious condemnation, and misinformation. The divisive narratives on social media are fueled by ethnic and religious tensions, misinformation, political manipulation, and the absence of regulatory frameworks. Religious intolerance appears widespread in Kano, affecting both urban and rural areas. However, individuals and governments can play roles in promoting religious tolerance through education, dialogue, interfaith initiatives, and legislative action.

From the study, social media has become the new public sphere for the promotion of content that promotes negative stereotypes or misconceptions about a particular religious as well as a space where such contents can be challenged. However, as with the physical space, ideologies still come to play in the digital space. And this in itself can lead to polarized conversations which can affect relationships and eventually becloud the fact that beyond religious affiliations and ideologies, the issues affect us all as human beings and as citizens whether in the digital space or the physical. From the instances where readers called out the biases of the message originators, it is evident that social media influencers need to be careful with what they post and how they post it.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data underscores the pervasive influence of social media in propagating negative stereotypes and misconceptions about religious groups, particularly evident in Kano State. The study highlights the alarming prevalence of such divisive narratives, fueled by factors such as ethnic and religious tensions, misinformation, political manipulation, and the absence of effective regulatory frameworks.

The impact of these narratives extends beyond mere online discourse, significantly affecting interpersonal relationships, communal cohesion, and solidarity. Religious intolerance appears widespread, affecting both urban and rural areas of Kano State, thereby exacerbating societal tensions and conflicts.

However, amidst these challenges, the study also identifies avenues for promoting religious tolerance. Both individuals and governments can play crucial roles through initiatives such as education, dialogue, interfaith collaborations, and legislative actions. Social media, while serving as a platform for the dissemination of divisive content, also presents an opportunity for challenging and countering such narratives.

Finally, the findings emphasize the need for greater awareness and responsibility among social media influencers in disseminating content that fosters understanding and harmony, rather than division and animosity. By acknowledging the shared humanity beyond religious affiliations and ideologies, efforts toward promoting tolerance and fostering peaceful coexistence can be advanced both in the digital realm and in physical spaces.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the presented data and analysis, this study shares some practical recommendations to actualize the promotion of religious tolerance in Kano state. These recommendations, if effectively implemented, can address the issues of religious intolerance and social media divisive narratives in Kano State.

**Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Implement educational programs aimed at increasing the citizen's awareness about the dangers of religious intolerance and the impact of divisive narratives on and offline, targeting both individuals and communities. These campaigns should emphasize the importance of respecting religious differences and promoting the culture of tolerance.

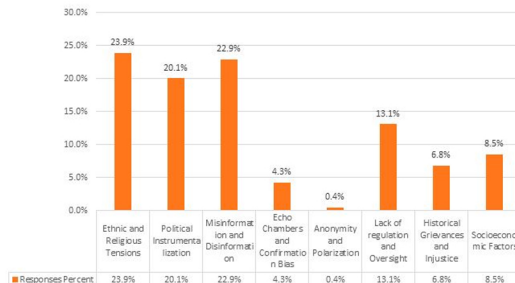
- 1. Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Implement educational programs aimed at increasing the citizen's awareness about the dangers of religious intolerance and the impact of divisive narratives on and offline, targeting both individuals and communities. These campaigns should emphasize the importance of respecting religious differences and promoting the culture of tolerance.
- 2. Interfaith Dialogue Initiatives:** Government at various levels, community and religious leaders, non-governmental and civil society organizations should facilitate and support interfaith dialogues and collaborations between religious leaders and communities to create understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation across different faiths. Encourage joint initiatives and activities that promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the state.
- 3. Regulatory Framework for Social Media:** Individuals, religious and community leaders as well as non-governmental and civil society organizations should advocate for the development and implementation of regulations or guidelines to govern the conduct of individuals, religious clerics and organizations on social media platforms. These regulations should aim at curbing the spread of divisive narratives, hate speech, and misinformation, while also protecting freedom of expression.
- 4. Political and Community Leadership:** Politicians and community leaders should engage political and community leaders in efforts to promote religious tolerance and address underlying social, economic, and political factors contributing to religious tensions. They should from time-to-time, encourage leaders to publicly denounce divisive rhetoric and promote inclusive policies and initiatives.
- 5. Youth Empowerment and Economic Opportunities:** Government should address the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to religious intolerance by providing youth with opportunities for education, skills training, and employment. They should empower youth to become agents of positive change within their communities, promoting dialogue, tolerance, and peacebuilding.
- 6. Monitoring and Response Mechanisms:** Government should establish mechanisms for monitoring and responding to incidents of religious intolerance and hate speech, both online and offline. Government should also develop protocols for swift and effective responses to prevent escalation and promote reconciliation.
- 7. Support for Social Media Literacy:** Government, civil society organizations, academicians should promote social media literacy and critical thinking skills among the general population, especially youth, to enable them to distinguish and challenge divisive narratives and misinformation online. Resources and training should be provided on responsible social media use and digital citizenship.
- 8. Collaborative Efforts:** There should be partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, religious institutions, academia, and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive and coordinated strategies for promoting religious tolerance and countering divisive narratives.



## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

As can be seen on the illustration above, 51% of the survey respondents stated they have encountered social media content that promotes negative stereotypes or misconceptions about a particular religious group. Some of the respondents cite items used to promote these stereotypes to include the use of offensive content, religious condemnation as the major contents dominating the discourse in this direction. Other minor variable used in this context is misinformation. Data from the in-depth interviews also collaborates the qualitative data. For instance, majority of the in-depth interviews respondents' stated that "there is widespread of religious intolerance content on social media are contributing to the existing tension between the two major religions, especially in Kano. This study established that the social media contents that promotes negative stereotypes and misconceptions about a particular religious group were shared on social media platforms. As elaborated by the FGD respondents, use of derogatory, inflammatory and hateful speech is common amongst the adherents of both religions, sometimes within the same religion (belonging to different sects), tribe, region, political affiliation or interest.

Fig. 2: Factors that Contribute to the Spread of Divisive Narratives on Social Media

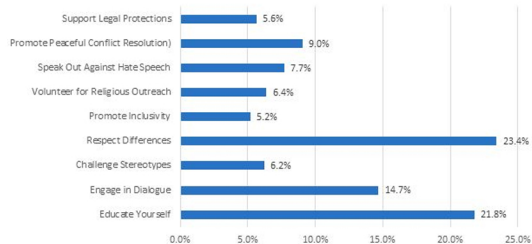


SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY DATA, MARCH 2024

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The survey data indicates that religious intolerance has pervaded Kano state. The majority of respondents, comprising 37.4%, confirmed the widespread presence of religious intolerance throughout the region. Closely followed are those respondents representing 36.6% who believed that the spread of religious intolerance has affected significant parts of the state while 17.4% believed that the spread of religious intolerance is within the metropolitan local government only and 5.4% believed it is within rural local government only. Data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions collaborate the survey data. For instance, all the in-depth interviews respondents stated that the spread of religious intolerance has spread all over the state, while the focus group participants believed that even though the spread of religious intolerance is state wide, it is more prevalent within the metropolitan local governments.

Fig. 4: Ways Individuals Can Contribute to Promoting Religious Tolerance

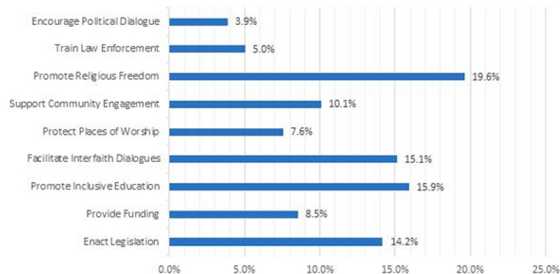


## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

On roles of that individuals can play in promoting religious tolerance in Kano, majority of the survey respondents (23.4%) believed that respecting religious differences is the best way an individual should be the number role they can promotes religious tolerance in Kano. Educating oneself on the importance of religious tolerance is second with 21.8% of the total respondents have this view, while 14.7% feel that religious individuals should be engaged in dialogue rather than confrontation.

The views of the survey respondents were not entirely different from those of the FGD participants, while they shared all the views expressed by the survey respondents, they added that for an individual to effectively contribute in promoting religious tolerance, he or she must understand the relevance of peace, tolerance and love for one another. Another segment of the participants was of the view that individuals from all faiths must “avoid biased and sentimental dialogue” no matter the temptation, this according them will help in guiding their utterances and by extension shunning divisive narratives on social media. Thus, this paper established that, there are several ways individuals within the society can promotes religious tolerance in the state and these includes respecting one’s religion, education, dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, etc.

Fig.5 Ways Government Can Promote Religious Tolerance



SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY DATA, MARCH 2024