



Digital Pentecostalism in Indonesia: Transformation of worship and virtual community



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The digital age has radically changed how religious communities worship, and the Pentecostal church is no exception. This article explores Digital Pentecostalism, focusing on how Indonesian Pentecostal congregations have capitalised on the changing worship, virtual community and new media in 2020–2024. Using qualitative methods through literature analysis, this study highlights key transformations in Pentecostal practice, including blending digital technology with preserving traditional Pentecostal aspects such as prophecy, speaking in tongues and healing ministry. This article also discusses the challenges and opportunities for connectedness in virtual communities, social media, spiritual authenticity and spiritual engagement in an increasingly digital world. The findings show that digital platforms offer a new way to engage in this digital transformation. However, they also raise questions about the authenticity, intimacy and spiritual implications of Pentecostal virtual worship.

Contribution: This study contributes to understanding how to redefine church membership in ecclesiology, analyses digital platforms as sacred spaces in media studies, studies embodied worship in virtual settings in anthropology, and studies the connectedness of prayer as a part of psychology and sociology.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; digital transformation; virtual worship; social media; digital platforms.

Introduction

The rise of digital technologies in the 21st century has led to significant changes in how religious communities practice their faith, with Pentecostalism being no exception. Traditionally, Pentecostal worship has been characterised by vibrant, in-person gatherings marked by charismatic expressions such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing. However, with the widespread use of digital platforms, particularly social media, Pentecostal churches are now navigating new ways of engaging their congregations and extending their reach across the globe. The transition to digital spaces for worship, fellowship and spiritual formation raises important questions about the nature of religious experience, community and authenticity in the age of digital media.

As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia also has a significant Christian community, including the Pentecostal. The growth of Pentecost in the midst of a Muslim majority offers insight into the dynamics of tolerance, interfaith tolerance and adaptation of evangelisation strategies.

Pentecostalism, with its distinctive charismatic practices, presents a unique case study in this domain, as its members engage in both traditional forms of worship and new digital platforms to express and experience their faith. While some studies have examined the role of media in Pentecostalism (Cartledge 2022), there is a notable gap in understanding how digital tools specifically reshape Pentecostal worship and community dynamics. How do virtual platforms impact the expression of Pentecostal rituals, such as speaking in tongues or prophetic messages? To what extent can online worship replicate the sense of spiritual intimacy and collective experience that characterises traditional Pentecostal gatherings? These questions remain underexplored in current literature.

Previous research, such as Tsuria and Campbell's (2021) examination of 'digital evangelism' and study on 'Religion Across the media', highlights the importance of media in contemporary religious practices. Still, they do not delve deeply into churchgoers' specific practices and lived experiences using digital platforms for worship.

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This study addresses this gap by focusing on the transformative effects of digital media on Pentecostal worship practices and community life in Indonesia between 2020 and 2024. By examining how online platforms shape the expression of Pentecostal spirituality and the dynamics of the religious community, this research aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving role of digital technologies in Indonesian Pentecostalism, specifically in the context of virtual worship, social media engagement and the preservation of community spirit.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly forced the transformation of church practices in Indonesia, particularly among Protestant and Pentecostal denominations. The Indonesian churches started to adapt by adopting digital technologies to create virtual worship experiences and online communities at this moment (Tonapa 2023; Singarimbun 2021b). This shift has led to the emergence of 'e-churches' and livestreamed services, allowing congregations to participate in real-time worship from home (Singarimbun 2021a). While virtual worship presents challenges in replicating physical interactions, it has become a primary ministry strategy rather than a temporary solution (Campbell 2020a). This digital transformation reflects a broader cultural shift from centralised to decentralised worship practices, reshaping ecclesiology in the face of technological advancements and pandemic-induced changes (Tonapa 2023).

Pentecostalism history and characteristics

Pentecost is a celebration celebrated by Christians to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, which occurred 50 days after Easter. It took place in Jerusalem, in an upper room (Ac 1:13). This celebration is often considered the birthday of the Christian church. In the biblical context, Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2:1–4. The meaning of Pentecost is the fulfilment of Jesus' promise in John 14:16–17 to give another helper, the Spirit of Truth. Pentecost also became the beginning of the church's mission to preach the Gospel throughout the world. The history of modern Pentecostalism began with Montanism and Joachim of Fiore (Hollenweger 1997), followed by the Holiness Movement of the 1800s spearheaded by John Wesley, which emphasised the holy life and experience of the Holy Spirit. Next up was the Azusa Street Revival of 1906–1909 in Los Angeles, which was a pivotal event in early Pentecostalism, characterised by sustained revival gatherings, manifestations of spiritual gifts and a focus on the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Blumhofer 2006).

After the events on Azusa Street, the movement then flourished throughout the world, characterised by its emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy (Kay 2011; Lankford 1967). Pentecostalism usually emerges during times of crisis, attracts marginalised groups and seeks to return to the roots of Christianity (Anderson 1979). The movement is known for its dynamic worship, biblical literalism and premillennial

beliefs (Lankford 1967). However, the Indonesian Pentecostal church does not only focus on spiritual gifts but also emphasises building dynamic individuals with characteristics such as firm fellowship, social concern, enthusiasm and intellectual ability (Siahaan 2017). Despite its rapid growth and global spread, Pentecostalism remains a legitimate expression of the Christian faith and is expected to continue to influence the future of Christianity (Kay 2011).

Pentecostalism is characterised by several key features, including an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and a dynamic Christian life (Siahaan 2017). Although often associated with speaking in tongues and charismatic experiences, Pentecostalism also emphasises fellowship, Bible study, social care and enthusiastic witnessing (Siahaan 2017). Education plays an important role in Pentecostal churches, focusing on discipleship, leadership development and church growth (Hosea 2019). Historically, Pentecostalism has appealed to marginalised groups and is characterised by biblical literalism, premillennialism and a focus on personal ecstatic experiences (Lankford 1967).

Pentecostal churches in Indonesia

The Pentecostal movement in Indonesia, which began in the early 1920s, was characterised by baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues (Aritonang 2012). The history of the movement in Indonesia is very complex, with some churches rooted in American Pentecostalism, particularly from the Pacific Northwest (Tambunan & Ruslim 2021). This movement, characterised by dynamic worship and an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, has become a prominent Christian face in the country (Supatra 2019).

The Pentecostal denomination entered Indonesia in 1921, brought by two Dutch immigrants, Cornelius Groesbeek and Richard (Dirk) van Klaveren, from America. They began their mission in Bali, including translating the Gospel of Luke into Balinese and performing divine healing. Later, this evangelistic activity expanded to Surabaya and Cepu (by Groesbeek) and Batavia/Jakarta (by Van Klaveren). In Cepu, Groesbeek met Reverend J. Thiessen and F.G. van Gessel, and since then the Pentecostal movement has grown rapidly. The Dutch East Indies Government officially recognized *De Pinkster Gemeente in Nederlandsch Indie* (Pentecostal Church in the Dutch East Indies) on June 4, 1924. Among its leaders were F.G. van Gessel (1892–1958), D.H.W. Weenink van Loon (1877–1944), F. van Abkoude, and M.A. Alt (1883–1962). The organisation, which had its office in Bandung and was headed by D.W.H. Wenink van Loon (Aritonang 2012), played a key role in the emergence of large Indonesian Pentecostal churches. Thiessen, Van Gessel, and Wenink van Loon were especially influential during those years. They were among the founding figures of what remains the largest Pentecostal church in Indonesia today, the Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia (GPdI) (Aritonang 2012). In 2024, the number of Christians (excluding Catholics) in Indonesia is 21.02 million or 7.37% of the total population of Indonesia, 284.97m (Kementrian Agama RI; Perdana). Pentecostalism in Indonesia is experiencing significant growth; according to data from PGPI

(Fellowship of Indonesian Pentecostal Churches), in 2019, there are more than 90 synods registered and approximately 9m congregations (Wiyono 2019). From the figure, the percentage of Pentecostal congregations from all Christians in Indonesia is around 40%. This growth was characterised by the development of large churches in urban areas that offered a distinctive religious experience through expressive worship styles and modern elements. They emphasise large-scale worship events, modern music and inspirational sermons to create a unique religious experience (Simanjuntak 2023). This growth became interesting because of the phenomenon of mega churches in some cities (Simanjuntak 2023). These churches, such as Gereja Mawar Sharon (GMS), GSJS (Gereja Satu Jam Saja) in Surabaya and Jakarta Praise Community Church (JPCC) in Jakarta, employ marketing and branding strategies to attract and retain members (Yip & Ainsworth 2013). The focus on numbers serves as both a goal and a tool for proselytisation, with leaders like Philip Mantofa of GMS claiming to have led over 100 000 souls to Christ (Chao 2018). The emergence of the concept of a 'Third Pentecost', was launched by Pdt Ir. Niko Njotorahardjo in 2018 from GBI (Gereja Bethel Indonesia), one of the mega-churches (Harefa et al. 2020). Even though now, it is still a debate among the Pentecostal churches. However, Indonesian Pentecostal expansion also faced many challenges, including identity crises (when other denominations criticised their theology for adapting to changing cultural contexts), denominational divisions and religious persecution (Wiyono 2019). Despite many divisions, the Pentecostal churches have experienced significant growth, especially with the emergence of the Charismatic movement (Aritonang 2012; Supatra 2019). While some other church denominations have criticised these churches as a commodification of religion, research shows that these churches positively impact the congregation's spiritual growth (Simanjuntak 2023). Despite these obstacles, Pentecostalism continues to thrive in major Indonesian cities, attracting thousands of people to Sunday services and revival meetings (Wiyono 2019).

Research methods and design

This study uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis to explore the transformation of worship and the Pentecostal community in the era of social media. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural phenomena occurring within Pentecostal churches, including the increasing use of social media and digital platforms in their religious practices. The qualitative method is also used to explore how spiritual experiences are shaped as congregations and churches adapt to digital technology. This research aims to understand how virtual worship and digital interaction have changed the way Pentecostal congregations live their religious practices, as well as how their communities are formed and thrive in the digital world.

Transformation of worship

Online platforms have become increasingly important for worship and ministry delivery, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cartledge 2022). Research shows that religious organisations are increasingly adopting digital

platforms, including websites, social media and mobile apps, to engage with their followers (Beznjuk & Tsybulskaya 2019). Online worship is widely adopted and reveals diverse experiences among the congregation.

Pentecostalism in Indonesia has distinct characteristics and is evolving. The movement is marked by a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work and is expected to shape the future of Christianity in the country (Supatra 2019). Indonesian Pentecostalism has developed its own unique identity, distinguishing it from global Pentecostalism and warranting its inclusion in religious studies as a distinct entity (Tambunan & Debataraja 2024).

Recent studies explore the unique characteristics of Indonesian Pentecostalism compared to global Pentecostalism. Tambunan (2021) highlights the struggle of Pentecostal scholars in Indonesia to redefine their position in society, representing Christian higher education. Tambunan and Debataraja (2024) argue for the distinctiveness of Indonesian Pentecostalism, emphasising its local and original aspects within religious studies. The historical connection between American and Indonesian Pentecostalism is examined by Tambunan and Ruslim (2021), revealing the Americanisation of Pentecostalism while acknowledging unique Indonesian modes of religiosity. Tambunan (2021) proposes expanding Pentecostal studies in Indonesia beyond revival and spiritual experiences, suggesting the integration of contemporary social theories. It is important to recognise Indonesian Pentecostalism's distinct features, its historical connections to global movements and the need for more comprehensive methodological approaches in studying Pentecostalism within the Indonesian context.

Nevertheless, today's transformation of online worship may not fully meet believers' needs for community, faith, or privilege (Wolf et al. 2022). The future of religious services is likely to involve a hybrid approach, with online options complementing traditional in-person worship, especially appealing to marginalised congregations (Jacobi et al. 2022). This shift presents opportunities for further research and design in technology-mediated religious experiences.

The complex relationship between technological progress and Pentecostal conservatism reveals adaptations as well as tensions. Some scholars argue that their unique spiritual perspectives can contribute valuable insights to theological-science dialogue (Smith & Yong 2010). This diverse response highlights the context-dependent nature of Pentecostal engagement with technological advances, ranging from enthusiastic adoption to cautious scepticism.

The explanation preceding Table 1 represents the author's interpretation of the complex interactions within the context of Pentecostal churches in Indonesia, which is subsequently supported by citations from Elvinaro, Syarif and Rohmana (2022), as well as Jaenudin (2024).

Despite the tensions that exist, some scholars suggest that virtual online worship can still evoke a sense of holiness and

TABLE 1: Complex interaction.

Aspect	Technological progress	Religious conservatism	Resulting tension
Worship practices	Online services, AI sermons, VR church	Preference for physical gatherings, sacraments	Hybridisation vs. purist resistance
Scriptural authority	Digital Bibles, algorithmic exegesis	Literalist adherence to traditional interpretation	Conflicts over 'correct' hermeneutics
Community formation	Social media groups, global networks	Emphasis on local, face-to-face fellowship	Fragmentation of traditional hierarchies
Morality & Ethics	AI ethics, transhumanism	Fixed theological doctrines on human nature	Debates over 'playing God'
Evangelism	TikTok preaching, metaverse revivals	Suspicion of 'shallow' digital conversion	Struggles over authenticity

AI, Artificial Intelligence.

devotion among congregants, especially when there is consistent engagement and a clear demarcation between the sacred virtual space and the offline environment (Elvinaro, Syarif & Rohmana 2022). This shift requires a balance between the use of technology and collective religious activities to maintain spiritual and social values (Jaenudin 2024).

The concept of virtual mediation of the Holy Spirit offers a bridge between traditional and digital worship practices, inviting further exploration of digitally mediated Pentecostalism (Cartledge 2022). The Holy Spirit is thought to be embedded in the digital infrastructure, enabling miraculous healing through technological devices (Addo 2021). The move to digital platforms has required the development of new research methodologies, such as virtual ethnography, to study the online Pentecostal community (Cartledge 2022).

In many other church denominations, this transition disrupts traditional liturgical practices and power dynamics while providing an opportunity to reassess doctrine (Mhandu & Ojong 2021). Pentecostal churches are more adaptable to online worship celebrations compared to other denominations, raising theological questions about sacramental practices in the digital age (Cartledge 2024a).

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the preparation of sermons and sermons is also a transformation that needs attention. Artificial Intelligence in education offers numerous advantages, including personalised learning experiences, improved task management and efficient data processing (Abou Karroum et al. 2024; Al-Tkhayneh et al. 2023). A recent study investigated the function and influence of AI pastors on the future of the church in Indonesia through an analysis of Christian theology and ethics. They contended that AI pastors serve as tools that can enhance the future ministry of the church by critically considering ethical, biblical and spiritual principles (Ndruru 2024).

However, researchers highlight several disadvantages and ethical concerns. These include the potential de-professionalisation of teachers, erosion of teacher–student relationships, perpetuation of biases and data privacy issues

(Rakap 2024). Similar to sermon ministry in Pentecostal churches, the use of AI in sermon preparation and sermons is also an advantage and disadvantage that must be faced. While AI has the potential to improve various aspects, it is crucial to approach its integration with caution, ensuring it complements rather than replaces human expertise (Rakap 2024; Hutchings 2017). Balancing AI's benefits with ethical considerations is essential for leveraging its transformative potential in Pentecostal church ministry. The concept of presence in digital worship has been widely questioned by many, with concerns about its purity compared to physical presence. However, efforts are being made to reconstruct the meaning of presence in digital worship experiences, emphasising the presence of the Holy Spirit that truly touches every worshipper. Researchers are exploring the potential of the Holy Spirit's virtual mediation and the internet as an additional or alternative space for worship (Cartledge 2022). The shift to digital platforms has prompted the need for further academic attention to understand the implications and future of digitally mediated Pentecostalism (Cartledge 2022). Recent research explores the role of the Holy Spirit in digital evangelism and virtual Pentecostal practices. The Holy Spirit is crucial in enabling effective virtual evangelism, leading people to repentance and conviction (Ananius 2024). However, the virtual world often lacks the Holy Spirit's involvement, necessitating believers to actively present His existence as a guide in digital life (Toding & Anjaya 2021). Pentecostal scholars are working to expand discourse on Pentecostalism beyond mere focus on the Holy Spirit, fostering dialogue between Pentecostal and ecumenical perspectives (Gultom et al. 2022). Pentecostal doctrine emphasises the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second blessing after salvation, available to all believers for ministry empowerment and always accompanied by speaking in tongues. This gift is believed to continue beyond the apostolic era (Stevanus & Panjaitan 2020). These studies highlight the ongoing relevance of the Holy Spirit in virtual religious practices and Pentecostal theology.

Pentecostalism, characterised by its emphasis on transformative encounters with the Holy Spirit, has been conceptualised as a form of 'play' in religious studies (Vondey 2018).

This framework encompasses Pentecostal spirituality, experience, narrative, affections, practices and embodiment (Vondey 2018). Understanding these ordinary beliefs and practices concerning the Holy Spirit is crucial for both academic and ecclesial audiences (Cartledge 2016).

While digital technologies present risks of misuse, they also offer opportunities for reimagining transcendent realities and developing new perspectives on discipleship, communication and community formation (Afandi 2018). Overall, Indonesian Pentecostal churches are encouraged to adopt innovative approaches in the digital era while preserving their core mission and values.

Virtual community

Virtual communities have become increasingly important for Indonesian Pentecost churches, especially during the

COVID-19 pandemic. These online platforms allow congregations to participate in worship services and maintain religious connections despite physical distancing measures (Singarimbun 2021b). Churches adapt by utilising technology for pastoral care, particularly for ministers in remote areas. However, challenges remain, such as the loss of physical touch and emotional expression in online settings (Singarimbun 2021b). Despite these limitations, virtual communities offer churches new strategies for maintaining connections and providing spiritual support in the digital era, bridging geographical and cultural boundaries (Lizardo 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted religious practices, particularly among Indonesian Pentecostals. This is driving churches to adopt virtual platforms for worship and community engagement (Singarimbun 2021b; Sopacoly & Lattu 2020). This shift to e-church services has enabled congregations to participate in real-time Sunday worship via live streams, although it lacks certain aspects of in-person gatherings (Singarimbun 2021b). The transition to online spirituality has transformed Christian understanding of faith experiences, extending beyond physical church spaces (Sopacoly & Lattu 2020). These developments highlight the growing importance of cybertheology in shaping Indonesian Christian spirituality and community engagement in the digital age.

Virtual communities have emerged as an important platform for religious expression and interaction in the digital age. These online spaces facilitate the adaptation of religion to the realities of new technologies (Semenova 2020) and provide a new context for religious engagement and community building (Borowik 2018; George 2005). While virtual religious communities offer benefits such as connecting geographically dispersed individuals and encouraging interactivity (George 2005), they also face challenges in replicating the traditional social structures of offline religious institutions (Hughes & Robinson 2009).

The unique characteristics of online environments, including the importance of identity, authenticity and authority, can create particular problems for religious communities in virtual spaces (Hughes & Robinson 2009). Nevertheless, digital technology has enabled marginalised religious groups to reconfigure their identities and practices (Borowik 2018). Along with the development of virtual religions, virtual religions continue to evolve. This raises important questions about the role of technology in facilitating human religiosity and community formation in the 21st century (George 2005).

Social identity, which consists of cognitive, emotional and evaluative components, influences community participation and is shaped by social network features. Social presence in a virtual environment facilitates social identification and promotes community engagement.

However, online religious communities face unique challenges in replicating traditional social structures because of computer-mediated communication constraints, especially

regarding identity, authenticity and authority (Hughes & Robinson 2009). Intentional social actions in virtual communities are driven by individual factors (emotions and desires) and community influences, especially social identities (Bagozzi & Dholakia 2002). Understanding these dynamics is critical to supporting social interaction and designing effective virtual communities across a variety of domains, including healthcare and religion.

Trust and security are important factors in virtual communication in a variety of fields, including business, health and career development. The integration of virtual and real communities can offer a promising approach, combining the strengths of both while mitigating each other's weaknesses (Etzioni & Etzioni 1997). Security issues in these online spaces require robust authentication methods, such as MAC address-based systems, to protect member privacy and build trust (Hong 2008).

Connectedness in the virtual community

In this context, Indonesian Pentecostal social activism is being reconsidered through a pneumatological lens, emphasising the Holy Spirit's role in motivating believers to work toward societal transformation (Manurung 2023). While some people argue that online interactions lack the intimacy and emotional depth of face-to-face meetings (Etzioni & Etzioni 1997), virtual communities offer unique advantages such as asynchronous communication and strong memory features. The integration of virtual and real communities can provide the best of both worlds (Etzioni & Etzioni 1997). The concept of community in cyberspace has been explored extensively, revealing opportunities and challenges. Online interactions can foster new forms of social and organisational relationships, challenging traditional notions of identity and community (Kollock & Smith 2002).

Indonesian culture emphasises connectedness and social relationships. The concept of social connectedness, which predicts better mental health and life expectancy, has been studied using adapted measurement tools like the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R) for Indonesia (Bagaskara & Widyastuti 2023). This connectedness extends to the digital realm, where pastors use online platforms to reach their congregation. In nursing, the Theory of Communion-in-Caring aligns with Indonesian values of 'gotong royong' (mutual assistance) and 'silaturahmi' (relationship building), promoting holistic care and meaningful connections (Tuppai & Setiawan 2024). Research has identified key Indonesian values such as mutual aid, democracy, religion and family, alongside challenges like corruption and individualism (Sihombing 2013). These highlighted the importance of social bonds and cultural values in Indonesian society, especially in the church.

Despite scepticism about online cohesiveness, studies of virtual communities such as the Asep-Asep Community (KAA) show

that a sense of community can be fostered through online interactions and offline encounters, highlighting the potential for meaningful connections in digital spaces (Nurjanah 2017). Connectedness plays an important role in spiritual well-being, encompassing relationships with oneself, others and greater purpose (Bellingham et al. 1989).

This concept is related to eudaimonic well-being, with spirituality potentially mediating the relationship between nature's connectedness and well-being (Trigwell et al. 2014).

Spirituality is understood as a vital element of the human condition, which involves relationality and connectedness to the self and everything other than the self, including social, physical and transcendent dimensions (De Souza 2009). This connection promotes a sense of self, place, meaning and purpose. Religious frameworks can nurture and express human spirituality, blurring the distinction between the individual and spirituality for some individuals. Connectedness is very important in one's spiritual well-being and mental health (De Souza 2009). Recent human resources studies have emphasised the importance of employee well-being and the use of technology in management, which may have implications for understanding spiritual experiences in organisational contexts (Wirajaya & Tiarpuspa 2023). Thus, the digital transformation in the Pentecostal church must still be able to maintain the core of the gathering with fellow believers, which is to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, which is the core of Pentecostal spirituality.

The shift from hierarchical structures to more fluid network-based relationships in online religious communities reflects broader cultural changes in media and society (Campbell & Golan 2011). This transformation has led to the development of alternative authority structures and forms of individual religious engagement that can deviate from mainstream doctrine. The formation of bonds and the emergence of network structures within online communities may differ from traditional social networks, requiring new interpretations and research approaches (Groenewegen & Moser 2014).

Research shows that social connectedness plays an important role in psychological well-being (Holt-Lunstad 2024). In addition, social connectedness, along with self-esteem, significantly affects loneliness (Rahma 2019). These findings underscore the importance of fostering and maintaining social relationships to improve psychological well-being in various contexts, especially in the church.

From the explanations above, one way for virtual communities to maintain connectedness among church members is by increasing the intensity of visual meetings in the form of Joint Prayer and Joint Bible study among church congregations. Thus, even though the difference in distance and time does not allow for physical encounters, the existing emotional bond can still be improved.

Social media

Recent studies highlight the significant growth of social media usage in Indonesia. As of January 2022, there were 191m active social media users in the country (Kemp 2022). This represents a substantial increase from 160m users in January 2020, which was already 59% of the total population at that time (Andriano 2021).

Social media platforms are also used by Pentecostal churches to disseminate religious content, live broadcasts of services, or testimony of miracles. As an archipelagic country, the digital church allows access to isolated areas without the physical presence of the church. Online radio, streaming and mobile apps are becoming effective means of reaching remote communities. Research highlights the importance of religious moderation on social media to promote interfaith harmony and prevent conflicts (Doma 2023). Pentecostal churches have leveraged social media to spread teachings, with scholars analysing the movement through religious and theological perspectives (Tambunan 2021). Social media also played an important role in religious preaching during lockdown, allowing for continued religious outreach while people stayed home (Putra 2021).

Social media presents both opportunities and challenges for Christianity in Indonesia. While it can enhance social relationships, it is also misused for bullying and spreading hoaxes, leading to social divisions (Arifianto & Santo 2020). Christian faith and education play crucial roles in combating these issues by promoting ethical online behaviour, tolerance and honest communication (Arifianto & Santo 2020). The negative impacts of social media on children, including addiction, cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content, require attention and control from parents and close relatives (Cahyono 2018). However, social media also offers the potential for fostering interfaith dialogue, empathy and understanding among diverse religious communities in Indonesia (Doma 2023). Christians are called to be 'salt and light' in the digital world, embracing differences and living harmoniously with others while maintaining their faith (Arifianto & Santo 2020).

The relationship between the church and social media in the digital age is not necessarily problematic, as long as society prioritises natural communities over virtual communities (Nole et al. 2024). The emergence of 'Religion 2.0' was marked by the proliferation of faith-based apps and interactive religious content, which further blurred the boundaries between physical and virtual worship experiences (Cheong 2014). These developments have prompted a re-evaluation of religious practices, community formation and the role of technology in spiritual life.

According to Nurul Fatmawati (Fatmawati 2021), social media has advantages compared to conventional media, including: (1) Simplicity, which is very easy to use even for people without an IT background can access it. (2) Building Relationships. Social media offers an unparalleled

opportunity to interact with the ready-made and build relationships. If you use traditional media, you cannot do the things mentioned above, but traditional media only communicates one way. (3) Global Reach. Traditional media can reach globally but of course at a very expensive and time-consuming cost. Through social media, businesses can communicate information in an instant, regardless of geographic location. (4) Measurable. With an easy tracking system, message delivery can be measured, so companies can immediately know the effectiveness of promotions. Meanwhile, the negative impact of social media is to keep people away from people who are already close and vice versa, face-to-face interactions tend to decrease, making people addicted to the internet, causing conflicts, privacy problems and being vulnerable to the bad influence of others (Fatmawati 2021).

Cyber theology, or cybertheology, is an emerging field that explores the intersection of Christianity and digital technology. It examines how the internet and virtual spaces impact religious practices, spirituality and theological thinking (Juhani 2019; Sopacoly & Lattu 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual worship services, challenging traditional notions of church gatherings and sparking debates about faith and online presence (Ardiansyah 2023). Cyber theology is a field of study that explores the relationship between theology and technology, particularly in digital and internet contexts. It considers the internet as a new locus theologicus, reflecting on how digital culture influences Christian communication and community formation (Juhani 2019; Spadaro & Way 2014). It addresses topics such as virtual liturgy, sacraments and the concept of 'virtual presence' in religious contexts (Spadaro & Way 2014). As the internet becomes an integral part of religious life, cybertheology offers a framework for understanding and navigating the relationship between faith and technology in the digital age (Juhani 2019; Sopacoly & Lattu 2020). Cyber theology emerged as an important framework for understanding the intersection of theology and digital technology in the modern era. It explores how digital spaces are transforming religious practices, spiritual experiences and theological thought (Le Duc 2023). Cyber theology also addresses ethical issues surrounding advanced technologies such as Super AI (SAI), emphasising the need for a grounded ethical framework that is aligned with human values and theological insights (Peters 2024).

Alongside cyber theology, digital ecclesiology has emerged as a significant field of study, examining how churches integrate digital technology into their practices and theology. While digital media offers new opportunities for communication, community building and discipleship (Afandi 2018), they also present challenges such as 'Zoom fatigue' and content proliferation (O'Lynn 2022). Digital ecclesiology has been extensively explored from various aspects by researchers, including the theological implications of virtual church communities and the need for churches to engage with the internet in their ministries (Campbell 2020b). As churches navigate this digital landscape, they must

balance the benefits of technology with the potential risks, such as the loss of human identity to technology, or 'techno-ontology' (O'Lynn 2022). Digital ecclesiology seeks to address these challenges and opportunities, shaping the future of church practice in an increasingly digital world (Campbell 2020b).

Digital ecclesiology explores the intersection of churches and digital technologies, examining how faith communities adapt to and utilise online platforms. Digital ecclesiology encompasses various aspects, including social media engagement, virtual church experiences and the potential for new forms of discipleship (Afandi 2018). As Pentecostal churches navigate this digital landscape, they must balance the benefits of technological integration with maintaining their core Pentecostal theological principles and practices.

Spirituality and authenticity of worship

Myrick (2025) explores the impact of the authenticity of spirituality in worship practice. criticised the emphasis on authenticity and purity in worship music, arguing that it could hinder social engagement. It requires an approach that engages in incarnation to worship and spirituality, emphasising the integration of worship and action to meet modern spiritual needs. Research suggests that spirituality and religiosity are distinct concepts, with religiosity rooted in specific theological beliefs and practices, while spirituality focuses on understanding life experiences without specific religious foundations (Amir & Lesmawati 2017). Spirituality in the workplace can influence employee productivity and behaviour and reduce fraud, while religiosity may not significantly impact ethical awareness (Marsus & Azharani 2022).

In Christian contexts, spirituality is linked to an individual's relationship with God and can foster harmony among congregation members when practiced in worship (Santo et al. 2021). To enhance youth spirituality in church settings, charismatic leadership approaches may be effective, including encouraging prayer, building relationships with God, improving communication and providing counselling (Akka & Devisa 2023). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of spirituality and its potential impact on various aspects of personal and professional life.

Speaking in tongues and healing is seen as a cultural performance that unites participants and reaffirms their place in the religious community (Sequeira 1994). The gifts of the Holy Spirit, including healing, prophecy and tongues, are considered essential for digital church ministry and evangelism (Astuti & Bara 2022). The concept of virtual mediation of the Holy Spirit has gained attention, especially given the increasing reliance on internet communication. A study of Benny Hinn's online healing praxis shows the adaptation of Pentecostal sacraments to a digital platform, called 'Zoompartation', which exemplifies Pentecostalism's haptic culture in virtual space (Cartledge 2024b).

Conclusion

This article shows how the struggles of Indonesian Pentecostal churches have changed in the face of the digital age, especially in terms of worship transformation, the use of social media and digital technology to expand the reach of worship, virtual communities, congregational connectedness and spirituality. This transformation does not just focus on shifting from worship that is carried out in-person to worship that is held on a virtual platform. This process also reflects the uniqueness of Indonesian culture, which is known for its warmth in socialising and establishing relationships with others. In addition, this transformation presents a new and invaluable experience, where the congregation is allowed to deepen their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Thus, this change not only adapts the way of worship but also enriches and deepens the spiritual experience of the congregation amid increasingly rapid technological developments.

One of the key findings of this article is how digital technology has enabled Pentecostal churches in Indonesia to maintain and introduce their traditional practices, such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy, albeit in a virtual format. Nonetheless, there are challenges related to the authenticity and intimacy of spiritual experiences that are generally expected in physical contexts, so churches must continue to innovate to ensure that digital worship experiences remain authentic and immersive.

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Authors' contributions

F.O.L.L. contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis and supervision. D.A.W. contributed to the writing, software, validation and resources.

Ethical considerations

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