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A Conceptual Framework for Mitigating Religious Conflict in Nigeria Using an AI-Driven Consensus Model

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Abstract

This paper proposes a conceptual framework for mitigating religious conflict in Nigeria through the use of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) model. Sectarian violence, often fueled by the misinterpretation of religious texts, poses a significant and persistent threat to Nigeria's national security and social cohesion. Existing conflict resolution strategies, which have largely focused on kinetic military operations and elite-level political dialogues, have not adequately addressed the ideological roots of this violence. This paper introduces the "Religion-AI Handshake Model," a theoretical construct designed to synthesize interpretations of Christian and Islamic scriptures from a wide and diverse range of recognized scholars. By using machine learning to identify areas of consensus and flag interpretations that fall outside the scholarly mainstream, the proposed model offers a different approach to generating non-conflictual readings of contested texts. The framework is grounded in a synthesis of Conflict Resolution Theory and AI Textual Analysis Theory. It aims to provide a strong foundation for future empirical research and the development of practical, accessible tools for peacebuilding. This paper outlines the model's multi-stage architecture, discusses its theoretical implications for digital peacebuilding and religious studies, and considers the significant ethical challenges that its implementation would entail.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Religious Conflict, Nigeria, Peacebuilding, Text Interpretation, Sectarian Violence, Conflict Resolution*

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Introduction

Nigeria's social and political stability is continuously challenged by religious conflict. The country is home to one of the world's largest Christian and Muslim populations, living in close proximity. This religious diversity, while a source of immense cultural richness, has also become a pronounced fault line for violence (Sakupapa, 2025). For decades, and with increasing intensity since the restoration of democracy in 1999, sectarian clashes have resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, widespread internal displacement, and a deepening of mistrust between communities (Ibenwa, 2025). The Global Terrorism Index (2024) consistently ranks Nigeria as one of the countries most impacted by terrorism, a significant portion of which is driven by religiously motivated extremist groups.

The most prominent of these groups is Boko Haram, which has waged a brutal insurgency in the country's northeast since 2009. A central element of Boko Haram's strategy is its use of a distorted and decontextualized interpretation of Islamic scripture to justify violence and recruit followers (Fahd, 2024). The group's ideology is not an isolated phenomenon. It preys on a complex set of socio-economic grievances, including poverty, unemployment, and a sense of political marginalization (Omenma, 2020). However, its ability to frame these grievances in religious terms and to offer a seemingly divine mandate for violence is a key driver of its resilience. The problem is not limited to extremist insurgency. Divisive and manipulative rhetoric from certain mainstream Christian and Islamic leaders has also contributed to a climate of intolerance and social fragmentation (Oladosu et al., 2022).

Current approaches to this problem have proven insufficient. The Nigerian state has invested heavily in a military response to Boko Haram. While this has contained the group's territorial ambitions, it has not defeated its ideology. At the same time, numerous interfaith dialogue initiatives have been launched by civil society organizations and the government. These dialogues are often valuable for building relationships between religious elites. However, their impact rarely extends to the grassroots level where radicalization occurs (Uroko& Amin, 2025). There is a clear disconnect between the official discourse of peace and the reality of division on the ground. A critical reason for this disconnects is the absence of accessible, authoritative tools that can directly challenge the misinterpretations of religious texts that fuel conflict.

This paper argues that new technologies, specifically Artificial Intelligence, offer a potential pathway for addressing this gap. It introduces a conceptual framework for an AI-driven model designed to promote non-conflictual interpretations of religious texts. The proposed "Religion-AI Handshake Model" is a theoretical contribution to the emerging field of digital peacebuilding. It builds on the "Library-AI Handshake Model" (Bakare-Fatungase, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between human experts, information professionals, and AI systems in managing sensitive knowledge. The purpose of this paper is not to present the results of a completed project. Rather, its aim is to provide a detailed theoretical blueprint that can guide future research, development, and investment in this area. It seeks to answer the question: how can we conceptually design an AI system that supports peace by making the rich and varied traditions of religious scholarship more accessible to a public that is vulnerable to extremist manipulation?

The paper proceeds in six parts. Section 2 provides a detailed review of the literature on religious conflict in Nigeria, the use of AI in religious studies, and the field of digital peacebuilding. Section 3 outlines the theoretical foundations of the proposed model, drawing on Conflict Resolution Theory and AI Textual Analysis Theory. Section 4 presents the core of the paper: a detailed description of the conceptual architecture of the Religion-AI

Handshake Model. Section 5 discusses the potential theoretical and practical implications of the model. Section 6 addresses the significant ethical challenges and future research directions. Finally, Section 7 offers a concluding summary.

Literature Review

This review synthesizes three distinct but intersecting bodies of scholarship: the nature of religious conflict and textual interpretation in Nigeria; the application of Artificial Intelligence to religious studies and peacebuilding; and the emerging field of digital peacebuilding in Africa. The review identifies a conceptual gap that the proposed framework is designed to address.

Religious Conflict and Textual Interpretation in Nigeria

The literature on religious conflict in Nigeria is extensive and has identified a complex web of causal factors. Many scholars argue that these conflicts are not purely religious. They are often intertwined with struggles over land, resources, political power, and ethnic identity (Ibenwa, 2025; Okoroafor, 2025). However, religion consistently serves as a powerful vehicle for mobilizing collective action and framing grievances in absolute, non-negotiable terms. As Sakupapa (2025) notes, religion can simultaneously be a source of division and a resource for peace. Understanding when and how it becomes a driver of conflict is therefore essential.

A key factor identified in the literature is the role of interpretation. Extremist groups like Boko Haram do not invent their ideology from scratch. They construct it by selectively quoting, decontextualizing, and misinterpreting passages from Islamic scripture (Fahd, 2024). Omenma (2020) provides a detailed analysis of Boko Haram's recruitment strategies, showing how the group targets youth who often have limited religious education. These recruits are presented with a simplified and distorted version of Islam that promises certainty, purpose, and divine reward for violence. This ideological indoctrination is a critical part of the radicalization process.

Countering this indoctrination requires more than just military force. It requires a credible and accessible counter-narrative. Ishaku (2021) studied the role of faith-based organizations in counter-radicalization efforts in Nigeria. He found that religious leaders and institutions can be powerful voices for peace, but they often lack the resources and platforms to compete with the sophisticated propaganda of extremist groups. Uroko and Amin (2025) similarly argue that both Islam and Christianity contain deep traditions of peace and reconciliation, but these traditions are often marginalized in public discourse. The challenge, therefore, is to amplify these mainstream, peace-oriented interpretations.

Artificial Intelligence in Religious Studies and Peacebuilding

The use of AI in the humanities, often termed "digital humanities," is a rapidly growing field. In religious studies, scholars have begun to use computational tools to analyze sacred texts in new ways. Reed (2021) provided a foundational overview of this area, distinguishing between "AI in religion," "AI for religion," and "AI and religion." He demonstrated how AI could be used for tasks like textual classification, authorship attribution, and the analysis of historical trends in religious thought. Sulistio et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of machine learning applications for the study of Islamic Hadith, demonstrating the global interest in this area.

While these applications are promising, the use of AI on sacred texts is not without ethical complexities. Hutchinson (2024) offered a critical perspective, arguing that researchers must consider the cultural and religious significance of the texts they use as data. He warned against treating sacred scriptures as mere linguistic corpora, ignoring their role in the lives of believers. He also highlighted the risk of AI models reproducing or amplifying existing biases found in their training data. This is a particularly salient concern in the context of religious texts, which have been used to justify both violence and peace.

The application of AI to peacebuilding is a more nascent field. Roy (2026) examined AI's potential to promote religious tolerance and counter religious hatred and misinformation. He argued that AI can move beyond reactive content removal toward a proactive, peacebuilding approach. His work highlighted the use of NLP and multimodal analysis for detecting hate speech and fostering dialogue through counter-narratives. Alkhouri (2024) explored the broader intersection of AI and religion, demonstrating how computational tools can reshape how individuals engage with spirituality and religious texts. He argued that AI-powered sentiment analysis can identify emotional and rhetorical patterns in religious texts that are relevant to interfaith dialogue. Mutongoreni et al. (2025) extended this work to the African context, arguing that AI could enhance interfaith dialogue by analyzing large volumes of discourse and identifying patterns of escalation and de-escalation. These studies, however, have remained largely theoretical.

Digital Peacebuilding in Africa

More broadly, there is a growing interest in the use of digital technologies for peacebuilding in Africa. John (2024) surveyed the state of digital peacebuilding on the continent, identifying trends, challenges, and opportunities. He noted that digital tools are being used for a range of purposes, including early warning systems, hate speech monitoring, and the facilitation of online dialogues. However, he also pointed to the significant challenges of the digital divide, misinformation, and the need for culturally relevant tools.

The governance of AI is a related and critical issue. Yilma (2025) examined AI governance initiatives in Africa, interrogating the role of indigenous ethical frameworks like Ubuntu. He argued that AI development on the continent must be guided by local values to ensure that it serves the interests of African societies. Shidawa and Opabunmi (2026) focused on the Nigerian context, analyzing the country's state of AI integration and its ethical and policy responses. They called for a responsible governance framework to guide the development and deployment of AI in the country. These governance concerns are directly relevant to any project that seeks to use AI for a socially sensitive purpose like religious text interpretation.

Conceptual Gap

This review of the literature reveals a clear conceptual gap. While there is extensive research on religious conflict in Nigeria and a growing body of work on AI in religious studies and peacebuilding, no study has yet proposed a detailed theoretical framework for an AI model specifically designed to mitigate religious conflict in Nigeria by addressing the problem of textual misinterpretation. Existing studies on digital peacebuilding in Africa have tended to focus on communication and monitoring tools rather than on the deeper ideological drivers of conflict. This paper aims to fill that gap by synthesizing insights from these disparate fields to propose a new conceptual model.

Theoretical Foundations

The proposed framework is built on two theoretical pillars: Conflict Resolution Theory and AI Textual Analysis Theory. This section explains each theory and how their synthesis provides a foundation for the Religion-AI Handshake Model.

Conflict Resolution Theory

Conflict Resolution Theory is a broad field of study that encompasses a range of approaches to understanding and managing conflict. A central tenet of many of these approaches is the importance of communication and perception. Conflicts are often exacerbated, if not caused, by misunderstandings, misperceptions, and the failure of parties to communicate effectively (Jatau & Maza, 2023). In the context of religious conflict, this often manifests as a conflict of interpretations. Each side believes that its interpretation of sacred text is the only correct one and that the other side's interpretation is not only wrong but malicious.

Conflict Resolution Theory suggests that one pathway to de-escalation is to improve communication and challenge these negative perceptions. This can involve creating channels for dialogue, providing accurate information, and helping parties to see the conflict from the other's perspective. The theory emphasizes that sustainable peace requires addressing the root causes of conflict, not just its violent symptoms. In the case of religious conflict in Nigeria, this means addressing the problem of textual misinterpretation that is used to justify violence.

The Religion-AI Handshake Model applies this theory by creating a new kind of communication channel. It is a channel that allows users to access a wider range of interpretations than they might otherwise encounter. By presenting a consensus view from a diverse group of scholars, the model can challenge the authority of extremist interpretations and show that there are other, more peaceful ways of understanding the same texts.

AI Textual Analysis Theory

AI Textual Analysis Theory provides the technical means to operationalize the principles of Conflict Resolution Theory. This framework supports the use of computational tools, particularly from the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), to analyze large and complex bodies of text. In recent years, the development of large language models (LLMs) has dramatically expanded the capabilities of AI for textual analysis (Allam et al., 2025).

In the context of religious studies, AI can be used to perform a variety of tasks. These include topic modeling (identifying the main themes in a text), sentiment analysis (identifying the emotional tone of a text), and authorship attribution. For the purposes of the proposed model, the most relevant application is text classification. Supervised learning algorithms can be trained on a pre-annotated dataset to classify new texts according to a set of predefined categories (Saeed et al., 2023). For example, a model could be trained to classify a particular interpretation of a religious text as falling within or outside the scholarly consensus.

By synthesizing these two theoretical frameworks, the Religion-AI Handshake Model proposes a socio-technical system for peacebuilding. Conflict Resolution Theory provides the social and ethical rationale for the intervention. AI Textual Analysis Theory provides the technical means to carry it out. The model is not a purely technical solution. It is a human-centered one that uses technology to support and amplify the work of human experts.

The Religion-AI Handshake Model: A Conceptual Framework

This section provides a detailed description of the conceptual architecture of the proposed Religion-AI Handshake Model. The model is conceived as a multi-stage, socio-technical system that integrates human expertise with machine learning. It is designed to be a tool for education and peacebuilding, not a replacement for human scholarship or religious authority.

Stage 1: Data Curation and Annotation

The foundation of the entire model is a high-quality, diverse, and well-annotated database. The construction of this database would be a major undertaking requiring the collaboration of religious scholars, librarians, and computer scientists. The database would consist of several components:

- **Primary Texts:** The full texts of the Christian Bible (both the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament) and the Islamic Quran. These texts would be included in their original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic) as well as in multiple widely used English translations. The inclusion of multiple translations is important, as translation itself is an act of interpretation.
- **Scholarly Commentaries:** A wide range of scholarly commentaries on these primary texts. For the Christian tradition, this would include works from different historical periods and theological perspectives (e.g., patristic, medieval, reformation, modern). For the Islamic tradition, it would include classical and modern works of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) from different schools of thought (e.g., Sunni, Shia, Sufi).
- **Historical-Critical Scholarship:** Works of modern academic scholarship that analyze the historical, literary, and cultural contexts of the biblical and Quranic texts.
- **Peacebuilding Resources:** Texts from both traditions that specifically address themes of peace, reconciliation, and interfaith relations.

The selection of these materials would be a critical and sensitive process. It would be overseen by a diverse and respected panel of Nigerian Christian and Muslim scholars and leaders. The goal would be to create a database that is as representative as possible of the breadth and depth of scholarly interpretation in both traditions.

Once the texts are collected, they would need to be annotated. This is the process of adding structured metadata to the texts. The annotation process would also be overseen by the panel of experts. The annotations would include:

- **Topic Tagging:** Tagging each verse or passage with relevant topics (e.g., "justice," "mercy," "violence," "interfaith relations").
- **Interpretation Summaries:** For each passage, writing brief summaries of the main interpretations found in the scholarly commentaries.
- **Consensus Rating:** For each interpretation, providing a rating of its level of acceptance within the scholarly community (e.g., "broad consensus," "majority view," "minority view," "outlier").

This annotated database would be the fuel for the AI engine. The quality and diversity of the data at this stage would be the single most important factor in determining the quality and fairness of the model's output.

Stage 2: The AI Consensus Engine

The core of the model is the AI Consensus Engine. This engine would use supervised machine learning techniques to analyze the annotated database. The primary task of the engine would be text classification. It would be trained to take a user's query (a specific verse or passage) and classify the various interpretations of that passage according to the consensus ratings in the database.

The engine would likely employ an ensemble of different machine learning models to improve its accuracy and dependability. Ensemble methods combine the predictions of multiple models to produce a more reliable result (Iwanowski & Gahbler, 2025). For example, the engine might use a combination of traditional machine learning algorithms like Support Vector Machines (SVMs) and more modern deep learning models like transformers.

It is critical to understand what the AI engine would *not* do. It would not generate its own original interpretations of religious texts. It would not claim to have any spiritual or theological insight. Its function would be purely to synthesize and present the range of existing human scholarship. When a user queries a passage, the engine's output would be a structured summary of how that passage has been interpreted by recognized scholars. It would present the consensus view, note significant alternative views, and flag interpretations that are widely considered to be outside the mainstream of scholarly thought. The output would always be linked back to the original source texts in the database, allowing users to verify the information for themselves.

Stage 3: The User Interface and Application

The final stage of the model is the user interface. This would be the public-facing component of the system. It would be designed as a simple, accessible, and user-friendly web application and mobile app. The interface would have several key features:

- **Search Functionality:** A simple search bar where users can enter a Bible verse or Quranic passage.
- **Structured Output:** A clear and easy-to-understand presentation of the AI engine's output. This would include the text of the passage, a summary of the consensus interpretation, summaries of major alternative interpretations, and any flags for outlier interpretations.
- **Contextual Information:** Links to the source commentaries and scholarly works in the database, as well as information about the historical and cultural context of the passage.
- **Educational Resources:** A section of the application dedicated to providing resources on responsible religious text interpretation. This might include articles, videos, and tutorials on hermeneutics and exegesis.

The design of the user interface would be critical to the model's success. It would need to be designed in close consultation with Nigerian religious leaders, educators, and potential users to ensure that it is culturally appropriate and meets their needs.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The development of the Religion-AI Handshake Model has a number of significant theoretical and practical implications.

Implications for Peacebuilding

At a practical level, the model offers a new tool for peacebuilders working in Nigeria and potentially other conflict-affected societies. It could be used in a variety of settings:

- **Education:** The model could be used in secondary schools, universities, and seminaries to teach students about responsible religious text interpretation.
- **Clergy Training:** It could be used to train imams and pastors on how to address difficult or controversial passages in their scriptures.
- **Interfaith Dialogue:** It could serve as a common reference point for Christians and Muslims in dialogue, helping them to understand each other's scriptures more accurately.
- **Public Information:** It could be used by journalists and policymakers to fact-check the claims of extremist groups.

By making scholarly consensus more accessible, the model could help to create a more informed public discourse about religion. This could, in turn, reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies and contribute to a more peaceful and tolerant society.

Implications for Digital Humanities and Religious Studies

The model also has significant theoretical implications. It represents a new application of AI to the humanities, demonstrating how computational methods can be used to address complex questions of interpretation and meaning. It challenges the traditional boundaries between computer science and religious studies, suggesting that these fields have much to learn from each other.

For religious studies, the model offers a new way of mapping and analyzing interpretive traditions. It could be used to trace the historical development of different interpretations, to compare and contrast the interpretive methods of different schools of thought, and to identify areas of consensus and disagreement both within and between religious traditions. This could open up new avenues of research for scholars.

Implications for Religious Authority

The model also raises important questions about religious authority. In an age of social media and widespread misinformation, traditional sources of religious authority are increasingly being challenged. Extremist leaders with little or no formal religious training can use online platforms to reach large audiences and present themselves as authoritative interpreters of scripture. The Religion-AI Handshake Model offers a potential response to this challenge. It does not seek to replace the authority of trained and recognized religious scholars. On the contrary, it seeks to amplify that authority by making their collective wisdom more widely available. It provides a tool that can be used to distinguish between interpretations that are grounded in a long tradition of scholarship and those that are not.

Ethical Challenges and Future Directions

The development and deployment of the Religion-AI Handshake Model would entail a number of significant ethical challenges. These must be addressed proactively and transparently.

Algorithmic Bias

The most significant ethical challenge is the risk of algorithmic bias. AI models are only as good as the data they are trained on. If the database of texts and interpretations is not sufficiently diverse and representative, the model will reproduce and potentially amplify existing biases (Pasipamire, 2024). For example, if the database overrepresents the views of male scholars, the model may marginalize the interpretations of female scholars. If it overrepresents the views of one particular theological or sectarian group, it may present that group's views as the consensus. Mitigating this bias will require a painstaking and inclusive process of data curation, overseen by a diverse panel of experts.

Data Privacy and Security

While the model would not collect personal data from users, the security of the database itself would be a concern. The database would be a valuable resource, and it could be a target for malicious actors who might seek to corrupt or steal the data. Strong cybersecurity measures would be essential.

Potential for Misuse

There is also a risk that the model could be misused. It could be presented as a final arbiter of religious truth, shutting down legitimate debate and delegitimizing minority or dissenting interpretations. The user interface must be carefully designed to avoid this. It must be clear to users that the model is a tool for understanding scholarly consensus, not a replacement for their own critical thinking and spiritual judgment. The model should be seen as a starting point for conversation, not an end point.

Future Directions

This paper has presented a conceptual framework. The next step is to move toward empirical research and development. Future work should focus on several areas:

- **Prototype Development:** A small-scale prototype of the model should be developed, focusing on a limited set of contested passages.
- **User Testing:** This prototype should be tested with a diverse group of potential users in Nigeria, including religious leaders, educators, and students. Their feedback would be essential for refining the model.
- **Governance Framework:** A detailed governance framework for the model should be developed. This would include policies on data curation, bias mitigation, and user feedback.
- **Expansion:** If the prototype proves successful, the model could be expanded to include a wider range of texts, traditions, and languages.

Conclusion

Religious conflict poses a grave threat to Nigeria's future. The misinterpretation of religious texts is a key driver of this conflict. This paper has argued that new technologies, specifically AI, can be part of the solution. It has proposed a conceptual framework for the Religion-AI Handshake Model, a socio-technical system designed to promote non-conflictual interpretations of religious texts. The model is not a simple technological fix. It is a human-centered approach that seeks to support and amplify the wisdom of religious scholarly

traditions.The development of such a model would be a complex and challenging undertaking. The ethical risks, particularly the risk of algorithmic bias, are significant. However, the potential rewards are also great. By providing a tool that can help to counter extremist propaganda and promote a more informed public discourse about religion, the model could make a real contribution to peace and national integration in Nigeria. It represents a fresh approach to a problem that has proven resistant to more traditional interventions. It is an approach that deserves serious consideration and further research.

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