

Phenomenology Study of Millennial Influencers in Herding the Digital Community

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Abstract—Technology is an integral part of today's life. To give birth to a digital generation who are familiar with the digital world, where they can access the internet for up to 8 hours per day and 3 hours access social media. The digital native generation is young people who are familiar with the digital world. The presence of various platforms gives rise to influencers who influence their followers so that it has become the entry point of a great value system for young people in the digital world. It takes a spiritual influencer who can be a role model in their lifestyle, a mindset that can influence them with Christian values. This is something that is forgotten and considered trivial by the church. The death of Raditya Oloan, a young spiritual influencer at the age of 36, has left many young people sad and lost. This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach that occurs and also analyzes the results of several survey institutions. The result is that churches and leaders must urgently and quickly train and release young influencers who can reach and shepherd young people in the digital community. **Research Contribution:** Emphasizing the church on the importance of preparing and equipping and presenting young leaders to become influencers who are pastors of digital natives

Keywords—*millennial; influencers; church; social media; digital native*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology has brought changes in culture and communication patterns in society. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, Line, etc. have become a popular platform for virtual communication. This pattern of communication is

very popular with young people, where they can make friends and communicate without being limited by space and time. Digital media has become a new culture that is very popular with young people. In Indonesia alone, social media users in 2021 will increase by 6.3% (10 million people) from the previous year. The We Are Social (Hootsuite) report released on February 11, 2021, shows that social media users in Indonesia reach 61.8%, which is 170 million out of 274.9 million Indonesian population. The duration of time to access social media is 3 hours 14 minutes [1]. The data shows that more than half of Indonesia's population are active social media users.

The emergence of various social media platforms, no doubt also gave rise to influencers who became a new trend, even this also happened in the world of digital marketing. Influencers are now trusted by various manufacturers to take an important part in marketing products to the wider community through digital media. Anjani defines that an influencer as an activist, who is well-connected, impactful, active-minded, and a trendsetter for his followers, while a social media influencer is an individual who is considered an opinion leader on a particular topic, be it beauty, food, fashion, lifestyle on media platforms social [2]. The results of his research show that influencers play a very important role in influencing their followers in opinion, beauty, food, fashion, and lifestyle. This emphasizes how influential an influencer is to his followers.

In terms of spirituality, it seems that the role of influencers is also very influential on their followers. This is evidenced in the research of Dadang Sugiana, Ira Mirawati

and Putri Truline where Ulama are influencers who are still used as opinion leaders to clarify news and issues circulating on social media [3]. The results of Pratyaksa's research show that several millennial Hindu female figures in the 4.0 era have skyrocketed and can be equalized with men in their role in society. They are influencers who become opinion leaders of gender equality in Hindu society [4]. Meanwhile, in Caracas, Venezuela, it was reported that a Catholic priest, Father Salazar, 34 years old, described himself as a "Catholic influencer.", actively uses social media to preach. He is an influential influencer in the spiritual field, having more than 120,000 followers on Instagram[5]. Unfortunately, there are not many Christian millennial influencers who are trendsetters in opinions and lifestyles according to God's Word that can influence their followers as a mission to outreach young people on social media.

The phenomenal Christian millennial influencer studied in this study is a person named Raditya Oloan Panggabean, who is known as a public figure and influencer. Born on December 7, 1984, in Jakarta, married to an artist named Joanna Alexandra in 2007 and they are blessed with 4 children. The content on his Instagram account shares a lot of his life stories that inspire and teach young people. His dark teenage life, where he was once an alcoholic and even a drug addict, was once a thug. Until he became a pastor who pastored young people in a church in Jakarta [6]. He is known as a millennial pastor who often preaches through social media, Instagram, and TikTok. Where posting sermons and short messages get appreciation and much liked, especially by young people. Even when he died on May 6, 2021, the news of his death became a trending topic on Twitter with the hashtag Raditya Oloan [7].

The Numbers Research Center (BRC) found that 61.8% of young people felt the church was unattractive and suitable for them. This is because first, young people are not involved in church services, and secondly, the church and its leaders act rigid, old-fashioned, authoritarian, so that they often do not understand the mindset of young people[8]. But Raditya Oloan was able to come to be an oasis during amid the dryness of the church's attention to young people. He is present and understands their concerns so that his presence in the digital world is an inspiration that is longed for and motivates, changing many people. His death from Covid-19 at a young age has been deep and shocking grief. Almost no "other raditya oloan" is found in the digital Christian community in Indonesia today. It seems that the mission and outreach of young people in the digital world will experience stagnation and quite dangerous obstacles. Therefore, the urgency of this research is to awaken the church to wake up and prepare new spiritual influencers who have the capacity and capability to reach the community of young people and pastor them within a certain. Otherwise, it will affect the church with the loss and abandonment of young people sooner or later. They are like sheep that are not shepherded, they need someone who is present and understands their concerns, inspires, and motivates young people as influencers through social media.

II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method by collecting literature study data and paying attention to the phenomenon of virtual community phenomena that have occurred in both the secular and religious worlds recently[9]. The author also observes how the existence of social level, depth of religious experience, and church ministry in this virtual world.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Digital Native and New Culture

The term digital native is a term that is pinned to the digital community, where they communicate, behave, work and think as a digital society. In addition, Digital Native is also defined as the generation born when the internet has become a part of them. Supratman stated that digital natives are the millennial generation or Generation Y, also called the internet generation (born between January 1977-December 1997) and generation Z (January 1998-2018)[10] and the Alpha generation born in 2019 to the present. In other words, the digital native generation is the generation born between 1977 and the present (aged 44 years and under). Digital natives use social media for various purposes in their daily lives. Supratman stated that the characteristics of the digital native generation are multitasking, always networked, random access, likes interactive games, wants to get information quickly and prefers information on online sources rather than information sources in libraries [10].

Fig. 1. Profile of Social Media the Image Users in Indonesia in 2021

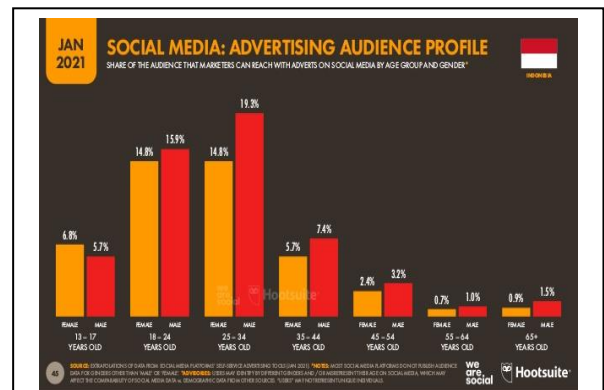


Figure. 1 shows data as of January 2021 related to the profile of social media usage in Indonesia. Based on the data in above, social media users are dominated by the digital native generation, namely the age range of 13-44 years as much as 90.4% or 153.68 million. Social media users based on gender, 42.1% of women (70.57 million) and 48.3% of men (82.11 million). Meanwhile, the row of platforms most frequently used by social media users in Indonesia is described in the following table:

TABLE I. TABLE 1. 10 MOST POPULAR PLATFORMS IN INDONESIA IN 2021

No.	Platforms	Procentase
1.	Youtube	91,8%
2.	Whatsapp	87,7%
3.	Instagram	86,6%
4.	Facebook	85,5%
5.	Twitter	63,6%
6.	Facebook Messenger	52,4%
7.	Line	44,3%
8.	Linkelin	39,4%
9.	TikTok	38,7%
10.	Pinterest	35,6%

The data above shows that the platforms most frequently used by more than 50% of social media users in Indonesia are Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Facebook Messenger. The data also shows that platforms such as TikTok can penetrate the top 10, where TikTok is a new platform that is starting to gain a place in the hearts of social media users in Indonesia.

The digital world, especially social media, has become a new communication pattern that is inseparable from the life of the digital native generation. This brought the world changed into a new civilization. A new culture is awakened into a digital culture, where all matters related to daily life are facilitated by digitization. Such as transportation to food can be ordered so easily via a smartphone. E-commerce has emerged that can adapt to this new culture so that celebrities, YouTubers, and tiktokers are present to become influencers who have a lot of influence on their followers.

B. Outreach Missions in the Digital World

Use the world is changing, now shifting to the digital age. Everything adapts to changing times, from industry, education to marketing, and even bureaucratic affairs, all turning to digitalization. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the church. The church still maintains the old pattern, even in outreach missions it has not changed. Evangelism patterns such as the Revival Service are no longer relevant. It is important to state from the outset that the sum of spiritual presence and vitality is not identical [11]. Until the pandemic came, the church seemed to be forced to evolve and switch to a virtual space through the digitalization [12]. The apostolic church is the duty and responsibility of the living church and is linked to the present context, not only the real church but also the virtual one. The youth community has become the largest part of the digital world today, they come from various places and groups, people, and languages. But the church must continue to have a diaspora to reach the souls that exist and are scattered in this virtual world. The spiritual needs of today's young generation are integrated with advances in information technology and social media, The real change is when they are smarter than their actual age, due to the practice of virtual spaces in everyday life.

Barna group in their research reveals the challenges in the youth outreach [13], as illustrated in the following table:

TABLE II. CHALLENGES IN YOUTH OUTREACH.

Items of Problem	Percentage
Busy with activity	86%
Lack of parental interest in training and teaching	41%
Family split	31%
Lack of adult volunteers to care for youth	22%
Lack of interest from young people	20%
Lack of youth taking leadership roles	19%

Based on this data, the biggest challenge in outreach to the younger generation is their busyness (86%), making it difficult to have time to meet. Parents have a vital role in educating their children, the absence of parents in educating and directing children in the truth of God's word (41%) will create an apathetic generation, regardless of religion. Family splits (31%) further add to the challenge of evangelism to young people, where it creates disappointment, fear, and anxiety that overwhelms them. The next challenge is that no one cares about the mindset, lifestyle of young people (22%). And the lack of interest of young people themselves (20%) and the lack of young people to dare to take leadership roles (19%).

The spiritual needs of the young generation are integrated with advances in information technology and the social media [14]. The real change is they are smarter than their real age, because of the practice of virtual space in everyday life [15]. This generation is found to have experienced a great shift in the spiritual world [16]. The results of the BRC research show that they are influential in forming an exclusive culture but have also lost the basic faith that has become a major mission field throughout the world [17]. This digital generation is included in a group that is vulnerable to a decline in faith so it needs a different strategy [18]. A high index of caring for others, togetherness in hobbies, freedom to express ideas and creations, and what many churches forget is that psychologically they have a central figure who is a role model, idol, and pride for the programmers in the digital world [16].

Raditya Oloan is a phenomenon in missions, which can adapt missions to a new culture, namely the mission of using digital media. Become an influencer who is followed by thousands of followers on his Youtube, Instagram, and TikTok accounts. The devotional video content or sermons uploaded to various social media platforms are videos that inspire, advise on the anxiety experienced by many young people. With contemporary language and methods that are easier for digital natives to understand. Indirectly he transformed into a central figure, a role model who is always awaited by uploading content so that he influences the mindset, lifestyle of young people with what he conveys.

In reaching the millennial generation in the digital world, the church must have a different strategy from the existing mission world, namely by bringing up millennial servants of God like Raditya Oloan to become central figures, influencers in the digital world with the character of humility, high integrity, and sincerity. By always being wary of the temptation to be the favorite preacher of young people but being responsible for shepherding the soul and without seeking great name and popularity in the name of Allah [18]. Local priests and shepherds should not be busy with themselves [19]. The church must see the development of IT and social media that are used in today's world as a way in a hybrid model of pastoral care and the Word without compromising the basic values of Christianity but contemporary so that it is easily accepted by the digital youth community. It will require the cooperation, resources, and generosity of church leaders. Their concern for youth is to prepare young leaders according to their generation, where this will be more easily accepted by young people. Conducting mentoring training is a positive step to strengthen them in the existing services [20].

IV. CONCLUSION

Times have changed, so the way youth outreach must change. The digital world gives birth to platforms that give rise to influencers who influence their followers. The same applies to outreach to digital natives, namely young people who are familiar with the digital world daily. It takes a spiritual influencer who can be a role model in their lifestyle, a mindset that can influence them with Christian values. The role and function of the Church organization must work together and focus on training and giving birth to many millennial generations to become central figures (influencers), namely, to become effective shepherds, leaders, and servants of God. The pattern of word ministry and virtual pastoral care is no longer centered on senior pastors but on the younger generation who can reach and shepherd today's digital community.

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