



Spiritual Leaders in the Digital Age: A Study of the Impact of Digitalization on Spiritual Ministry

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Abstract. Digital transformation in society is rapidly changing the ministry of churches or organizations. Although these changes are fundamental for leaders of organizations where they are complex, studies on leadership and responses to digitalization have been done few studies. When spiritual leaders are expected to lead digital transformation, this paper aims to understand how digitalization affects spiritual leadership in both church ministries and non-profit organizations. To achieve the objectives of this study, that takes the following approaches: (1) describe the three models of leadership needed: values-based, transformative, and authentic leadership; (2) analyze the digital transformation that occurs in the ministry of churches and spiritual institutions, and how leadership responds to these changes. Conduct a data collection with an in-depth literature survey and observations of church leaders. This study finds that digital transformation influences forms of spiritual leadership to change how leaders practice their leadership styles and practices by entering the ministry of the digital world. There are three results of the study: (1) leadership in a digital society must have a foundation of values in the life of the organization they lead; (2) leaders are required to make breakthrough changes through building influence, inspiring motivation, stimulating thoughts, and also mentoring relevant to the characteristics of digital society; (3) the role of an authentic leader through character development, namely knowing oneself, transparency, building balance, and having biblical moral ethics are essential parts in developing ministries in a digital society.

Keywords: church, Christian leadership, digital age, spiritual transformation

1 Introduction

The world has changed and will continue to happen; no expert can know where it will end. That is part of the current disruption called the industrial revolution 4.0. The digital era or the era of digital society simplifies by the term “rapid and complex changes.” A society or generation that is genuinely one with technology. A life full of internet technology makes leaders, including the world of education, need to anticipate it seriously. The state of Indonesia is also a part of that change. Moreover, as a

country with the fourth largest population in the world, it has experienced this drastic change. The COVID-19 pandemic for two and a half years has accelerated the process of digitizing Indonesian society, including church life.

World change challenges impact the problem of human spirituality. Religious life becomes more pragmatic because, on the one hand, it can facilitate religious processions, but there is a tendency for spirituality to become shallow. Indeed, spirituality in Christianity is not easy to measure because it is very subjective, and in Christianity, spirituality is a dynamic journey [1]. However, this is evident in many impromptu spiritual leaders who appear on social media platforms without a theological background but become popular because of their influence in the media, such as being an artist or comedians.

On the other hand, the influence of spiritual leaders on the younger generation on spirituality is decreasing. Bilangan Research Center, in their publication of research results, shows that the role of spiritual leaders (read shepherds) is decreasing in one's spiritual life, especially in the lives of the younger generation. They said that: "there has been a decline in the role of church pastors in guiding children, youth, and youth to believe in the Lord Jesus, from 37.9% in a period of about 30-40 years ago to 10.6% among the younger generation today," [1].

The digital world brings benefits to life, but the rise of religious nationalism creates social conflicts. The rise of religious life is marked by many controversies or conflicts between religions on social media, such as attacking and vilifying each other between religious leaders and the teachings of other religions [1].

Seeing the various background problems faced by the church today, writers formulated the problems faced as follows:

First, the demographic bonus, often referred to as the advantage of the Indonesian state, where the productive population aged 15-64 is in the range of 70% of the Indonesian population, can indeed be a bonus but also a challenge and disaster if not managed properly. So how can spiritual leaders provide value for this new generation?

Second, the church's ministry in the digital world is still full of challenges. On the other hand, the condition of the population's welfare, political, economic, educational, health, social, cultural, religious, and environmental conditions need the church's attention because it is a mandate for Christ's ministers to serve. What transformational approach is used to become an impactful spiritual leader?

Third, the global ethics of the digital society have yet to be organized so that conspiracies, lies, and fabricated news become daily food. If there is no ethical movement, the conflict will escalate, including identity politics, which can lead to the nation's division. How do ministers of Christ present authentic leadership that describes life as citizens of the kingdom of God?

From the start, ethical involvement in digital (Artificial intelligence) can address emerging issues. Reflections on leadership suggest resilience, coexistence, and hope as key theological components for navigating the uncharted world of the digital age [2]. Spiritual innovative leadership practices are essential drivers in triggering the digital transformation of organizations [3]. Digitalization can realize the spread of religion quickly. On the other hand, religious ethics is a reasonable control for healthy digitalization.

Spiritual leadership becomes essential in society. Spiritual leaders impact the spiritual growth of others. But the accountability of spiritual leaders is needed to get dedicated spiritual leaders [4]. Spiritual leaders try to adapt to online worship and banquets without losing God's presence but can experience it. The challenge is how is the congregation experience in sharing God's presence when they are not face-to-face with their spiritual leader. One study in the Catholic church stated that the values of spiritual communion are real, mystical, and fruitful actions that not only sustain people worshipping from afar but enhance authentic eucharistic spirituality [5]. In answering this struggle, this paper will provide a theoretical study of the spiritual leadership needed in the era of digital society, the extent to which digital transformation has been carried out by the church, as well as the role played by spiritual leaders to have a significant impact in a digital society.

2 Method

This article will answer how the impact of digitalization affects spiritual leadership in the ministry [6]. For this reason, we will discuss the spiritual leadership needed to understand the characteristics of digitalization so that spiritual leaders can play a role in ministry that remains relevant for their generation. Through a literature survey, three types of leadership are needed to face the characteristics of the digital world: values-based, transformative, and authentic leadership. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to deepen our understanding; of how the role of spiritual leaders performs their duties in this digitalization era. The research method used is qualitative, namely through literature studies on spiritual leadership, digital transformation in church services, and the characteristics of the digital world itself. According to Moelong, qualitative research is a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior [7]. This literature study continues with confirmation and deepening through observations and interviews with spiritual leaders, namely by deepening a deeper understanding of what digitization is and its effects on servants, as well as recommendations from in-depth interviews. The analysis is inductive or qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalizations [8]. This approach allows for greater exploration of the leader's perspective on performing relevant and effective services in the era of digitalization.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Required Spiritual Leadership

Being an impactful servant of Christ requires leadership competence. Three leadership models in the digital era are needed [9]. First is values-based leadership. Leadership not only talks about technical skills, such as the ability to master information technology but must also be based on the leader's values. In entering the digital world, an organization, including a church, cannot achieve its goals if it runs without value. If so,

the church will face a situation where the organizational culture is not conducive because there is no responsibility and low moral ethics. James O'Toole saw the importance of values-based leadership, which is a way to enable organizations to achieve their goals. When the organization already has a vision and mission, goals and objectives, strategic plans and good management, it is essential to build on integrity, trust, listening, and respect for followers [10]: (a) Integrity: the meaning of integrity starts from the same heart, mind, and actions. Integrity has to do with who he/she is as a person, their commitments, and actions consistent with themselves and their commitments [11]. Having integrity is the value of unity between words, beliefs, and actions in an individual leader. Integrity is the highest value in leadership in any organization; (b) Trust: One of the pieces of advice is when Moses talked with his father-in-law about the conditions for choosing a leader. The book of Exodus 18:21 says that those worthy of being elected as leaders must be "men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe" (ESV). The essence of trust is that the leader is a servant with the responsibilities and privileges shared among all leadership teams. Trust talks about leaders who make their followers have courage and optimism. The followers' aspirations and opinions are accommodated so they trust the leader, ultimately strengthening the organization. Furthermore, teamwork and collaboration can only happen when people in the organization trust each other [12]; (c) Listening: The key to a leader's success is listening to his followers and understanding the desires of the service organization he leads. A leader must be a good listener to understand others and understand their feelings. Skilled listeners let them know they are heard, and they do not hesitate to express an understanding of concerns and problems. When a leader is a good listener, people feel respected, and trust can grow [13]; (d) Appreciate followers: Leadership that is more appropriate to be applied in service organizations is like someone who is teaching and not commanding. Leaders must be good teachers to their followers. Leaders as teachers provide an empowering persona, encourage followers to accept service values and internalize them, and build work groups that are expected to develop. Teacher model leadership talks about appreciating each individual's gift that is used for the benefit of leading together [10].

The second leadership model is transformation-based leadership. This leadership model is different from transactional leadership, which focuses on excellent and orderly management. Transactional leadership focuses on preparing the vision, mission, achievement strategies, good governance management, and expected outputs. However, unlike transactional leadership, a transformational leader, in achieving his goals, views the organization as an entity in which the leader persuades and motivates, encourages, convinces, and ultimately drives change. A transformational leader needs to focus on himself as a hero. He is a change agent conceptualizing organizational reality through a vision and mission and determining how to set strategies to realize the vision and mission. The method inspires, motivates, finds growth opportunities, and increases service effectiveness. Ways to build leadership based on transformation or change include building influence, providing inspirational motivation, stimulating thoughts, and mentoring: (a) Building influence: Transformational leaders work towards real change, starting with building their influence, such as leading by example, acting with optimism, having self-confidence, and having high moral and ethical standards so that the resulting decisions become an influence that will be followed [14]; (b) Provide inspirational motivation: In the Bible, a leader named Nehemiah showed the ability to motivate and inspire in leading the Israelites to build the walls of Jerusalem. He transformed his followers from pessimistic and discouraged to aggressive and effective workers [15]. Leaders become a source of inspiration and motivation whose goal is to

lift team spirit and challenge them to achieve higher goals in their work. By articulating a clear and optimistic vision of the future and involving followers in leadership, leaders build commitment through a shared vision and can therefore demand commitment from followers [10]; (c) Stimulates the mind: The way leader stimulates followers' effort and self-reflection, through creative and innovative questioning assumptions, without any criticism of their ideas. Criticism should not be carried out in this internal phase. Instead, ideas can differ from the leaders, allowing for different perspectives on the issue without fear of sanctions or punishment. Leaders can even ask followers to submit radical and controversial suggestions to generate creativity and change [10]; (d) Mentoring: In mentoring, leaders are involved in a teaching and coaching role while paying particular attention to the needs of each individual. By acting as a mentor, the leader focuses on the needs that must be met to encourage further growth and achievement among followers. Leaders must listen, recognize and accept differences like each individual to adapt. Mentoring methods differ from one to another. Some are more lenient with caring, guiding, and flexible, but some must be more challenging and task-oriented. Mentoring aims to create a safe environment for followers to learn and try out new tasks where they feel guided and monitored toward achieving organizational goals. [16].

Finally, the third leadership model is authenticity-based leadership. Authentic leadership develops the perspective that to impact and benefit individuals, the nation, and society; they must have strong characters born of internal values, both mentally and spiritually. His authenticity becomes a process of mutual growth between himself and the service organization he leads. There are four characteristics of authentic leaders: leaders who know themselves well, are transparent, build balance, and have strong moral ethics based on Bible principles: (a) Self-knowing: Leaders who know themselves seek to create interactions and make a meaningful impact on the world. That act is done by seeking feedback from others and increasing dialogue with individuals to understand who they are. Thus, the leader will know their strengths and weaknesses of themselves through the input given through the eyes of others. A leader who knows himself can describe his weaknesses, understand his diverse nature, and strengthen his strengths [17]; (b) Transparency: Authentic leaders are transparent in instilling trust and sharing feelings and thoughts and openly sharing information with others while trying to balance and minimize inappropriate emotions. Leaders who are relatively transparent value authenticity, truthfulness, and openness. At the same time, guiding their followers in understanding the negative and positive sides of who they really are [18]; (c) Build balance: Leaders must comprehensively analyze objective data before making a final decision. Leaders must use a balanced decision-making processing approach. A leader who can be objective will be rewarded by his followers for processing which information is relevant or irrelevant without negative assumptions, opinions, or feelings. With objective decisions and ready to accept negative and positive results from the analysis, leaders are far more authentic than those driven by biased subjectivity [10]; (d) Have biblical moral ethics: Authentic leaders are those who build leadership from within themselves [19]. The leader's guide is the values and moral standards of the Bible so that the leader stands up to the social pressures of the group and bases Biblical values on the values of the service organization. Ethical leaders are leaders who build themselves in humility [15].

3.2 Digital Transformation in The Church

In the Industrial Revolution 1.0 in the 16th century [20], The invention of machines, including the printing press, had the most dramatic impact on human civilization at that time, which is still felt today. This brings a new era of reading culture for ordinary people and provides more comprehensive access for everyone to share knowledge and literature in the form of books to all human beings. This technology led Martin Luther and the reformers to bring the Bible into people's homes and daily lives. It made possible the production of catechisms for every Christian tradition, quickly becoming a center for religious education for children and adults. The Christian Church was an early adopter of the new technology of the printing press and the revolution it started [21]. This changed Christianity to flourish and grow tremendously throughout the world.

In the twenty-first century came the digital revolution, which began with the invention of the internet; various digital tools, technologies, and social media platforms had the same dramatic impact on the world community, including the Christian church. The combination of streaming media, video conferencing, websites, online learning platforms, and social media has changed all aspects of human life, including church services, worship, seminars, and other discipleship.

The discovery of digital technology and its ongoing transformation is the most phenomenal story of the early twenty-first century. In the book *Networked: The New Social Operating System* written by Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, they state three significant impacts that the digital revolution will have, namely the existence of social networks, the internet, and cellular connectivity on human life. The merging of these three factors has successfully shifted the community's social life from the family, environment, and closely interwoven group relationships into a broader and diverse personal network [22].

The social network revolution provides opportunities for people to reach out to the world beyond their communities, which provides diversity in social relationships without boundaries and bridges the creation of a new world. The internet revolution has become the power of communication and the ability to obtain such information, enabling everyone to become a publisher and broadcaster for themselves with the existence of social media platforms. This creates a new method for social networking. The mobile phone revolution has fundamentally changed the relationship between information, time, and space. Information becomes more accessible, participatory, and private. People of all ages are now creating content through available social networking sites and social media. The fact that most people are "publishers" and "broadcasters" and where powerful search technologies such as "google" are already available. This makes it easy to find the content they want and connect with people who share similar tastes, lifestyles, political beliefs, spiritual practices, and health conditions. People also easily connect with others through the social media they have built.

From the phenomenon above, it can be formulated that there are six characteristics of digitalization that leaders need to understand because this relates to the initial explanation of this paper, namely how the church can understand the current condition

of digital society [9]: (a) Interconnection and integration: Interconnection and integration: communication and social interaction have also increased due to digitalization in aspects of organizational life. All elements of life are connected and even more united. This will promote productivity, sustainability, quality, and effectiveness within the organization [9]; (b) No time lag and information abundance: The increase in the speed of information causes decisions to be made quickly, not to mention the abundance of information because the information is quickly received via smartphones, tablets, and social media. It requires robust analysis to understand the information and how to use it fully [9]; (c) Transparency and complexity: All information can no longer be covered in this digital era. That is why transparency is needed to manage organizational transformation. For example, the digitization of services causes the need for transparency in how the service process is carried out. When church services enter the digital world, there will be an increase in technological complexity, shifts, and challenges in how services will be carried out in the digital era [9]; (d) No hierarchy and removal of personal barriers: When organizations become more fluid, there is a change in the organization's hierarchical structure. For example, there is a management expert's notion of a "reverse mentoring program," which refers to initiatives in which older executives are paired with and mentored by younger employees on topics such as technology, social media, and trends [23]. Furthermore, from a leadership perspective, regular office time and attendance (morning to evening) are barriers that can be removed to enable employees to work more productively[9];(e) Decision maker and high integrity: Digitalization enables a faster decision-making process because it is supported by digital transformation. Indeed, this will cause much tension, especially between internal and external resources, horizontal and vertical aspects of the organization, and the short decision-making time. Decisions assisted by digitizing data affect personal and organizational integrity. For example, mutual trust appears, an essential factor in building services [9]; (f) Humanizing impact: Digitalization is reshaping the five main pillars of service, namely followers, competition, data, innovation, and value. Digitalization has made it easier for humans to interact, communicate and connect through virtual platforms and tools more authentically. As humans and machines continue to be connected, more and more people work side by side with "robots", causing human-robot collaboration to become closer. Today's robots are "smart" with artificial intelligence so that they can see and feel their environment. As humans become more interconnected with computers, the future of interactivity will be "symbiotic", a system in which almost everyone and everything depends on one another [9].

From the characteristics of digitization, it turns out that the widespread practical application of the digital revolution into the life and ministry of the church must be acknowledged as a slow process. Indeed, urban churches, such as in Indonesia, have become innovators and early adopters of new digital technologies since the first decade of the 2000s. They broadcast Sunday services online and use social media platforms to connect with their members and thus gain a wider audience or audience. From here, the church builds relationships, shares faith, prays, explores social issues, and more. In addition, they also develop attractive sites that serve as centers of church life and ministry and provide an attractive invitation for people to experience their

community. From the beginning, these urban churches have adopted digital tools and media to advance their mission and spread the Gospel.

In contrast to some urban churches that accelerate technological change quickly, most churches have a different response. Some are fast, but most are slow in anticipating change. Through the global COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a forced shift; humans are forced to carry out all work-life activities in the virtual world, including consumption and ways of socializing. This triggered a massive and further shift to virtual activities for all human life, including church ministry.

One of the paradoxes of change in this pandemic is that while people are self-isolating and studying or working remotely, many are rediscovering more social bonds than ever before. For example, with Zoom, there are many gatherings, family reunions, birthday celebrations, gatherings with family members and friends, and much more. People naturally turn to social media platforms to fulfill this basic human need. The pandemic has accelerated the development of hybrid human identities, i.e., living their lives online and offline. Instead of considering the two separate, modern humans realize that their lives embrace in-person (physical) and online (virtual).

When applied to the life of church ministry, they live in a hybrid Christian community because the church has incorporated digital tools, methods, and media into church life and faith formation. Churches nurture relationships, spiritual growth, worship, and learning and engage in personal and online ministry. Through social media, members cultivate online connections similar to the relationships that existed before the internet and mobile phones. The COVID-19 pandemic has become an awareness tool for churches using digital technology and social media in church life and faith formation. Urban churches that have adopted it from the start are stepping up their initiatives to tackle the pandemic's challenges and eliminate physical gatherings as places of service. Other churches that have been slow to adopt a digital approach or resist the digital world are struggling to adapt quickly to the challenges of the pandemic. Some worked, but many still needed to. In the face of the pandemic, churches are coming to make peace with their concerns about technology. Churches are already seeing the tangible benefits of the Internet and digital technologies. Over the past two decades, researchers studying religion and the internet have demonstrated the undeniable benefits various aspects of online religious work can offer religious groups. A growing view illustrates how moving into the digital world can expand the influence of religious groups to new audiences and create outreach opportunities. Embracing technology for spiritual ministry purposes has proven a vital strategy during the pandemic and beyond in the decades to come to [21].

3.3 Recommendations for Impactful Spiritual Service

This paper's purpose has three objectives as writers explain: first, spiritual leaders can provide values for this new generation; second, find the transformational approach used to become an impactful spiritual leader; third, spiritual leaders present authentic leadership that describes a life that has a spiritual identity.

Typical roles that need to be played by a spiritual leader to have an impact are openness, adaptability, and an optimistic attitude that something can be done. Warren

Bennis says that when it comes to the nature of leadership and nurturing it for leaders to be influential in the digital world, it has to do with being open to the new. It is based on many factors: sometimes a person's personality ... In addition to resilience and openness, quality adaptive capacity is an optimistic sense of being able to do and willing to try [24].

In particular, several roles of spiritual leaders need to be carried out to impact the digital society era: First, leaders must have a foundation of values in the life of the organization they lead. From the literature review and field observations, leaders who lead with biblical values will answer the characteristics of the digitalization of society where the values of integrity, trust, listening, and respect for followers make the service ready to serve a hybrid society.

Second, the role of the leader is required to make breakthrough changes (transformational leadership) by building influence and providing motivation that inspires and stimulates the mind. Mentoring is also relevant to the characteristics of a digital society. Leaders must continue to learn, dare to make changes, and directly practice service in the digital world. "Learning, changing, and doing are integrated internal dimensions of a sustainable transformational leadership development process to create positive change for religious and non-profit organizations" [25]. Given the vast impact of this ministry, it is time for the church to dare to enter a more digitally severe world ministry. Generation Z and Post-Z creativity in the church should be invited to enter into a hybrid ministry where digital ministry can answer human problems holistically. Third, the role of an authentic leader through character development, namely knowing oneself, transparency, building balance, and having biblical moral ethics, is essential in developing services in a digital society. Building ethics and ethical values in digital community interactions are necessary when everyone can become a resource for themselves. A digital society without ethics will become an anarchic society that produces a sick digital community. Education on being a good and ethical netizen is the primary calling as a servant of Christ. This includes promoting religious moderation as an embodiment of building a shared ethic globally.

4 Conclusion

The digital community in Indonesia has adopted a hybrid lifestyle, and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process. Leaders must "get out" by being in the digital world. He is expected to build his ministry with values-based, transformational, and authentic leadership. From this solid leadership building, each team member will understand the characteristics of the digital era and be able to carry out digital transformations for themselves, the institutions, churches, and the communities they serve. All of this starts from an open and adaptive attitude because the current changes have not stopped and are still long. For example, the phenomenon of the Metaverse church is a follow-up study that needs to be examined first, proving that the change has not yet been completed. There is still a long way to go, but the foundation of leadership principles must be built so that they can face any changes that will occur in the future.

This research makes spiritual leaders aware of the impact of digitalization on spiritual leadership, which has significantly changed the form of church ministries. The transformation in this digital era demonstrates a very complex situation in leading through this digital change, where leaders find themselves leading in constant change and towards a digital future whose end is unknown.

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