

Reaching Digital Natives People: A Phenomenology Study

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Abstract—In the digital era, technology has influenced the way society develops. This disruption has phenomenally transformed a new group of people known as digital natives. In terms of digital technology, natives are very tech-savvy, but they are also experiencing a spiritual shift. The world is changing towards digitalization, and the church must also transform its outreach to digital natives through digital media. This research aims to make church leaders aware of the importance of digital media as an outreach tool to the generation of digital natives. This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach that analyzes data from the existing literature. As a result, social media heavily influence digital natives. The church needs to understand the digital strategy to meet their needs and reach them in our digital contemporary cultural context. **Research Contribution:** This research helps readers see how churches can be present in virtual spaces to reach digital natives. This approach develops social media as the dynamics of carrying out missions in the digital space and utilizes technology as a support system to transmit the relevant Gospel of Christ in the digital era.

Keywords—digital natives; mission; church leader; social media

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology developments have brought about universal cultural change. The digital world, especially social media, allows for friendship and communication without being limited by place and time. The pattern of virtual communication through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, and other timelines has become a new culture. The internet has become a vital need of modern

society. Digital culture dramatically speeds up and makes it easier for humans; all matters relating to daily life use digitization. The emergence of e-commerce can adapt to this new culture, from transportation to ordering food quickly via a smartphone. The world is changing so fast; everyone adapts to this new culture. The church must be able to adapt to the digitalization [1]. The old pattern of outreach, such as gathering large crowds through Revival Services, is no longer relevant. Cathy H. George said that the number of attendances does not indicate the quality of spiritual vitality [2]. The mission cannot separate from the mandate of the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew 28: 18-20, where this verse is the command that the Lord Jesus himself gave to the disciples before He ascended to heaven. The Great Commission is not only a great but also an important message in Christian history.

Meanwhile, Petersen and Shamy assert that they are great if they correctly realize who gives the mandate and remember how big it is. Verkuyl, quoted by Marisi, divides the Great Commission into three essential parts: (1) the granting of authority from Jesus, (2) the continuing mandate of Jesus, and (3) the giving of a promise of inclusion by Jesus[3]. The mission of the Great Commission is calling for all believers. The task of this *marturia* should not consider only be a complete task for certain people. However, every believer must act as a witness, salt and light of the world who proclaims the good news, share the Salvation Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rescue is the goal and fuel of the mission. In other words, the mission task begins and ends with a rescue[4]. The heartbeat of Jesus is to save souls, so the church's heartbeat should also be to save lost souls. Including the digital generation, the modern generation who are accustomed to technological advances but

do not become the lost generation. So that mission becomes an essential and urgent word that the church must carry out as a mere call and appeal to reach and save them. Purnomo reminded in his research of the importance of the church to transform its mission strategy; the mission of *Missio Dei*, which is the church's task, will not change forever. However, its implementation strategy can change and adjust to the context [5]. It means the importance of changing the outreach mission strategy through digital media. Camerling, in his research, found that a large number of digital media users in Indonesia can carry out outreach mission services through the digital media [6]. The research explained that young people dominated internet users (social media). They have become a technology literate generation or can be said to be a digital generation. It is confirmed in Kristiono's research which states that the young generation is the demographic bonus age. Indonesia is currently entering a demographic bonus; the productive age population (16-64 years) reaches 66% more than the dependent age [7]. It means that the focus of evangelism should aim at this digital generation.

Even though the researchers emphasized the importance of the church transforming using digital media for outreach missions, it has not yet obtained significant results. The church's stuttering and unpreparedness in dealing with technological advances can see from BRC's findings showing that at least four elements of service other than worship are neglected, such as finance, Sunday school, family ministry, and evangelism [8]. Not all churches can hold online worship services, apart from the lack of adequate infrastructure and existing technology even if the infrastructure is available. Adapting to the digital world is not easy; creating online worship content is very draining of energy, time, and resources human and material. The church focused on online worship, both live (live streaming) and pre-recorded streaming, which has not holistically touched other areas that are no less important. The author wants to see some things formulated into several research questions: (1) how are Indonesia's digital world and digital natives? (2) how reach out a mission to digital natives through digital media? Based on the formulation of the problem, this research aims to make church leaders aware of the importance of digital media as an outreach tool to the generation of digital natives.

II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological [9]. The author collects data from various sources, literature related to the topic, then analyzed and developed it as part of data analysis. Analyzing research data with phenomena due to the covid-19 pandemic, the church must evolve and adapt to the digital world [1] to carry out the mandate of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *The Distracted Focus*

Churches in Indonesia keep growing. It can see the emergence of large churches (mega churches). Bilangan Research Center (BRC) in recent church growth research, it turns out that most of the church growth is due to the movement of members from one church to another (45.7%). Meanwhile, 23.8% is biological growth. The evangelism factor is only 1.7% [10]. It shows that the church's *marturia* tasks are not maximal. Dwirahardjo pointed out the fading fire of evangelism in his research on the mission of the Great Commission, thus emphasizing the importance of the church to rekindle the fire of mission that seems to dim in the present [11]. This research expects 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 expects to be a reference for future researchers interested in analyzing the mission strategy in communicating the Gospel to digital natives through social media.

Teng terms the fading fire of this mission as a "crisis" that has hit the church's ministry. It is an ambiguity that is going on massively, widely, and repeatedly for a long time, others: (1) the ambiguity between theological reflection and the practice of the ministry; (2) the ambiguity of the measure of success. The church is experiencing a shift in focus from essential things to unimportant things. Many churches think that a church's success can see from attendance, finances, and physical expansion of the ministry [8]. Matthew 28:19-20 clearly says that the measure of its success is about outreach, repentance, and growth of souls in Christ as a form of obedience to the mandate of the Great Commission. It causes the church to experience a shift in focus in ministry, from the ministry of souls to program orientation, from spiritual growth to methods, from true spirituality to the busyness of various activities, from the ministry of the word to mere managerial skills of the organization and a shift in results, from a faithful disciple of Christ to Christian fans or specific Christian figures [8].

The church is still half-hearted in carrying out the mission of the Great Commission, as the budget for the mission is still very minimal compared to the budget for other activities, such as musical tools at the church and even funds for Christmas celebrations. The reluctance of believers to carry out their witness is also due to a mistaken view of the mission. The mission is considered a foreign word that certain people can carry out and even only by mission agencies, such as western missionaries sent from foreign mission agencies [3]. The attitude of intolerance and rejection of evangelism results in bullying and legal problems. The blasphemy law makes Christians insecure in carrying out their witness duties and, coupled with the attitude of pluralism, which places all religions as good and has a goal to the same God, has undermined the spirit of evangelism and dull the task of the *marturia* of the Great Commission.

B. Technology and generation of digital natives

Indonesia is a country that has experienced a sharp increase in the development of digital technology, continuously updated with the latest developments in information technology. The digital era is currently entering the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. In the world of today's digital era, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Line, and TikTok have become popularly used by many levels of society. Even on an Indonesian scale, the use of social media ranks first as the famous among all ages. In research released on February 11, 2021, conducted by a British company, We Are Social, Indonesians can spend 3 hours and 14 minutes a day surfing social media. Active social media users reach 170 million out of a population of 274.9 million people or equivalent to 61.8%. That number is not small; more than half of Indonesia's population are social media users [12].

TABLE I. DATA ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN INDONESIA IN 2021

Data Internet Users	Time/day	Total	Percentage	Description
Population		274,9 million		1,1% increase (2,9 million)
Mobile user		345,3 million	125,6%	1,2% increase (4 million)
Internet user	8 hour 52 minutes	202,6 million	73,7%	15,5% increase (27 million)
Active media user	3 hour 14 minutes	170 million	61,8%	6,3% increase (10 million)

Source: Hootsuite (We Are Social) Digital: Indonesia 2021, released February 11, 2021.

As for applications that are often use until the time this research is released, it can see in the following graph:

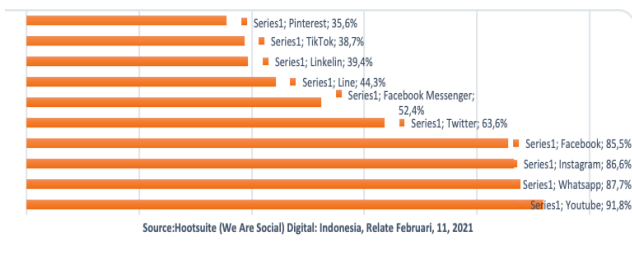


Fig. 1. Ten most popular social media applications in Indonesia 2021

Based on the graph above, the most popular apps in 2021 are YouTube, then WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Facebook Messenger, Line, LinkedIn, TikTok, and the tenth place is Pinterest. While the term digital natives is a term given to the digital users, they communicate, work, act, and think as a digital society. In other words, digital natives are the generation that was born when the internet has become a part of them. Supratman said that digital natives start from the millennial generation or Generation Y (born between January 1977-December 1997), generation Z (born between January 1998-December 2018), generation Alpha (born between January 2019 to the present) [13]. The digital native is a generation in

the age range of 44 years and below. The main characteristics of digital natives are (1) being happy to receive information from various sources and different media quickly; (2) enjoy processes/activities that doing in parallel at the same time; (3) choosing media in the form of images, sound, and video compared to the text; (4) working/interaction in groups; (5) choosing materials that are fun, useful, and relevant to their needs [14]; (6) networking; (7) interactive games; and (8) multitasking [13].

TABLE II. PROFILE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN INDONESIA IN 2021

Media social users by gender		
Ages	Female	Male
13-17 years old	6,8% (11,56 million)	5,7% (9,69 million)
18-24 years old	14,8% (25,16 million)	15,9% (27,03 million)
25-34 years old	14,8% (25,16 million)	19,3% (32,81 million)
35-44 years old	5,7% (9,69 million)	7,4% (12,58 million)
45-54 years old	2,4% (4,08 million)	3,2% (5,44 million)
55-64 years old	0,7% (1,19 million)	1,0% (1,7 million)
65 + years old	0,9% (1,53 million)	1,5% (3,55 million)

Source: Hootsuite (We Are Social) Digital: Indonesia 2021, released February 11, 2021.

In terms of age, social media users are dominant by the 25-34 year age range, which is 34.1%, the second place is the 18-24 year age range, which is 30.7%, the third is the 35-44 year age range of 13, 1%, the fourth rank is aged 13-17 year which is 12.5%, the fifth rank is the age range of 45-54 year by 5.6%, the sixth order is aged over 65 years by 2.4%, and the last is the age of 55-64 year, 1.7%. When viewed from the productive age, the age range of 16-64 years social media users in Indonesia are 66.2% or 112.54 million people. When viewed from digital natives in the age range of 13-44 years, social media users in Indonesia are very dominant at 90.3% (153.68 million), while the remaining 9.7% (16.49 million) are in the range age 45 years and above. The data shows that digital natives identify young people as the digital generation. It has become a new trend in communication patterns among the digital native generation. It brings the world into a new civilization, digital culture, and new culture related to daily life use with digitization, such as ordering transportation and food services through a smartphone.

C. Mission within the scope of digital society

The world is changing, even now in a digital culture. All adapt and adjust to this new culture. From Industry to bureaucracy, all are adapting to digitization. Unfortunately, the church still maintains the old style in the outreach model, such as the mission of evangelism through the Revival Service. Until the arrival of the pandemic has awakened the church from its long slumber, the pattern of mass gathering is no longer relevant. The church must evolve in worship and outreach into the digital world [1]. Teng sees this pandemic

situation as a "divine interruption" to wake the church from its long ambiguity [8]. If this "Divine Interruption" responds to appropriately by the churches, there will be an essential renewal in the congregation's life. Forced cessation of various service forms and switching to digital space is God's way to momentum self-improvement and improve service quality.

The author thinks that the spiritual needs of the young generation nowadays need to connect with advances in information technology and social media. Their everyday virtual space has made them look more intelligent than their actual age [15]. However, it is not equivalent to their spiritual growth, and they experience a shift in the spiritual world [16]. Subowo said that the young generation was an influence in forming an exclusive culture but at the same time lost the primary faith [17]. Harmadi said that a digital generation is a group that is vulnerable to a decline in faith so that a different strategy is needed [18]. It does indicate that the young generation is a mission field must reach.

The missionary church in today's context is the duty and responsibility of a church that is alive and present not only in absolute terms but also virtually. The community of young people who are the digital native generation has become a significant part of today's digital world. Commonly they come from various places and groups, people, and different languages. They have transformed into a mission field spread in cyberspace, so the church must continue reaching out to them. Bilangan Research Center (BRC) research shows an ironic fact, such as, 61.8% of young people feel that the church is no longer attractive and fit anymore. It is due to Engagement (not being involved in service responsibilities) and Disconnect (not involved in the ministry)[19]. The mindset of young people to their church is old-fashioned and authoritarian. It shows that the church needs to evaluate itself and focus on reaching and involving young people as a digital generation. Churches need to innovate and evolve in using the digital media [1] for this digital outreach mission.

In reaching the millennial generation in the digital world, the church has a different strategy from the current mission world. In the case of digital native outreach challenges, they are hard to find, but they are busy with social media activities. Therefore, social media as an outreach tool is very effective as an evangelism mission strategy for the digital native generation. The church must make the current development of IT and social media a bridge and model for the pastoral ministry of the word in a hybrid manner that digital natives can readily accept without compromising the fundamental values of Christianity. The absence of parents and the lack of concern for the mindset and lifestyle of young people should be the church's concern. Cooperation, financial resources, and generosity from church leaders are required. According to their generation, their concern for youth is to prepare young leaders, which young people will more readily accept. Conducting mentoring training is a positive step to strengthen them in the existing services [20].

The digital era missions can bring out during the pandemic [6] are (1) Live streaming sermons. Live streaming is a feature

provided by social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Its feature can support worship processions so that members who cannot attend due to a pandemic or illness can attend directly. Meanwhile, it can do as a means of learning/exploring the word of God through sharing and interactively by answering every question in the chat column, praying for the sick or struggling evangelism. (2) Video recordings of sermons. Sermon recordings can improve service or be uploaded on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, becoming a blessing to many people. (3) Video testimony. Testimony is a means that can inspire or encourage others to continue to believe and hope in God because God can prove that He is accurate and able to help His people. It can be uploaded to social media. (4) Status updates on Facebook and Instagram. Status on Facebook or Instagram with reflections on God's Words can be evangelism tools to others. (5) Talk Shows on Podcasts that are currently popular. The open nature of digital media raises a critical attitude that can elicit reactions and responses from all these services. Apart from making it as attractive as possible, it must also pay attention to biblical teaching.

IV. CONCLUSION

Indonesia has experienced rapid progress in technology. The digital world is transforming into a new culture that is inevitable. Social media users dominate by young people who are the digital native generation. They can spend an average of 8 hours 52 minutes per day accessing the internet, while 3 hours 14 minutes per day for social media. 61.8% of young people in the church think that the church is no longer attractive and fit for them. So that young people are digital natives, they must pay attention to the great mission of the church. The role and function of the Church organization can work together, pastoral, and focus on training digital natives. The word ministry and virtual room pastoralism pattern is no longer centered on senior pastors but can adapt to the times.

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