

Cyber Church : Between Innovation and Tradition in Christian Ministry in The Digital Age

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Abstract: The development of digital technology has significantly changed various aspects of life, including the religious sphere. Cyber Church has emerged as an innovation that allows churches to reach a broader congregation through digital media without relying on physical gatherings. This study aims to analyze the concept of Cyber Church, the role of technology in transforming church worship and ministry, its impact on congregational spiritual growth, and the integration of digital innovation with traditional church values. The research employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach, drawing from various journal articles and academic books. The findings reveal that Cyber Church provides significant opportunities for churches to engage with the digital generation while posing challenges in maintaining spiritual depth and personal interactions within faith communities. Furthermore, the integration of technology with church traditions is crucial to ensuring that digital innovation does not replace the essence of fellowship, which has long been the foundation of the church. Thus, this study asserts that Cyber Church should be understood as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for conventional church ministry.

Keywords: Cyber Church; Spirituality, Technology, Worship

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including Christian religious practices. The emergence of the concept of the “Cyber Church” represents an innovation that combines traditional church ministry with technological advancement. This phenomenon has sparked debates between preserving traditional values and adapting to digital innovation within the context of Christian ministry.

Across the globe, churches have begun adopting advanced technologies to enrich the spiritual experiences of their congregations. For example, a church in Lucerne, Switzerland (2024) has used an AI hologram named “Deus in Machina” to hear confessions and provide advice based on New Testament texts. This initiative aims to spark discussion about the role of AI in religious practice, although it has generated both support and criticism among churchgoers and theologians.

Meanwhile, the Vatican has introduced AI-based services at St. Peter's Basilica in preparation for the Jubilee Holy Year (2025). These services include an interactive virtual website and a digital replica of the basilica, designed to enhance the visitor experience and provide remote access to the architectural richness of the basilica. This approach reflects the Church's effort to adopt technology to reach a wider audience, including the younger generation, without neglecting or abandoning the traditional values that form the foundation of its ministry.

However, the implementation of technology in church ministry presents various challenges. Christian leaders are required to find a balance between preserving traditional values and integrating modern technology to enhance the effectiveness of ministry. A study conducted by Palullungan and Paipinan (2024) highlights the importance of a balanced strategy in combining digital technology with traditional values so that the Church remains accessible and relevant.

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In addition, it is essential for the Church to consider ethical aspects in the use of technology, especially regarding the privacy and security of congregational data. The Church has a responsibility to protect sensitive information and ensure that technological innovation does not compromise the core values and essence of Christian teachings. Therefore, a wise and reflective approach is necessary when integrating technology into church ministry, so that tradition and innovation can work together to enrich the spiritual experience of the congregation.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach to analyze the phenomenon of the Cyber Church in Christian ministry in the digital age. As stated by Zaluchu (202), religious research can be conducted through various approaches, including qualitative methods, by utilizing relevant academic sources. In a literature review, the researcher collects and analyzes theories, concepts, and findings from credible sources such as books, journal articles, and research reports related to the topic being studied. This approach enables the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics between technological innovation and tradition within the context of church ministry, as well as its implications for the spiritual life of the congregation. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a significant theoretical contribution to the development of Christian ministry strategies in the digital era.

3. Results and Discussion

Cyber Church

Advancements in information and communication technology have significantly impacted various aspects of life, including Christian religious practices. One manifestation of this change is the emergence of the concept of the “Cyber Church,” which refers to a form of church community that utilizes digital technology and the internet as the primary medium for worship and ministry. This concept has developed in line with increased internet penetration and the growing need for flexibility in worship, especially during global situations that limit physical gatherings, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The origin of the Cyber Church can be traced back to the late 20th century, when the internet began to be used as a mass communication tool. Churches started using websites to disseminate information and reach a wider audience. However, a significant transformation occurred in the early 21st century with the rise of social media platforms and streaming technology, which enabled online worship services. Sopacoly and Lattu (2020) state that advancements in information and technology have significantly influenced the way Christians worship. Therefore, the church is required to adapt to the virtual environment in order to continue functioning effectively.

The concept of the Cyber Church is not limited to broadcasting worship services online but also includes the formation of virtual communities where members can interact, share spiritual experiences, and support each other in their faith journey. Juhani (2020) argues that the internet has become a living space that defines and gives meaning to human and church existence, creating a cyber culture that influences thinking and theology. In this context, the Cyber Church functions as a platform that connects members across geographical boundaries, allowing active participation in various church activities through digital media.

The implementation of the Cyber Church in Christian ministry involves various aspects, ranging from providing online worship content to developing applications and interactive platforms that allow members to participate in theological discussions, prayer groups, and other ministry activities. Afandi (2019) states that technology enables the formation of broader communication and community, where members can pray and interact through social media and other digital platforms. This proves that the Cyber Church is not merely a medium for delivering worship but also a digital ecosystem that supports the holistic spiritual life of believers.

Furthermore, the development of cyber theology becomes important in the context of the Cyber Church as an effort to understand and interpret spiritual experiences in digital spaces. Juhani (2020) emphasizes the need for developing cyber theology in Indonesia, considering that the internet has become a *locus theologicus* that influences the way Christians think and believe. Cyber theology plays a role in bridging the gap between theological tradition and digital reality, enabling the church to formulate pastoral approaches that are relevant and contextual in the digital era.

Overall, the Cyber Church is an innovative response to technological development and social changes that affect religious practices. By using digital technology, the church can extend its reach, provide convenience in worship, and build open communities unrestricted by geographic boundaries. However, the implementation of the Cyber Church also requires careful theological and pastoral consideration to ensure that this innovation aligns with the values and traditions of the church and is effective in supporting the spiritual growth of the congregation in the digital age.

The Role of Technology in the Transformation of Worship and Church Ministry

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including worship practices and church ministry. The integration of digital technology into church activities has transformed how congregants worship, interact, and receive spiritual services. This transformation not only includes the use of electronic devices during services but also the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance ministry efficiency and the development of church leaders. In this context, it is important to understand how technology plays a role in changing the dynamics of worship and ministry, as well as its implications for the spiritual life of the congregation.

One tangible manifestation of technology integration in worship is the use of gadgets or smart devices by congregants during services. A study by Yunita, Purwoto, and Antadinata (2024) reveals that the development of information technology has led to a shift from printed Bibles to electronic Bibles. While this makes access to Scripture more convenient, the study also found that using gadgets during services can distract congregants and reduce their focus on listening to the Word of God. This phenomenon shows that although technology offers convenience, its use in worship requires regulation and awareness to avoid diminishing the quality of fellowship with God.

In addition, AI is being used in various aspects of church ministry to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Pasasa (2024) in his research discusses how AI can be used to enhance the spiritual development of church leaders and improve church ministry operations. Through literature analysis and practical implementation, the study explores the revolutionary potential of AI to bring positive change in the context of spiritual life and personal development within the church. However, Pasasa (2024) also emphasizes that while AI can simplify administrative and operational tasks, the pastoral role and personal relationships between church leaders and members cannot be replaced by technology.

The transformation of worship and church ministry through technology also includes the use of digital platforms for sharing spiritual content and fostering interaction among members. Social media, video streaming, and church-specific applications allow congregants to attend services online, participate in small groups, and receive spiritual guidance without geographical limitations. However, this adaptation also presents challenges related to the authenticity of the worship experience and the depth of spiritual interaction. Therefore, churches need to design balanced strategies that utilize technology while preserving the essence of authentic Christian fellowship.

In addition to the benefits offered, the integration of technology into worship and church ministry also demands digital literacy among both congregants and church leaders. Adequate understanding of technology use will help maximize its benefits while minimizing potential distractions or misuse. Training and education on digital ethics, data security, and the use of spiritual software can serve as proactive steps to ensure that technology functions as a tool that supports faith development, rather than detracting from it.

The Impact of the Cyber Church on the Spiritual Growth of Congregants

The development of digital technology has had a major impact on many aspects of life, including Christian religious practices. One emerging phenomenon resulting from this advancement is the “Cyber Church,” which utilizes online platforms to conduct worship and ministry. This phenomenon became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social restrictions forced churches to shift to online worship formats. However, questions arise regarding how the Cyber Church affects the spiritual growth of congregants.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of online worship in fostering spiritual growth. Hondro and Yusuf (2020) emphasize that delivering sermons through live streaming media can serve as an effort to build spirituality in the digital era. They highlight that sermons remain a vital instrument for guiding, inspiring, and deepening the faith of believers, even when delivered via digital platforms. However, adapting to this

technology also presents challenges related to personal interaction and the continuity of spiritual community values.

Moreover, research by Lolinga (2021) at Bethel Church Indonesia Parakletos Cengkareng revealed that online worship is fairly effective in supporting the spiritual growth of congregants. Through online services, nearly all members were able to participate in various church activities, such as Sunday Worship, Cell Groups, and Discipleship Programs, ensuring continued engagement in church life despite the virtual format. This shows that even with physical limitations due to social restrictions, spiritual growth can still occur through digital platforms. However, some respondents stated that onsite worship is more efficient, and therefore, a combination of online and onsite worship is recommended to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation optimally.

Not all studies, however, show positive results. A study conducted by Simanjuntak at GBI Ponds Square Jakarta (2021) found that social interaction in online worship was rated as “lacking,” and the spiritual growth of congregants only reached a “moderate” level. Although there is a significant correlation between social interaction during online services and the spiritual growth of members, limitations in personal interaction can hinder deeper faith development and meaningful involvement in the church community. Therefore, churches need to explore ways to enhance social interaction in online worship contexts to support the spiritual development of their members.

Furthermore, Sopacoly and Lattu (2020) suggest that the flow of information and technological mobilization has influenced how people form relationships with others and with themselves, including in the development of faith and spirituality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Christian worship patterns underwent significant change, pushing churches to adapt to virtual realities. Understandings of spirituality have also shifted, where the relationship with God is no longer seen as limited to physical places of worship but can also occur in virtual spaces. This indicates that the Cyber Church can serve as a valid medium for spiritual experiences, even though it differs from traditional practices.

Therefore, the Cyber Church has the potential to support the spiritual growth of congregants through the flexibility and accessibility it offers. However, challenges related to social interaction and the depth of spiritual experience must still be addressed. Churches are expected to develop strategies that integrate digital technology with traditional religious practices in order to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation holistically in this digital age.

Integration of Digital Innovation with the Traditional Values of the Church

The advancement of digital technology has had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including the practice of religion. The Church, as an institution rooted in a long-standing tradition, faces the challenge of integrating digital innovation with its traditional values. This integration is not only about adopting technology, but also about how technology can be used to enrich and strengthen religious practices without sacrificing the essence of long-held values. In the context of Christian ministry, Andreas Simanjuntak (2020) explains that the role of technology in supporting worship, teaching, and pastoral care has become increasingly important, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital worship models.

A concrete example of this integration is the use of AI in church ministry. A study conducted by Manurung and Silaban (2024) shows that AI can be used to develop theological chatbots that provide spiritual guidance based on biblical texts. Although this technology can help church members gain a deeper understanding of their faith, some theologians emphasize that AI lacks the spiritual and personal dimensions that are central to religious experience. Therefore, while AI can be a helpful tool for theological learning and pastoral ministry, its use should remain under the supervision of church leaders with strong theological understanding.

In addition, several churches in Indonesia have utilized digital technology to create more inclusive worship experiences. According to Siregar and Hutapea (2023), Protestant churches have begun developing hybrid worship systems that combine traditional and digital elements. Members who cannot attend physically can still participate in services via streaming platforms, while social interaction is maintained through online discussion groups and social media-based communities. This demonstrates that digital innovation does not have to replace tradition, but can be used to support and expand the scope of church ministry.

However, the integration of technology into the church is not always well received. Some studies show that the implementation of digital technology in churches can create tension between more conservative members and those more open to change (Daniel Hutagalung,

2024). In this context, it is important for churches to adopt a balanced approach to technology adoption, while respecting the spiritual needs of members who hold firmly to traditional values. Furthermore, church leaders must ensure that the use of technology does not replace the direct interaction that is an essential part of congregational life (Andreas Simanjuntak, 2023).

In today's digital era, Christian leaders in Indonesia face a major challenge in balancing the preservation of traditional values with the use of modern technology to enhance church growth and ministry effectiveness. Palullungan and Paipinan (2024) highlight that the development of digital technology presents a dilemma for church leaders, who must find ways to remain faithful to ecclesial teachings and traditions while embracing technological innovation so that ministry remains relevant and impactful for the congregation. Therefore, strategic steps are needed such as deepening the understanding of traditional values, optimizing technology for the dissemination of religious teachings, and ensuring that its use remains aligned with Christian principles. Through an inclusive approach, the church can harness technological advancements to reach more people without compromising the essence of Christian teachings. Furthermore, continuous reflection and evaluation are key to ensuring that technological integration supports, rather than displaces, the core values of the church. In this way, Christian leaders can maintain the relevance and effectiveness of ministry amid the dynamics of changing times.

Additionally, church leaders in Indonesia need to develop a digital ethic for congregations in response to the growing sophistication of technology. Arifianto, Sumual, and Rahayu (2023) assert that digital transformation in social life has influenced the pattern of interaction between church leaders and congregants in pastoral ministry. Therefore, church leaders must have a comprehensive understanding of digital technology and Christian ethical principles in order to wisely guide their members in interacting in digital spaces. The transformation of church leadership in the digital era is crucial in building a digital ethic that aligns with Christian teachings, so that technology can be used to effectively support the teaching of faith without neglecting the deeply rooted traditional values of the church community.

Thus, the integration of digital innovation with the traditional values of the church requires a wise and balanced approach. Technology can be a powerful tool to enrich spiritual experiences and expand the reach of ministry, but it must be used in a way that respects and preserves the essence of the traditions and values long upheld by the church. A church that successfully adopts technology without losing its identity will be better equipped to reach new generations without abandoning the spiritual legacy that has been preserved for centuries.

Discipleship Model in the Cyber Church

In the digital era, discipleship within the church has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of the Cyber Church, which enables faith formation to be conducted through online platforms. The Cyber Church offers easy access for congregants to participate in Christian communities without geographical limitations, creating new opportunities in discipleship models. According to Campbell and Tsuria (2021), the digital church is not merely a communication medium but also an interactive space that facilitates teaching, mentoring, and faith development effectively. This digital-based discipleship approach emphasizes the use of technologies such as video conferencing, online discussion groups, and interactive applications to support congregational engagement in Bible study and theological reflection.

One of the main aspects of digital discipleship is the use of technology-based platforms to build dynamic faith communities. A study by Hutchings (2017) shows that digital communities can achieve levels of spiritual engagement similar to physical communities when managed properly. This can be seen in the implementation of small-group learning models that utilize technologies such as Zoom, YouTube, or Discord to support Bible discussions and mentoring sessions. Furthermore, research by Asaf Kharisma Putra Utama, Dedy Katarso, and Sari Saptorini (2022) highlights that the use of digital media in Christian discipleship can strengthen relationships among members, expand the reach of ministry, and provide flexibility in theological learning without being bound by geographical limitations. This approach allows spiritual leaders to maintain personal and contextual interaction with congregants, even when conducted online. The use of interactive digital platforms not only increases the effectiveness of delivering spiritual content, but also deepens congregants' engagement in theological discussion, faith reflection, and faith-based social action that can be done collectively in digital spaces. Therefore, technology-based discipleship is not just an

alternative for certain situations, but has become a model that can be optimized to support the spiritual growth of the congregation in the digital era.

However, challenges remain in the digital discipleship model, especially in maintaining spiritual depth and the quality of relationships among members. A study by Cheong (2013) points out that although digital media can support broader communication, there is a risk that online interaction cannot fully replace the depth of interpersonal relationships formed through face-to-face meetings. Therefore, the Cyber Church needs to develop a hybrid strategy that combines online and physical meetings to ensure that discipleship is not merely based on information transfer, but also on profound experiences of faith.

Another strategy that can be applied in digital discipleship is the use of AI and data analytics to understand spiritual growth patterns among congregants. According to research by Wagner (2020), machine learning algorithms can be used to identify the spiritual needs of church members and provide personalized learning content recommendations. By utilizing this technology, the digital church can develop AI-based systems capable of analyzing preferences and interaction patterns with spiritual materials, such as Bible reading, participation in online discussion groups, or involvement in faith-based digital outreach. This technology enables the Cyber Church to offer a more personal and adaptive discipleship experience, where each member receives teaching relevant to the challenges they face in their faith journey. A study by Anton Napitupulu and Rezeki Putra Gulo (2024) in the context of churches in Indonesia shows that the use of AI in Christian religious education not only improves learning effectiveness but also fosters active engagement of church members in theological reflection and practical application of Christian teachings in daily life.

Moreover, the implementation of AI in discipleship can enhance the efficiency of spiritual mentoring by automating certain administrative and communication tasks within the digital community. For example, AI-based chatbots can be used to answer basic theological questions, deliver daily devotionals tailored to individual spiritual needs, or even send reminders about small group meetings and online worship schedules. Research by Campbell and Tsuria (2021) emphasizes that the application of AI in the digital church environment must continue to consider ethical and spiritual dimensions so that this technology does not replace the human interactions that are essential to faith development. Therefore, churches need to adopt a holistic approach that integrates AI with active involvement from spiritual leaders to ensure that technology remains a supportive tool aligned with Christian principles. In this way, discipleship within the Cyber Church can develop in a more inclusive and effective manner without losing the personal and communal dimensions that are central to church life.

In conclusion, the discipleship model within the Cyber Church does not rely solely on technology as a tool, but also requires a holistic strategy to sustain spiritual engagement and depth among church members. With a structured approach, the church can optimize the potential of digital platforms in building a strong faith community without compromising theological values and fellowship within the church. In the future, the integration of more advanced technologies such as virtual reality and the metaverse may further enrich the digital discipleship experience, creating new opportunities for evangelism and the spiritual growth of the congregation.

4. Conclusions

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the Cyber Church is an innovation in the Christian world born out of digital technological development, enabling the church to expand its reach in ministry without losing the essence of its traditional values. The history and concept of the Cyber Church show that the church has undergone a significant transformation in delivering worship and ministry, now utilizing digital media as a primary means. Technology has not only changed how worship is conducted but also impacted the patterns of congregational engagement, presenting both challenges and opportunities in building a broader and more inclusive faith community. On one hand, the role of technology in transforming worship provides wider and more flexible access for congregants to participate. On the other hand, the church must ensure that the spiritual experience remains profound and is not replaced by merely technical aspects.

The Cyber Church also influences the spiritual growth of its members, where digital innovation can serve as a supportive tool in faith formation when applied wisely and remains grounded in theological values. Furthermore, the integration between digital innovation and the traditional values of the church is the key to maintaining a balance between technological

advancement and the richness of spiritual heritage. Therefore, the church needs to develop discipleship strategies that are relevant to the digital era, using technology to support learning and congregational engagement, while also preserving its spiritual roots so that the innovations implemented are not merely technical but also deepen the experience and understanding of faith in daily life.

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