



# The Pattern of Religious Life in The Era of Social Media

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**Abstract.** The problem in this study was the change in the pattern of the religious life in the era of social media, which definitely had an impact on the conventional religious habits prior to the existence of social media. This topic was discussed because in reality before and after social media existed, the activities of religious life experienced significant differences. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The finding of the research showed that the pattern of religious life in the era of social media was that everyone became an active participant of religious life. The concrete form of active participants in religious activities was that everyone could interpret the scriptures based on the comments or statuses shared by others on social media. The design of one's spirituality no longer depended solely on the clergymen, but the existing religious contents could design the viewpoint of one's spirituality. Moreover, the audience of the religion was diverse. Consequently, when the religious activities were carried out in live streaming, anyone could watch and become an observer. Although the pattern of religious life differed in the era of social media, the Bible should remain to be the primary reference in assessing whether something was proper or not.

**Keywords:** Bible, Religious Life, Social Media.

## 1 Introduction

The existence of social media has changed the condition of the global community in various aspects. Sajithra K revealed that social media was an extension of the dissemination of information that used to be carried out traditionally by word of mouth. However, with the development of technology characterized by the existence of internet access, it has caused the explosion of social media today [1]. Significant changes are marked by the presence of social media including the culture in economic, politic, religion and other various fields. In political culture, social media has driven revolutions in several countries [2] whereas in the economic field, social media has created new market places for its users [3]. Meanwhile, in the realm of religion, social media has become a forum for spreading doctrines and rituals so people have become active participants through contents presented on social media [4]. According to Brubaker, people loved the religious contents on social media because the presenters usually served and

provided enlightenment framed with entertainment [4]. These facts show that the culture of the global community's life has undergone changes according to the design of social media.

The rapid influence of social media brings with it positive as well as negative impacts. The nature of life before the birth of social media was certainly different from after its presence. The differences include the changes in the way an individual interact with others. The Internet has become a new digital space that creates a cultural space [5]. Social media also functions as a tool for people to create branding, be it a product, an identity, or an opinion [6]. This shows that the presence of social media provides a lot of conveniences to its users today.

Social media also makes the pattern of life of religious people in the world undergo a significant change because social media platforms today have become prominent communication channels for interactive participants. Social media platforms also serve as technological tools that allow religious information and knowledge to perform social and cultural transformations due to their ability to generate either collective or individual opinions [7]. Hence, it is noticeable that social media is changing the culture of religious life. The pattern of religious life through social media is the specific focus of the presentation in this study. The use of the word 'pattern' in this study is more appropriate because this paper aims to describe religious life in the era of social media. Previous research related to religious life in the era of social media was written by Mite Setiansah. The finding of her research revealed that showing off piety is taboo and personal but with the increase of the technology through smartphones, religious practices undergo digitalization when the characteristics and logic of smartphone users contribute to shape the religious practices in this digital era [8].

This paper will specifically elaborate the pattern of religious life in the era of social media and how Christian theology judges them. It will focus on two questions of the research, namely, how is the pattern of religious life in the era of social media? And how does Christian theology judge it? The contribution offered by this research is that churches will understand the pattern of religious life in the era of social media. When the churches know about the pattern of religious life in the era of social media, they can improve and participate in updating and setting the direction of the model to carry out the ecclesiastical service.

## **2 Method**

The method used in outlining this topic was the qualitative method with literature study approach. The literature study approach was chosen to describe how religious life was in the era of social media. By utilizing this approach, this study attempted to provide information on how the theoretical framework of this article was built as well as what kind of problem solving was carried out. In addition, literature study provided the researchers with the information from previous findings related to their research so as to provide a foundation for previous research gaps. The method used in describing this topic was descriptive qualitative method. A descriptive study approach was chosen to describe the pattern of religious life in the era of social media. By using a descriptive

approach in this topic, this study attempted to provide information on how the theoretical framework built in this article. The descriptive approach was chosen to carry out theoretical analysis in order to find the state of arts in a study. Therefore, the authors built a conceptual construction of the topic under study. The goal was to reach theoretical conclusions that were built on the theories used in the discussion of this paper.[9]. The framework that the researchers carried out to elaborate this topic was reading, collecting various references from online news, books and journals related to the topic, as well as collated the points of discussion [10]. The next step was to describe and elaborate the topic comprehensively. Such a framework is closely related to qualitative methods and literary approaches.

### **3 Findings and Discussion: Patterns of Religious Life in the Era of Social Media**

#### **3.1 Everyone becomes an active participant of religious life**

The presence of social media has made everyone an active participant in religious life, which means that anyone from any groups can participate in the dissemination of religion, interpretation of scriptures, and preaching [11]. At the time prior to the existence of social media, all religious activities tended to be carried out by the clergymen. However, with the presence of social media today, the task that used to be charged to religious leaders can be carried out by all people. Brubaker stated that religion was growing very rapidly on social media. It can be seen that various beliefs display their religious contents on social media, especially Facebook. This indicates that the technology helps facilitate mass communication in religious activities [4]. In term of Christianity, Kgatele stated that churches that emphasized prophetic used social media to spread the gospel to a wider community, thus social media became a means of evangelism because not only does it spread information faster but it also has a broader coverage [12]. This evidence denotes that social media is a reliable tool to spread the good news to everyone.

Today, the interpretation of scriptures related to doctrine is no longer limited to religious leaders, but anyone can do it without the need to rely on priests anymore. The way people interpret the scriptures can be based on the comments and opinions uploaded by other people on social media. Lukman explained that in Indonesia the interpretation of scriptures on social media today can be classified at least into three tendencies, namely textual, contextual, and allegorical interpretations[13, p. 119] This shows that social media has changed the culture, previously the interpretation of scriptures used to be done by religious leaders only, but now everyone can participate.

Everyone can be an active participant in religious activities because globally from 2012 to 2022 nearly five billion people have been using the internet [14]. The high number of internet users also affects the social media users who play a big role in changing all aspects of life, especially the culture in religious life. Therefore, social media is a pliable space to determine and shape people's perceptions and behavior because the contents presented on social media tend to be adhered by the fans [15]. The

existence of social media encourages all people to be active participants of religious life by giving comments or sharing their ideas on social media

### **3.2 Religious content affects spirituality**

Today, religion and social media play a vital role in the order of global society because social media has a big contribution in shaping people's perception about the world and its developments. Meanwhile, religion shapes and designs the spirituality of human beings in order to become a virtuous human being [16]. The research conducted by Febriani on 39 respondents showed that nowadays the way people mastered religion tended to switch from traditional systems to digital systems. This indicates that social media influences the concept of thinking and acting in mastering theology [17].

The presence of social media has changed the religious culture of some people. The change is noticeable that in the era prior to the social media, the spirituality of religious believers was formed through rituals and ordinances of worship in accordance with their own religions. However, after the existence of social media, the design of one's spirituality no longer relies on rituals or ordinances of worship. The design of spirituality in the era of social media is influenced by religious contents that on the one hand, it can broaden one's knowledge, but on the other hand, it can lead one to radical actions because of his religious understanding. Hamdi reckoned that the shift from religious consultations to social media would be worrisome if it was contaminated by extreme conservative contents. The essence of those contents will actually give rise to radical and extreme attitudes [18]. Prior to the presence of social media, religious leaders would be the ones who designed the direction of spirituality for their congregation, but today, through the religious contents presented on social media, it is the individual himself who designs the direction of his spirituality based on the contents he prefers. The religious

Contents on social media encourage someone to design his own pattern of spirituality and not to follow the pattern of spirituality which tended to be directed by his religious leaders previously [19]. Furthermore, watching religious contents also urge people to conduct a comparative study with other religions. This suggests that religious contents can direct one's spirituality, at the same time, the content can be either unifying or dissociating. Pratiwi said that social media could be used for campaign movements to echo religious moderation through contents that contained elements of ideas and understanding through photos, videos or posters containing symbols of religious tolerance. The goal of these religious contents is to show people about the differences in beliefs, places of worship, clothing and cultures to educate those with different views [19]. With religious contents available on social media, this shapes the pattern of how religion is carried out in the present. This can be seen how some congregations use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to post their faith via status or contents [20]. This shows that with the presence of religious contents, the change in the pattern of religious life is noticeable in the era of social media.

### 3.3 Multicultural religious audiences

Changes in the pattern of religious life in the era of social media can also be seen from the audiences from different cultures, namely listeners and observers of religions from various tribes, languages and groups of different faiths [21]. This is because when a religious activity or worship is carried out in a live-streaming, anyone can be the audience of the activities. The audience of religious activities consists of people from various cultures because the nature of social media is that it is open to the public without barriers. Back then, the audience of religious activities came from one group only, but this is not the case with today's audience in the era of social media. Hutchings mentioned that evangelists showed their enthusiasm in using digital media to advertise their faith, share their life stories, share the Word of God and do special services for children in the field of education. The missionaries used social media to help promote their religion in countries that rejected and antagonized Christianity [22].

When a church conducts a live streaming worship, it has the potential to get a diverse audience due to the nature of live streaming which is open to the public. This shows that the characteristics of religious life in the era of social media is that the audience can come from various groups. In particular, during the pandemic in 2020, various beliefs carried out their worship rituals through live streaming with the aim that people would still be able to meet their spiritual needs. Live streaming worship can be the moment and space where God is present in the Holy Spirit. As long as God is believed to be present in the live streaming worship, then the worship is acceptable and valid. [20]. The implementation of live streaming services through the use of social media during worship can be seen and heard by anyone.

The existence of live streaming worship presented on social media indicates a change in the pattern of religious life in the digital era. Before the presence of social media, the audience only saw and heard from the people who had the same faith or religion. However, when live streaming worship is carried out, people of different faiths, nations, tribes and languages can see and hear as an audience. This shows that the culture of religious life in the era of social media has undergone significant changes, especially in terms of audience. Sircar said that churches in the UK used social media to communicate with the congregations, build church branding, build church communities, reach out for new believers and become a forum for spiritual development for the congregations [23]. The pattern of religious life in the era of social media in terms of audience can have an impact on two things, namely the increase of congregation in quantity or in contrast the religious teachings are criticized by others.

### 3.4 Christian Theological View of The Pattern of Religious Life in The Era of Social Media

In Christian theology, the Bible is the primary finality to measure the degree of propriety of religious life. In the context of religious life in the realm of social media, according to Christian theology, the Bible is the highest reference for measuring religious propriety. Katarina mentioned that all the teachings of church rules and the acts of religious life performed by every member of the church must be tested under the Word

of God. Therefore, in the present context, religious life must return to the principle of the Word of God. Moreover, to establish a spiritual life in religion, believers must begin with a correctly interpreted Bible scriptures which then becomes the theological foundation that influences the believers' concept of thinking and their practical actions [24]. Although everyone can be an active participant in the interpretation of the scriptures obtained from other people's comments, status and ideas on social media, all of this must remain in accordance with the principles of the Bible.

Social media only presents a diversity of meanings to the text of scripture through others' participation but the finality of whether or not the interpretation of the text is true remains to the truth from the Word of God. Social media enables everyone to participate in religious life, yet the engagement is only a participation, not an absolute determinant of whether or not the interpretations made by the participants through comments and ideas presented on social media are true. As mentioned by Febriani, social media is only a mapping in the learning of a religion [17]. When it comes to religious contents on social media, what plays a role in helping to design one's spirituality are things that are in accordance with the biblical truth. From the perspective of the Bible, when teaching, Jesus used various examples and parables to convey His teachings. It is a part of His teaching contents He conveys to the public who saw and listened to Him. Jesus used various examples and parables to deliver the gospel as a form of His creativity in communicating the Good News. The form of the parables and examples He presents is a part of the "content" framed in the News of Salvation about the kingdom of God. In fact, the use of examples and various parables is effective as a method of conveying the truth about the Kingdom of God, because by applying this method, He received attention from His audience [25].

## 4 Conclusion

All the arguments above show that the pattern of religious life before and after the existence of social media showed significant differences. The religious life in the era of social media now has led people to participate actively by demonstrating their religious activities. The activity can be in the form of interpreting holy scriptures and the dissemination of doctrine. This can be done through various religious contents where the audience may come from various groups. Even though the pattern of religious life has changed due to the presence of social media, any religious activities that are posted on social media must always show the truth in accordance with the principle of the Word of God. The pattern of religious life will indeed undergo a transformation in line with the era and its development, yet the religious substance must remain to be based on the Bible as the guide in carrying out religion.

**Research Contribution:** The main contribution of this paper is for pastors, churches and Christians. It is addressed to the pastors of the congregation so that the clergymen can understand about the pattern of religious life in the era of social media. This research is also aimed for the churches so that they can upgrade and set the direction of their ministry. Likewise, this research is addressed to Christians so that they will not follow the pattern of religious life on social media fully without consideration.

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