Digital Theology: Challenges and Opportunities in the Era of Information Technology

Bobby Sanjaya¹, Martina Novalina²

¹²Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Ekumene, Jakarta, Indonesia
bobbysanjaya@sttekumene.ac.id

Abstract. In an increasingly advanced digital era, theology encounters both new challenges and significant opportunities for development. This article explores the concept of digital theology as a theological response to the transformation of modern society through information technology. By analyzing the impact of digitalization on religious practices, church communities, and the interpretation of sacred texts, this study highlights how artificial intelligence (AI), social media, and digital platforms can enrich the mission of the church while simultaneously posing risks, such as decontextualized biblical interpretation. Drawing on a literature review of recent scholarly sources, this article proposes an inclusive theological approach to engaging the digital era.

Keywords: digital theology, information technology, church mission, artificial intelligence, social media

1. BACKGROUND

The digital era has profoundly transformed various aspects of human life, including religious practices. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of digital platforms for worship services and religious education has increased significantly. Digital theology has emerged as a field of study that integrates Christian theology with digital technology, exploring how faith can be navigated and articulated within virtual spaces (P. M. Phillips, 2023b). This phenomenon not only reshapes communication among believers but also gives rise to new theological reflections, such as AI theology, which engages questions of post-human anthropology (P. M. Phillips, 2023a).

This article aims to analyse the challenges and opportunities of digital theology within the Indonesian context, where internet access has expanded rapidly, particularly among younger generations. Focusing on scholarly sources published within the last five years (2020–2025), this study employs a literature review approach to construct a contextual and relevant theological framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital theology may be defined as the effort of Christian communities to deepen and articulate faith within digital culture. According to Phillips (2019), research centres such as CODEC at Durham University have pioneered this exploration by integrating digital humanities with theological studies. The post-COVID-19 digitalization of religious practices has resulted in a shift from face-to-face worship to online formats, significantly altering communal dynamics (P. Phillips et al., 2019).

Research indicates that social media platforms such as Instagram can function as tools for networked theology, where existential and religious discussions occur dialogically. However, this development also presents challenges in the form of fragmented theology, characterized by decontextualized biblical interpretations that proliferate in digital environments (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025). Furthermore, the integration of AI into theological discourse raises ethical questions concerning spiritual authority and discernment (Zaluchu, 2024).

A pluralistic approach is therefore necessary, incorporating voices from the Global South, including Indonesia, in order to avoid the dominance of Western perspectives (Campbell & Garner, 2017). In Africa and Asia, digital theology has been adapted for church mission through social media engagement (Garner, 2020). In Indonesia, theology students increasingly utilize mobile platforms for digital evangelism, although the depth of theological content remains limited (Tangirerung et al., 2025). Digital ecclesiology has also become a critical topic, particularly in global discussions concerning the emergence of virtual churches (Darmawan & Namsem, 2025).

3. PROPOSED METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review method. This approach is selected because the primary objective of the research is not to measure phenomena quantitatively, but to analyse, interpret, and synthesize theological ideas that have developed alongside advancements in information technology, particularly within the context of Christian theology.

Primary data sources consist of international and national peer-reviewed journal articles addressing digital theology, digital religion, digital church practices, AI in Christian ministry, and the impact of information technology on religious life. Secondary sources include academic books, conference proceedings, and relevant research reports.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges of Digital Theology

In an era increasingly dominated by digital technologies, theology faces complex and multidimensional challenges. One of the primary concerns is the risk of dehumanization through technology, whereby interactions with sacred texts and religious communities become increasingly impersonal. Artificial intelligence, for instance, may transform how believers engage with the Bible; however, without deep theological reflection, such use risks weakening biblical authority and diminishing authentic spiritual experience (Conrad, 2025).

In Indonesia, where Generation Z frequently employs platforms such as TikTok to express faith, challenges such as hate speech and theological fragmentation become more pronounced. Viral religious content often lacks historical and theological context, resulting in superficial or distorted interpretations of Scripture (Simamora, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technology in religious practices, yet not all communities were adequately prepared, leading to a persistent digital divide. Rural communities and elderly congregants with limited internet access may become isolated from online worship, exacerbating spiritual loneliness (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025). Studies indicate that post-pandemic digitalization has altered church community dynamics, as virtual worship often fails to replicate the warmth of face-to-face interaction that is central to the Christian theological concept of *koinonia* or fellowship (Rankin, 2024).

Ethical issues related to data privacy and security also pose significant challenges. Churches that rely on digital platforms for congregational data management face risks of data breaches, which may undermine trust and raise theological questions concerning stewardship of God's resources (Tchamba, 2025). Additionally, misinformation and the loss of theological authenticity are prevalent concerns. On social media, erroneous biblical interpretations and distorted doctrines can spread rapidly, challenging the authority of traditional church leadership.

In Christian religious education, the integration of technology is often hindered by limited digital literacy among educators, reducing the effectiveness of transmitting Christian values (Barbara Green Winslet Bessie & Hasanuddin Manurung, 2025). The use of AI in ministry further introduces risks such as algorithmic bias, which may distort Christian representation, or the implicit displacement of the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual guidance (Conrad, 2025; Rinto Francius Sirait et al., 2023). In multireligious contexts such as Indonesia, digital technologies may also intensify interreligious polarization or discrimination (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025).

Another significant tension lies between tradition and innovation. Many traditional churches perceive digital technology as a threat to sacramentality, since physical practices such as baptism and Holy Communion are difficult to translate into virtual spaces. Research on digital church models highlights the risk of digital individualism, whereby believers become passive consumers of religious content rather than active participants in communal life, thereby eroding the Christian understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ.

Opportunities of Digital Theology

Conversely, digitalization presents extraordinary opportunities for theological development and church mission. Social media platforms such as Instagram can facilitate inclusive theological discourse, where pastoral accounts encourage participation and dialogical engagement among believers (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025). Theology students in Indonesia, for example, utilize mobile platforms for digital evangelism, enhancing digital literacy within theological education and extending the reach of the Gospel to younger generations (Barbara Green Winslet Bessie & Hasanuddin Manurung, 2025).

One of the most significant opportunities lies in increased accessibility for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities. Studies of online Bible study groups within Pentecostal

churches in South Africa demonstrate that digital platforms can provide safe, non-judgmental spaces that foster spiritual well-being and a sense of belonging (Opperman & Botha, 2025). Global connectivity further enables theology to become more inclusive by incorporating voices from developing countries and fostering transnational theological networks (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025).

Artificial intelligence also offers opportunities for data-driven mission planning, creative content production such as religious music and imagery, and probabilistic exploration of biblical themes. In Christian education, gamification and online platforms enhance student engagement by making learning more interactive and personalized. Digital technologies also contribute to church resilience during crises, such as pandemics, by enabling organizational continuity and effective resource stewardship.

Hybrid community models, where digital churches complement physical congregations, enable global evangelism and online mentorship while maintaining spiritual authenticity. In Indonesia, such adaptations may support churches in navigating multireligious contexts by fostering interfaith dialogue through digital platforms.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Digital theology offers an innovative framework for navigating the era of information technology. While challenges such as interpretive fragmentation, the digital divide, and ethical risks must be addressed through deep theological reflection, opportunities including global mission expansion, marginal inclusion, and creative innovation through AI hold significant promise for church revitalization. In the Indonesian context, churches are encouraged to adopt digital theology through initiatives such as digital literacy training and the development of biblically grounded digital ethics. Future research should focus on empirical applications within local communities to ensure that theology remains rooted in the Word of God while constructively engaging technological advancement. Ultimately, digital theology should not be perceived as a threat, but as a calling toward a broader and more inclusive mission.

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