

# We are God's Social Media

## Doing missions using social media in digital world

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**Abstract**— Modern media continues to grow and have an impact on global changes in industrial, cultural, social, religious paradigms and the lives of people. New communication trends such as social media have implications for the disruption of the alienation of the functional role of religion which will most likely result in the loss of religious identity. Judging from the phenomenon above, how does the church reflect its identity as a social media that echoes God's Mission in the digital world? The purpose of this paper is to frame a new paradigm in the church and continue to streamline its mission of spreading the gospel throughout the world in the digital era. This research used descriptive research, with a qualitative approach. The results of the study highlight several factors (1) Reality of the Church as the Epistle of Christ in the Modern World (2) Church embraces digitization in mission. **Research Contribution:** This research is proposed to help readers present the church's identity in virtual reality in the context of social media as well as embrace social media as a support system for transmitting the message of Christ in the Digital Age.

**Keywords**—social media; mission; digital world; christian; identity

### I. INTRODUCTION

The world is constantly changing. These days new technology has redefined our economy, politics, culture, beliefs, and personal identity. Digital technology has changed the way we engage with people and understand our world. People today do things differently than they did a few years

ago, and this rapid change continues today. Every aspect of life is filled with technology through which we communicate, work, play, and even reconstruct the meaning of life.

In this modern era, the advancement of information and communication technology has opened a new stage for people to obtain information autonomously. The development of technology and communication is so rapid, has given rise to a new media. This is what Fiddler describes as *mediamorphosis* as a method of unifying the evolution of technology in communication media [1]. At the end of the 19th century and especially in the 20th century, there was a paradigm shift in the understanding of religion from what used to be limited to ideals towards historicity, from what used to be around doctrine to sociological entities, from essence discourse towards existence [2]. In other words, religion is no longer limited to only explaining the relationship between humans and God, but also needs to explain the awareness of living in groups (sociological), awareness of the search for religious origins (anthropological), fulfilling the need to form a strong personality in humans (psychological) [2]. In general, even Christianity itself has not been spared the magnitude of this influence. As revealed by Adrianus Pasasa, a number of Christian churches have reviewed their 'mission' strategy by utilizing digital technology, social communication that is connected online to spread the gospel. Adrianus Pasasa conveyed, a number of Christian churches have reviewed their 'mission' strategy by utilizing digital technology, social communication that is connected online to spread the gospel [3]. According to a report by Steaven Octavianus, one of the activists for evangelism, internet media is also an opportunity or a place to spread the gospel [4]. Furthermore, Kalis Stevanus, also stated that the use of the Internet, gadgets, and social media is no longer a new thing for the world community,

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so preaching the gospel through social media is also very possible to be carried out [5]. The church must take advantage of the development of information and communication technology and the power of influence of social media as opportunities and means for carrying out missions [6].

Thus, the digital world can be described as the current context where digital media is present in all areas of life. Digital media has certain characteristics that need to be considered to show how it affects humans and their existence, as well as their social context. The characteristics of the digital age can be thought of as a 'network' through various forms of media such as telephone and the Internet. Digital media is also interactive in terms of responsiveness between users and media objects. The Digital Revolution is a tool, a platform, and at the same time an opportunity that previous generations of Christians could not have imagined to carry out the commandments of the Gospel.

The previous research site was KC Church in Slough, England reviewed how the church runs itself online using various social media platforms and how effective it is to use these platforms to evangelize the mission of Christ is not only about spreading the gospel with words but also through content such as encouragement and empowerment and how it strengthens the impression of believers online [7]. Another study on how the use of social media which is commonplace today by Christian plays a very important role in the progress of God's mission amidst the limitations during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study explain that the preaching of the gospel must pay attention to the context of the recipient, such as culture, ethnicity, economic conditions. In other words, the strategy of evangelism will always change according to the needs of the times [8]. The difference between this study and the research conducted by Steaven Jason Worsley and Arifianto et al. This study reviews the media as a new world for Christians to portray the reality of the Church as an open letter in the digital world while simultaneously voicing the gospel of peace as well as through personal branding with integrity. The transformation of online media should not stop evangelism but continue the dynamic era of preaching the gospel. The author wants to see some things that are formulated through the following questions: (1) What is the Reality of the Church as the Epistle of Christ in the Modern World? (2) How the Mission continues to adapt and coexist with forms of digital media. Moving on from the formulation of the problem, this research aims to frame a new paradigm in the church and continue to streamline His mission of spreading the gospel throughout the world in the digital era.

This research is expected to enrich the growth and development of knowledge, especially the study of the problem of gospel communication in the transformation of communication in an all-connected society. This research is also expected to be a reference for future researchers who are interested in analysing the Mission Strategy in Communicating the Gospel to generation Z through social media.

## II. METHOD

The type of research used is descriptive research, using a qualitative approach. The emphasis in this paper lies on the theoretical framework (theory discussion) using socio-theological analysis so as to open the understanding of Christianity in understanding the identity and vocation of the Church's mission in the context of the digital world. In addition, the narrative analysis method was used to find the most relevant reflections on 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. Narrative analysis method is a method that focuses only on the text and does not really feel the need to be responsible for all other aspects that are behind the text.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. *Christian identity in today's digital reality*

The Globalization does not leave the scope of human life experience that escapes the influence of the media. Media has become an integral part of interpersonal relations and the development of social, economic, political and religious life. Digital media that is growing so rapidly greatly affects human life, including the lives of Christians. It provides a new challenge for the Church in proclaiming the Gospel. The Church needs the courage to cross this new threshold, to pedal into the depths of the Network (Net). Automatically with the changing times, the church also becomes a citizen of the digital world. In the digital era like today, the pattern of identity formation is migrating to the digital world which is familiarly termed as personal branding. Personal branding is becoming a common thing to do. Although personal branding has existed since previous eras, in this digital era, personal branding is becoming a very common thing to do, especially through the internet [9]. Through personal branding, the main things in individuals can be united that involve skills, personality, and character that are wrapped as a strong identity compared to other people's identities. The new media allows users to show an identity different from that of the user in the real world. The structure of the virtual space opens a wide space for everyone to create artificially the concept of self and identity [10]. Although it is not impossible, that the user's self-identity in cyberspace is a representation of his real identity in the real world [8].

### B. *We are God's Social Media as reflection of 2 Corinthians 3:2-3*

In 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, Paul shows the Epistle of praise to the Corinthian church. The circumstances of the times conditioned Paul to write letters as a means and a way of communicating [11]. Paul's letters are of great value because we believe they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The letters, although not a history as a historical record, but can be the main source for us about the history and teachings of the ancient church. The letters influenced and shaped the journey and development of the church. Letters of praise: Such letters were common and necessary in the early church to recommend and guarantee orthodoxy (true belief).

Letters were used as in Acts 18:27; 1 Cor 16:3. The changes in the lives of the Corinthian church became tangible evidence of the fruit of Paul's ministry, and it became a real letter of praise for everyone who knew and read it. A person is judged by his real life. The strong emphasis in this letter is on "The word 'known' comes from the word ἀναγνωσκομένη. These two words are participle present passive nominative feminine singular verbs which show that naturally the letter of praise can be known and read by everyone. Not the result of trying to show others, but naturally the life of the Corinthian church can be known and read by everyone.

The life of the Corinthian church was an open life, which could be as relevant in the context of believers today. The life of Christians should be a letter of praise that cannot be covered up, it will radiate automatically both in daily life and through social media. Whilst, the life of mankind throughout the history of the world has been shaped by unkind images of the world and untrue words. The book of Genesis narrates that human's initial uninterrupted interaction with God is now blurred; even the harmonization of nature as the transmission of worldly media was disturbed after the fall. While doom may be used in tragedy, and is considered a decline in the story it is referred to as a catastrophe. On the other hand, *euchatastrophe* is a shift in the story for the good. It's a "sudden turn of excitement"[12]. *Eucatastrophe* describes when all hope seems lost, when things couldn't get any bleaker, hope emerges.

Disastrous media situations such as the fall of humanity call for a media "eucatastrophe", the writer borrows a term coined by J. R. R. Tolkien. The media "eucatastrophe" (events of excellent proportions) finally happened.[12] That is the Incarnation. *TheoMedium* God's Word became flesh. The public announcement of what Jesus has done on our behalf as God incarnate is called the "gospel." This is a media term.[13] *TheoMedium* mediated distance between man and God must be bridged through the work of Christ incarnate, the new Mediator who has come from off the stage is hailed as "the image of the incarnate God (Colossians 1:15). .. After the bloodied cross and empty tomb, a new *TheoMedium* was formed. Inhabited by the Spirit, the society we call the "church" was created as a new Theo-Medium in the world in the sense that we as a church are now being restored as bearers of the image of God.[13] Byers in his book writes "we ourselves are *Theo Media*. The Church is the bearer of the image being restored to the image of Christ, the Perfect Image of God." [13] The author finds this as a concept that transforms the reality of the church in the present context. *TheoMedia*, a communicative and revelational vehicle that God uses to share Himself and influence mankind as bearers of His image.[13] The church's life in truth which praises and reflects Christ speaks much more powerfully than a letter. The fruit of the life of Christ can be felt and manifested in everyday life as well as through social media. From within a good heart, life will radiate in all aspects, including through social media. The lifestyle of Christians that reflect Christ is a testimony to the preaching of the Gospel and concrete evidence of the Church as the living letter of Christ.

### C. Mission to embrace digitalisation

Technological media is migrating, personal computers, the internet and social media are the biggest arenas of public discussion or debate the world has ever known. The network as a communication model has a lot of potential in this context. However, the church's greatest concern is not the technological imperative, but the gospel imperative. The church was given the task of sharing the gospel for more than 2,000 years with this world. We are now witnessing a revival in the vision of the Great Commission and strength in a new generation of Christians. The church's mission to communicate the gospel also applies in this digital context [14]. Yet the Church must focus on the internet as unique support in preparing for Christ's encounter with the world. The Bible can walk across the many intersections created by the jumble of different "crossroads" that make up the "virtual space" and show that God has His rightful place in every age, including in this modern age [15]. This is an opportunity, for the gospel message to enter and penetrate the virtual world, a new world that is lived by generations across the ages.

### D. The Challenges of the Church Carrying Out God's Mission in the Digital Age

The context of preaching the gospel in this post-modern era is certainly inseparable from the context of the wave of human civilization that is undergoing disruption. Alvin Toffler observes the idea of this wave of civilization, in his book *The Third Wave* divides the three waves of human civilization. The first wave is the agricultural wave, the second wave is industrial and the third wave is information [15]. It will be examined "Who controls the information, then will rule the world" this has even manifested into reality. Information has been considered as "strength" and "power". In a digital society that is included in the third wave of the development of human civilization, what kind of missiological perspective exists in the Church? is this a challenge or an opportunity in sharing the gospel?

The merging of industrial technology with digital technology certainly gives birth to a new mindset and culture. One of the characteristics of the new world built through the internet, both through social networks and other sites, is a new communication model, namely an open communication model, fast paced, easy to obtain information [16]. The social structure of the information society is formed with the character of a network society, creative, multifunctional. This fact demands serious attention on how the church should fulfill its calling in the context of the times in which the church exists. This is in accordance with Yahya Afandi's statement that technology is "a resource where the church must wisely take on the role of a capable steward for the sake of carrying out the preaching of the Great Commission in the digital era [17]. Whilst, Rick Warren called the recent media revolution like a tsunami that cannot be avoided unless it is faced by every individual by doing "spiritual surfing waves." This means that the church and the ministers of the gospel play the role of salt and light – in the context of a technological society, cannot ignore it. They

must be proficient in understanding the vital role that is being played by the information technology media. Failure to understand the context of its mission will leave the church behind an important tool in our modern global environment [18]. As Meitha Sartika said, as a community of pilgrims, the church should not lose its critical attitude towards the context in which it is church [19]. It can be understood that the media is no longer “only” a medium for delivering information for various daily habits and activities. The power of social media is proven to play a strategic part in evangelism[20].

#### *E. The Church continues to adapt to the context of its time in the world in Mission*

God's mission is closely related to digital media which has significantly changed the social values of society. As Widjaja et al say, the Church needs to capture and understand how Culture works. The current social changes reminded the church to continuously renewing itself. Furthermore, it also transforms and innovates to surpass the current and new challenges [21]. This is necessary to achieve a cultural paradigm with the message of the Gospel [22]. Evangelism must adapt and make changes according to the times [23]. Mission that is contemporary in its casing but conservative in its intrinsic message of God [24]. The main values of good news for the soul are adjusted to answer the spiritual needs of the digital media community, [25] so that the mission goal in the digital world can provide an atmosphere of calm, strength, longing for God that excites and gives spirit to life [26].

#### *F. A new way of communicating the gospel*

Communication also gives shape to the missionary vocation of the whole Church, and social networks are one of the places where that vocation is manifested so that people experience the beauty of faith and the beauty of the encounter with Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to evangelize the new world and integrate the Christian message into the new world. In the course of history, the success of evangelization has been determined by the ability to learn a new language and culture and to integrate the Christian message into it. Early in the life of the church, the apostles proclaimed the good news about Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. The success of the work of evangelization demands careful attention to understanding the culture and customs of the heathen peoples so that the truth of the Gospel can touch their hearts and minds. Likewise, today, the work of proclaiming Christ in the world of new technology requires an in-depth knowledge of the world if technology is used to spread the gospel.

Building an evangelistic tool with social media can be done by almost anyone, with low cost and wide reach. In terms of the reach of internet media, it is not limited by the dimensions of space and time. It allows the opportunity to use internet media to convey the gospel message is very open.

## IV. CONCLUSION

As Christians, we need to have a holistic view of social media. If the Great Commission applies to us today as it did to first-century Christians, then it must apply to the realm of social media as well. The church must anticipate its dynamic face both real and virtual in social media portraits as a stage for Christian life to glorify God as well as the momentum of the gospel movement for followers of Jesus Christ where the Holy Spirit moves throughout the world and His power brings many people to repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

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