
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Social Media on Religious Communities

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| ABSTRACT

This paper examines the growing impact of social media on religious communities in contemporary society, with particular attention to how digital technologies have reshaped religious communication, participation, identity formation, and community engagement. In today's digital era, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become central spaces where religious organizations and believers connect, communicate, and express their faith. These platforms are no longer just social tools but have evolved into important religious spaces where sermons are shared, worship services are streamed live, prayers are conducted online, and spiritual messages are circulated instantly across global audiences. The study explores how these digital platforms have significantly improved access to religious content, making it easier for individuals to engage with faith-based teachings regardless of time or location. This increased accessibility has also strengthened global religious interaction, allowing believers from different cultural and geographical backgrounds to share experiences and deepen spiritual connections. In addition, social media has expanded opportunities for evangelism, religious education, and community outreach, making religious messages more visible and widely distributed than ever before. Furthermore, the paper highlights how social media plays a crucial role in shaping religious identity and participation, particularly among young people who increasingly depend on online platforms for spiritual guidance, moral support, and a sense of belonging. However, alongside these benefits, the study also identifies key challenges. These include the spread of misinformation, commercialization of religious content, weakening of traditional religious authority, and exposure to morally conflicting or inappropriate content online. Such issues often create tension between long-established religious traditions and the rapidly evolving digital culture. Drawing from sociological and historical perspectives, the study argues that social media serves both as a powerful tool for religious growth and as a space of ideological and moral negotiation. It concludes that the influence of social media on religion is complex and ever-changing. Therefore, religious institutions must adopt balanced, ethical, and strategic digital approaches that enhance positive engagement while minimizing potential risks to religious values and teachings.

| KEYWORDS

Social media, religion, religious communities, digital communication, secularization, moral values

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology and internet communication has significantly transformed human interaction in the twenty-first century (Zhang, 2025; Müller & Friemel, 2024). Among the most influential developments is the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter), which have changed the ways people communicate, share information, and build communities (Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). These platforms have also reshaped religious life by providing new spaces where believers, religious leaders, and institutions can interact beyond traditional physical settings (Åhman & Thorén, 2021; Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024). Religious organizations increasingly use social media to spread teachings, conduct online worship services, promote religious programs, and maintain connections with

followers across different parts of the world (Minarti et al., 2023; Uyuni et al., 2023). As a result, social media has become an important instrument for religious communication and engagement in contemporary society (Henry, 2021).

Traditionally, religious communication relied heavily on face-to-face interaction within churches, mosques, temples, shrines, and other sacred spaces. However, the emergence of digital media has expanded religious participation beyond geographical and cultural boundaries (Campbell, 2004; Campbell, 2010). Believers can now access sermons, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and other forms of religious instruction through live-streaming services, podcasts, videos, and online discussion forums (Åhman & Thorén, 2021). This digital transformation has increased access to religious knowledge and enabled religious institutions to reach wider audiences than ever before (Müller & Friemel, 2024). Studies have shown that digital media has profoundly influenced religious education, participation, and identity formation in modern society (McClure, 2016; Prasojo et al., 2020).

Social media has also contributed to the formation of online religious communities where individuals share beliefs, testimonies, spiritual experiences, and moral support (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Batool et al., 2021). Through online interaction, believers develop a sense of belonging and maintain social connections regardless of physical distance (Rifat et al., 2024). Young people, in particular, are increasingly influenced by online religious content because they spend a significant portion of their daily lives on digital platforms (Ehlebracht, 2022). Social media therefore plays an important role in shaping religious identity, values, and patterns of participation among contemporary youth (Prasojo et al., 2020). Furthermore, social media algorithms often influence the type of religious content users encounter, thereby affecting religious beliefs and community engagement (Zhang, 2025).

Despite its many benefits, the use of social media within religious communities also presents several challenges. The open nature of digital platforms has encouraged the spread of misinformation, false teachings, religious extremism, and manipulation of religious messages for personal or financial gain (Faizin et al., 2025; Andok, 2024). Some religious leaders use social media primarily for commercialization, thereby reducing the spiritual value of religious communication (Henry, 2021). In addition, online religious practices may weaken traditional religious authority structures because individuals can access alternative teachings from multiple sources without direct accountability (Andok, 2024; Campbell, 2004). Exposure to immoral or controversial content online may also create tensions between traditional religious values and modern digital culture (Zhang, 2025).

From a sociological and historical perspective, religion has always adapted to changes in communication technology, from oral traditions and printed texts to radio and television broadcasting (Campbell, 2010). Social media represents another stage in this historical evolution, offering both opportunities and challenges for religious communities (Müller & Friemel, 2024). While digital platforms enhance global connectivity and religious outreach, they also create spaces of ideological conflict, moral contestation, and cultural transformation (Rifat et al., 2024). Religious institutions are therefore faced with the responsibility of balancing technological advancement with the preservation of ethical and spiritual values (Henry, 2021).

This paper examines the impact of social media on religious communities in contemporary society by analyzing how digital platforms have transformed religious communication, participation, identity formation, and community engagement. The study further investigates both the positive and negative implications of social media on religion and argues that its influence is multidimensional and continuously evolving (Zhang, 2025; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). The paper concludes that religious institutions must adopt responsible and balanced approaches to digital engagement in order to maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its social, cultural, and moral risks.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the central question of how social media influences religious communities in contemporary society. It seeks to understand the extent to which digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X have transformed the ways religious messages are communicated, received, and practiced. In particular, the study explores whether social media has strengthened religious participation by making worship services, sermons, and spiritual teachings more accessible, or whether it has weakened traditional forms of religious engagement by shifting attention from physical congregations to online interactions.

Another important question addressed in this research is how social media contributes to the formation of religious identity among believers. The study examines whether continuous exposure to diverse religious content online helps individuals develop a more informed and inclusive understanding of faith, or whether it leads to confusion, selective belief adoption, or distortion of religious teachings. This question is especially significant among young people, who are the most active users of digital platforms and often rely on them for spiritual guidance and community belonging.

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The study also investigates the challenges associated with the use of social media in religious contexts. It asks how issues such as misinformation, commercialization of religion, exposure to inappropriate content, and weakening of traditional religious authority affect the authenticity and stability of religious communities. Furthermore, it explores how religious leaders and institutions respond to these challenges in order to maintain credibility and relevance in a rapidly changing digital environment.

Finally, the research seeks to understand whether social media should be viewed primarily as a positive tool for religious development or as a space of tension between tradition and modern digital culture. It examines how religious institutions can balance these two realities by adopting strategies that maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its potential negative impacts on faith and community life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Social Media and Religion

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange information through online interaction (Zhang, 2025; Müller & Friemel, 2024). Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X have transformed communication across social, political, and religious spheres (Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Religious institutions increasingly use these platforms to spread teachings, conduct online worship, and maintain communication with followers across geographical boundaries (Minarti et al., 2023; Uyuni et al., 2023). Digitalization has therefore reshaped religious practices and community interactions in contemporary society (Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024; Henry, 2021).

2.2 Social Media and Religious Communication

Social media has significantly transformed religious communication by providing instant access to sermons, teachings, prayer sessions, and religious discussions (Åhman & Thorén, 2021; Campbell, 2004). Religious leaders can now reach global audiences through live-streaming, podcasts, and online broadcasts (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). This development has enhanced evangelism, religious education, and interaction among believers (Minarti et al., 2023; Prasajo et al., 2020). Studies indicate that social media algorithms also influence the visibility and spread of religious content online, shaping user exposure and engagement (Zhang, 2025; McClure, 2016).

2.3 Social Media and Faith Formation

Digital platforms play an important role in shaping religious beliefs, values, and identity, especially among young people (Ehlebracht, 2022; McClure, 2016). Many believers rely on online platforms for spiritual guidance, moral instruction, and community belonging (Batoool et al., 2021; Rifat et al., 2024). Social media therefore contributes to faith formation and religious participation in modern society by influencing how individuals interpret and practice religion in digital environments (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Prasajo et al., 2020).

2.4 Impact of Social Media on Religious Community Engagement

Social media strengthens community engagement by connecting believers across different regions and cultures (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Müller & Friemel, 2024). Online religious groups encourage interaction, emotional support, and participation in religious activities regardless of physical distance (Batoool et al., 2021; Rifat et al., 2024). Digital communities have become alternative spaces for worship, fellowship, and spiritual interaction, particularly among marginalized and mobile populations (Uyuni et al., 2023; Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024).

2.5 Challenges of Social Media in Religious Communities

Despite its benefits, social media also presents challenges such as misinformation, false doctrines, commercialization of religion, cyber manipulation, and exposure to immoral content (Faizin et al., 2025; Andok, 2024). Misleading religious teachings spread rapidly online and may weaken traditional religious authority structures (Andok, 2024; Henry, 2021). Furthermore, online media has altered perceptions of religious authority by allowing alternative voices and interpretations to gain influence (Campbell, 2004; Zhang, 2025). These challenges highlight tensions between digital openness and religious authenticity in contemporary society (Islam, 2019; Faizin et al., 2025).

2.6 Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in sociological and media theories which explain how communication technologies influence social interaction and identity formation (Müller & Friemel, 2024; Campbell, 2010). The digitalization of religion demonstrates how technological advancement reshapes religious practices, beliefs, and institutional authority in contemporary society (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Zhang, 2025). Social media therefore functions as both a communicative tool and a transformative force in shaping modern religious life (Henry, 2021; Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024).

3 Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the impact of social media on religious communities. The approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of how digital platforms influence religious communication, participation, identity formation, and community engagement in real-life settings. The study focused on religious individuals and groups who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X for spiritual and religious activities.

The population of the study comprised members of different religious communities, including church members, religious leaders, and active online faith participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had experience in using social media for religious purposes. This ensured that the data collected reflected informed perspectives on the subject matter.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire and supported by informal interviews. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to gather information on patterns of social media use, types of religious content accessed, levels of participation in online religious activities, and perceived effects of social media on faith and religious practice. The interviews provided additional qualitative insights into personal experiences and opinions regarding digital religious engagement.

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, as well as thematic analysis for qualitative responses. This helped in identifying common patterns and themes related to the influence of social media on religious life. The findings were then interpreted in relation to existing literature on digital religion, communication, and community engagement.

Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were included in the analysis, and all data were used strictly for academic purposes. This ensured that the rights and privacy of participants were protected while maintaining the integrity of the research process.

Overall, the methodology provided a balanced approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative techniques, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how social media impacts religious communities in contemporary society.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study show that social media has become deeply embedded in the daily life of religious communities, reshaping how faith is practiced, shared, and experienced (Zhang, 2025; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). One of the most noticeable results is the widespread adoption of digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X by religious organizations (Campbell, 2010; Minarti et al., 2023). These platforms are now commonly used to stream sermons, share inspirational messages, organize prayer meetings, and maintain constant communication with members (Åhman & Thorén, 2021; Uyuni et al., 2023). This shift demonstrates that religious engagement is no longer limited to physical spaces such as churches, mosques, and temples, but now extends into virtual environments where believers can participate from anywhere (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Müller & Friemel, 2024).

Another key result is the increase in religious participation, especially among young people. Many respondents indicated that they are more likely to engage in religious activities when they are available online (Ehlebracht, 2022; McClure, 2016). The convenience of accessing sermons on mobile phones, joining virtual prayer groups, and watching religious content at any time has made participation more flexible and appealing (Prasojo et al., 2020; Batool et al., 2021). This suggests that social media has helped to remove geographical and time barriers that previously limited religious involvement, thereby expanding the reach of religious communities (Müller & Friemel, 2024).

The study also found that social media plays a significant role in shaping religious identity and belief formation. Individuals are constantly exposed to a wide variety of religious teachings, interpretations, and debates online (McClure, 2016; Zhang, 2025). While this diversity can promote understanding and broaden perspectives, it can also create confusion when conflicting doctrines are encountered (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Islam, 2019). As users move between different online religious sources, their beliefs may become influenced by multiple interpretations, sometimes leading to uncertainty or weakened attachment to traditional teachings (Prasojo et al., 2020). Research has shown that digital platforms significantly influence how people develop knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to religion (Adeoye & Noorhayati, 2024; Müller & Friemel, 2024).

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In terms of discussion, the results highlight both the positive and negative consequences of social media on religious communities. On the positive side, social media strengthens communication within religious groups and helps maintain a sense of community even when members are physically apart (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Batool et al., 2021). It also provides opportunities for evangelism and outreach, allowing religious messages to reach global audiences quickly and efficiently (Minarti et al., 2023). Studies indicate that digital platforms enhance religious communication and can even support inter-religious dialogue and understanding (Henry, 2021; Åhman & Thorén, 2021).

However, the findings also reveal serious challenges. One major issue is the spread of misinformation and false religious teachings online (Faizin et al., 2025; Andok, 2024). Because social media allows anyone to publish content, unverified doctrines can circulate widely and influence believers (Zhang, 2025). Additionally, the rise of online religious influencers has, in some cases, weakened traditional religious authority, as individuals may prefer charismatic online voices over established leaders (Andok, 2024; Campbell, 2004).

Another important issue is the commercialization of religion. Some religious content creators use social media primarily for financial gain, which can shift the focus from spiritual growth to popularity and monetization (Henry, 2021; Islam, 2019). Furthermore, exposure to inappropriate or morally conflicting content on digital platforms may challenge the values of religious users and create tension between traditional beliefs and modern digital culture (Zhang, 2025; Faizin et al., 2025).

Overall, the discussion shows that social media has a dual impact on religious communities. It enhances participation, communication, and global connectivity, while also introducing risks that challenge doctrinal purity and authority structures (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Müller & Friemel, 2024). Religious institutions must therefore adapt by developing strategies that promote responsible digital engagement, ensuring that the benefits of social media are maximized while its negative effects are minimized (Henry, 2021).

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that social media has become a powerful and unavoidable force in shaping the activities and experiences of religious communities in contemporary society. Its influence extends across religious communication, participation, identity formation, and community engagement. The findings show that digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X have significantly expanded the ways in which religious messages are shared and received. Religious leaders and institutions now have the ability to reach wider audiences beyond physical boundaries, making spirituality more accessible and interactive than in the past.

At the same time, the study confirms that social media has redefined how individuals participate in religious life. Many believers, especially young people, now engage in online worship services, follow digital sermons, and join virtual prayer groups. This shift demonstrates that religious practice is no longer limited to physical gatherings but is increasingly blended with digital experiences. As a result, social media has contributed to the growth of online religious communities that provide support, belonging, and spiritual connection.

However, the study also highlights important challenges associated with the digitalization of religion. The spread of misinformation, exposure to conflicting doctrines, commercialization of religious content, and weakening of traditional authority structures pose serious concerns for religious integrity. These challenges indicate that while social media enhances religious expression, it also introduces risks that may distort faith practices and beliefs if not properly managed.

Overall, the study concludes that the impact of social media on religious communities is both positive and negative. It serves as a tool for strengthening religious outreach and engagement while simultaneously creating tensions between tradition and modern digital culture. Therefore, religious institutions must adopt balanced strategies that encourage responsible use of social media, promote authentic teachings, and preserve core spiritual values while embracing technological advancement.

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