

# Symbiosis of Faith and Technology: Analyzing the Impact of Information Technology on Religious Dynamics

Supriadi<sup>1</sup>, Vicky Bin Djusmin<sup>2</sup>, Fajar Novriansyah Yasir<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fakultas Teknik Informatika, Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo, 91921, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Fakultas Teknik Informatika, Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo, 91921, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Fakultas Teknik Informatika, Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo, 91921, Indonesia

Corresponding Author Email: [supriadi@uncp.ac.id](mailto:supriadi@uncp.ac.id)

## Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between faith and technology. The focus of this research on the evolving nature of religious practice in the digital age has prompted further research on the reconciliation of religious beliefs with scientific concepts, the influence of social media on religious identity, and the ethical implications of technological advances in religious contexts. These areas of research highlight the complex interplay between faith and technology and the need for ongoing exploration of its impact on religious dynamics. This research using a methodology that combines literature analysis and case study examination can provide a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena such as Faith-Tech Symbiosis. The respondents of this study were student groups, lecturer groups and educational staff groups of Cokroaminoto Palopo University. The research found that technology has an impact on religious practices where online religious rituals are shifting traditional practices and the massive formation of digital religious communities. In addition, another finding is that technology shapes the perception of respondent groups in religion in the digital era where social media has a self-image as well as a religious image, until the ethical challenges of the interaction between faith and technology are the task of all parties.

Keywords: *Faith-Tech Symbiosis; Information Technology Influence; Religious Dynamics Analysis; Digital Spirituality Impact; Tech-Enhanced Religious Practices.*

## 1. Introduction

The interaction between Information Technology (IT) and religious practice has evolved significantly. It shapes religious dynamics and influences the perception and practice of faith. Various studies explore the impact of IT on beliefs, practices, and religious communities. Studies have investigated the reconciliation of religious belief with evolution, the influence of social media on religious identity, and the integration of technology into religious education. In addition, several other studies have addressed ethical challenges arising from the intersection of faith and technology, emphasizing the need for culturally competent evolutionary education and the impact of digital media on religious experience.

The evolving relationship between Information Technology and religious practice underscores the need for ongoing research to understand the implications of technological advances on religious beliefs, practices, and communities. This evolving landscape presents opportunities for further exploration of the intersection between faith and technology, the impact of digital media on religious experiences, and ethical considerations in integrating technology into religious contexts. As technology continues to shape religious dynamics, further research will be critical to understanding and comprehensively addressing the evolving nature of faith in the digital age.

The integration of Information Technology (IT) has indeed significantly influenced religious dynamics by shaping religious practice, changing religious authority, and facilitating religious education. Religious leaders have framed technology to demand the integration of

information technology into religious practice, embedding it in an increasingly mediated social environment [1], [2]. The use of computing systems in church management, worship, pastoral care, and outreach has been reported, highlighting the success noted by faith-based organizations utilizing the provision of computing for their activities [3]. In addition, the intertextuality of technology and spirituality has been noted to provide cultural abbreviations and rich platforms for communicating various meanings, demonstrating the integration of religious language with technology [4].

IT integration has had an impact on religious education, with the application of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model that integrates Islamic values based on information and communication technology to strengthen students' character and problem-solving abilities [5]. Furthermore, the integration of reproductive health learning has been proven to provide an understanding of life skills, sexual and reproductive health, and health behavior by utilizing information and technology developments, integrating religious, socio-cultural, and psychological aspects [3].

The influence of IT on religious dynamics is also evident in changes in religious authority and the transmission of religious beliefs [6]. The emergence of a new technological era has been noted to threaten the originality of religious beliefs during their transmission through technology [7]. In addition, the role of religious figures is highlighted increasingly significantly in the era of information technology advances [2].

## 2. Literature Review

The relationship between faith and technology has been studied extensively. Ibarhim, (2022) highlight the ways in which religious leaders have framed technology to demand the integration of information technology into religious practice, embedded in increasingly mediated social environments [9] emphasizes the impact of digital technology on faith formation. A literature survey that revealed a limited body of scholarship that addresses the complex intersection of pedagogy, technology, and faith [4] explore the influence of technology on spiritual needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the impact of history, tradition, and authority structures on technology negotiations within religious communities [3], [10]. In addition, it argues that transhumanism should be seen as a secular belief, secularizing traditional religious themes and endowing technology with religious significance.

These studies collectively demonstrate the multifaceted relationship between faith and technology, which includes the integration of information technology into religious practice, the impact of digital technology on faith formation, the complex intersection of pedagogy, technology, and faith, the influence of technology on spiritual needs, and the secularization of technology in the context of transhumanism. Case studies can indeed illustrate the influence of Information Technology (IT) on religious life. The acceptance and influence of IT in religious traditions has been highlighted in numerous studies. For example, Kluver and Cheong, (2007) argues that the acceptance of information technology in Asian societies is strongly influenced by religious traditions with accompanying historical and political configurations (Kluver & Cheong, 2007). Furthermore, [1] discusses the empowerment of Muslim communities through the use of information technology in education and religious life skills, agriculture, trade, and social organization governance, emphasizing the positive

rational impact of IT in bringing the community closer to the formation of a prosperous civil society [1].

The influence of digital technology on religious endeavors, particularly on global missions, has been examined, showing that humans cannot escape the influence of this technology [4]. In addition, Evolvi, (2022) suggests that new information and communication technologies can support a variety of existing religious and spiritual activities, as well as help create new ones. These findings collectively show that IT has a significant impact on religious life, from education and governance to global missions and spiritual activities.

Furthermore, the influence of the Internet on religious practice has been a subject of debate, with McClure, (2020) highlighting that the debate is highly dependent on the particular technology [12]. In addition, the use of social media technology for religious information retrieval has been investigated, indicating a growing interest at the intersection of technology and religious practice [12], [13].

### **The theoretical framework supports the analysis of the Faith-Tech Symbiosis**

Faith-Tech Symbiotic Analysis can be supported by a variety of theoretical frameworks. For example, the theoretical framework of evolutionary biology can be applied to understand the cognitive processes underlying human mate choices and preferences [14]. Similarly, the use of geographical proximity as a theoretical framework has been used to analyze industrial symbiosis, aiming to identify key drivers and barriers that reinforce or regulate sustainability [15]. Furthermore, the intersection of neo-institutional theory with Bourdieu's theory of practice has been used to construct a theoretical framework for examining social responsibility activity within the Church of England [16].

In the context of faith-based interventions, the lack of a theoretical framework to guide the evaluation design and selection of relevant variables has been noted, suggesting the need for theoretical underpinnings to guide the analysis of faith-based initiatives [17], [18]. In addition, the importance of knowledge in the formation of children's faith has been highlighted, emphasizing the theoretical foundations for knowledge transfer analysis in online Sunday School content.

The use of ecological theoretical frameworks, combined with Waste Stream Analysis (WFA) and material flow analysis (MFA), has been used to build models for analyzing waste flows in industrial symbiotic systems, providing a theoretical basis for understanding material flow dynamics [19]. Similarly, the application of quantum theory frameworks has been shown to allow modeling decision-making situations in the presence of uncertainty, providing a theoretical basis for understanding decision-making processes [12] (Aerts et al., 2018).

### **3. Methodology**

This research approach combining literature analysis and examination of case studies can provide a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena such as Faith-Tech Symbiosis. The literature used in this study is articles published by national and international reputable journals using tracking engines through keywords that match the keywords of this study. While the case study evaluation was carried out at Cokroaminoto Palopo University consisting of student groups, education staff groups and lecturer groups. By integrating these two methods, researchers can gain insights from existing knowledge while also studying

specific real-world examples. For example, the use of literature analysis allows for a broad understanding of the theoretical and existing research underpinnings of the interaction of faith and technology. This approach can help identify key themes, trends, and gaps in the literature, as demonstrated by in their study of the application of research and technology into the rail industry. By conducting a literature analysis, the study can see how research in two cases develops, providing a foundation for understanding the implementation approach taken. Whereas, the integration of case study examination allows for exploration of real-world applications and contextualization of theoretical concepts in specific scenarios. For example, using case studies of waste flows in industrial symbiotic systems to model material flow dynamics, which supports their research within the theoretical framework of material metabolism and industrial ecology. This approach allows researchers to apply theoretical concepts to practical contexts, increasing understanding of the dynamics of industrial symbiosis.

## **4. Result and Discussion**

### **4.1 Technology has an impact on religious practice**

A research approach that combines literature analysis and examination of case studies at Cokroaminoto Palopo University results in a comprehensive understanding of how Technology impacts religious practice. Analysis of literature from national and international journals reveals a solid theoretical basis regarding the interaction between faith and technology.

The case study at Cokroaminoto Palopo University, involving groups of students, education staff, and lecturers, provides real insights into the implementation of the Faith-Tech Symbiosis in the context of higher education. College students, as a highly influential group, described the way technology influences their religious practices, such as participation in online religious events or using religious apps. The education staff group can provide perspectives on integrating technology in the religious learning process, while lecturers can reflect the use of technology in the delivery of religious materials.

Overall, this study opens insights into how Technology impacts religious practice in higher education environments, proving that the interaction between religion and technology not only affects theoretical understanding but also manifests in practical applications in everyday life. The influence of technology on religious practice has been studied extensively from multiple perspectives. For example, Saputra, Triantoro and Ardiansyah, (2021) conducted field research and interviews to explore the fragmentation of religious authority among urban Muslim youth in Indonesia due to the influence of social media. The study highlights how technology, particularly social media, has influenced religious communication and authority structures.

The results of research by [21] and [22] found that technology influences consumption behavior and purchasing practices in a religious context, as evidenced by various literature.... It adopts qualitative approaches and mixed methods to explore the impact of technology on the behavior of Christian congregations in Burkina Faso. What the study emphasized was the role of technology in shaping religious practices and consumer behavior.

The relationship between religiosity and technology has been investigated in the context of job satisfaction among Pakistani respondents by Aman *et al.*, (2019). The study revealed that religious commitment and practice play an important role in strengthening job satisfaction, demonstrating the influence of religious practice facilitated by technology. The study emphasizes the role of technology in the development of religious activities alongside traditional practices, reflecting the transformative impact of technology on religious conceptions.

The use of technology in religious education and spiritual formation has been explored by Humeira and Sarwono, (2019), who conducted in-depth interviews with administrators and members of urban Islamic groups in Indonesia. The study shows how technology is integrated into religious education and spiritual practices within specific religious communities.

#### **4.2 Online religious rituals change traditional practices**

To understand how online religious rituals are changing traditional practices, it is important to consider the impact of technology on religious activities. The study by Dein and Watts, (2023) provides valuable insights into the differences between online and offline religious worship, especially in terms of structure, communication, and performance. Traditionally religious rituals have often been limited to physical places of worship and can be difficult to access by people who live far away or have limited mobility, whereas online religious rituals of people around the world can be easily accessed without geographical boundaries. This allows more people to participate without having to travel far. Moreover, with the existence of online religious rituals, everyone has the flexibility to participate at any time according to their schedule. It can accommodate individuals who have a busy schedule or who live in different time zones.

In addition, research by Taragin-Zeller and Kessler, (2021) highlights the transformation of religious practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, through online platforms, everyone can stay engaged through chat channels, discussion forums, or even live video sessions. This creates a different form of interaction, although it is not always physical. By moving to a digital environment, there is potential for experimentation with more creative approaches, such as the use of multimedia, visual presentation, and innovative delivery methods. The study offers valuable perspectives on the adaptation of religious rituals to the online environment and the creation of new religious communities. Murwendayoko, (2023) presents the results of a case study on the ritualization of online worship during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the adaptation of rituals by religious leaders and congregations to online settings. The study provides insight into the challenges and adjustments made by religious communities in transitioning traditional practices to the digital realm. To answer the challenges faced in the practice of online religious rituals in the form of anticipation of data security and privacy, including the risk of personal information leakage or technical interference.

One thing is certain, the dynamics that occur at Cokroaminoto Palopo University require a transformation in religious practice today. Religious practice becomes very flexible and can be adapted to the character of every media, including smartphones. Religion is no longer understood as it used to be, where religious rituals are something that is not worthy of questioning, denying, or being carried out outside the standard. But now, in the life of

industrial and modern society, the demands of society want things that are instant, practical, and fast, including in religion.

#### **4.3 Digital religious communities are being formed**

An article written by Evolvi, (2022) entitled "Religion and the internet: digital religion, (hyper)mediated spaces, and materiality" provides theoretical reflections on the study of religion and the Internet by critically discussing the idea of "digital religion". In particular, it emphasizes the importance of integrating material and spatial approaches to the study of digital religion. Thus, he proposed the theory of "hypermediated religious space" to describe the process of religious mediation between online and offline environments taking into account materiality and space. Online religious communities, giving them the name 'virtual communities. During the same period, religious discussion groups began to appear on the web. The polysemic term "Cyber-Religion" began to be coined, and it encompassed a wide range of realities. It generally designates the ways in which religion develops in new information technologies, especially the Internet and, inversely, how the religious world is affected by the technologization of societies and cultures. In a stricter sense, perhaps more related to reality, it is used to describe "virtual" religious systems, either based on or created in the digital world, (almost) independent of the physical world.

In addition, research by Taragin-Zeller and Kessler, (2021) highlights the transformation of religious practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the emergence of new forms of religious competition and global prayer practices. This research data shows the effectiveness of learning and work instruction through online media such as WhatsApp Group (WAG), instagram community, Facebook community. In terms of learning, this digital community is very effective, where digital track records can be traced back to different times. To understand how online religious rituals are changing traditional practices, it is important to consider the impact of technology on religious activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has left a massive footprint of online learning, especially the adaptation of religious rituals to the online environment and the creation of new religious communities.

Furthermore, Murwendayoko, (2023) work presents a case study of the ritualization of online worship during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the adaptation of rituals by religious leaders and congregations to online settings. The study provides insight into the challenges and adjustments made by religious communities in transitioning traditional practices to the digital realm. Electronic media, digital technology, high-speed communication, and the Internet have a decisive impact on religious organizations and religious people. Most experts consider this technical change to bring rapid and massive changes, due to the concept of the "digital revolution."

#### **4.4 Technology shapes religious perceptions in the digital age**

Based on the references provided, the impact of technology in shaping religious perceptions in the digital age can be observed from various angles. For example, Xu and Campbell, (2020) discusses the potential influence of internet technology on the characteristics of religious fundamentalism, highlighting ways in which technology can influence traits such as hierarchy, patriarchy, discipline, and alienation. This suggests that technology has the potential to reshape traditional religious ideologies and practices. In some

cases, "mediatization" has become a major feature of religious globalization [12], [28] through sharing or distributing ideas, themes, symbols, images, videos, and hypertext and has reached new knowledge processes [29]. Cyber-religion, or e-religion, digital religion, online religion, first existed through and was shaped by communication technology. Forums on worship, blogs about religion, lists of newsletters from major religious figures (including the Pope), offer a variety of services (virtual connected blessings) through smartphone and laptop applications, with various online religious leaders producing mediated practices, whether worship, study, meditation, prayer ("pray online"), or confession [3].

In addition, [30] explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious practice, specifically the suspension of face-to-face religious gatherings and the need to engage in socially distanced forms of interactive religious services and rituals. It highlights how technology, particularly digital platforms, have influenced the adaptation of religious practices in response to external challenges. The study also found that one of the reasons why religious "ngaji" on the internet is mostly done by Muslim teenagers is because of practicality. Practically identical to easy and fast. In contrast to conventional religious practices that take longer. It's different with "ngaji" through social media. Tausiyah ulama or ustad can be listened to via smathphone and can choose for yourself what topics are searched and liked. Through smartphones people can more easily connect to the internet and can search for information about any religion and can spread religious teachings, as well as receive religious information. Through smartphones they can represent their respective religious identities Mundakir, (2021).

#### **4.5 Social media has a religious image**

Based on the references provided, the influence of social media on the image of religion in the digital age can be studied from various perspectives. For example, Zaid *et al.*, (2022) discuss how social media influencers challenge traditional religious authorities as they reimagine Muslim identities based on new global lifestyles. This suggests that social media is reshaping the image of religion by influencing religious authority and societal dynamics. This research shows that respondents use social media for the purpose of forming an identity as Muslims, initially may seem "tacky" or kampung. But later, this appearance of identity actually became proud. Similarly, efforts to use social media with the aim of gaining Islamic religious knowledge may be a funny phenomenon and sarkarm. Because all this time the internet, in a wild perception, is a technology that damages faith. So far, the Internet is synonymous with profane things, while religion is synonymous with sacred things. In addition to having no authority, the image of the internet also seems "dirty" with the rise of pornographic content, thus making many Muslims avoid the internet. But that assumption is now starting to shift. Information about Islam is rife on the internet. Coupled with the open, free and sharing nature of Internet users, Islamic content quickly spreads on the Internet. Starting from an understanding of tawhid, fiqh, hadith, Qur'anic exegesis, and ways of worship, including jihad information.

Furthermore, Brubaker and Haigh, (2017) highlight the shift in the use of social media for religious communication, which has changed the way many religious groups and individuals worship and proselytize. It shows that social media influences the public image of religion by changing modes of religious expression and outreach. The phenomenon of Cyber-

religion is a challenge for all religions, not only Islam. And for the entire millennial generation around the world. However, in the event of the millennial generation in Indonesia, especially the academic community of Cokroaminoto Palopo University, this is a challenge in itself because the phenomenon of cyber-religion in addition to bringing a positive impact with the spread of religious knowledge is very easy, cheap and practical, but on the other hand this is actually a means for jihadists to disseminate their teachings. Based on this, an appropriate formula is needed in addressing this phenomenon.

#### **4.6 Ethical challenges arise from the interaction between faith and technology**

Faith is, of course, a central concept in all religions. In general, it indicates trust, confidence or conviction, whether in reality, in others, or ultimately in God. Or simply put, the dynamics of faith are determined more by its object (the believer) than by its subject (the believer) necessarily generally having universal ethics. In the context of religions, the dynamics of faith are determined by how a person attempts to perform religious rituals to actualize trust and confidence in the believed. This behavior can simply be reflected in one's response and attitude towards something, the better one's level of faith the less potential it has to violate universal ethics.

Especially in spreading religious information on social media, students can take advantage of features on social media platforms, such as live streaming, Instagram stories, and YouTube videos. This technique helps them in accessing a wider range of information. Students can also take advantage of creative content such as memes, images, videos, and infographics to make the message of Islamic da'wah more interesting and easy to understand. They can also take on the role of spreading Islamic da'wah on social media, but the most important thing that needs to be maintained is ethics and politeness in communicating on social media [6], [20], [31], [33].

The determination of reasoning in this sub-discussion culminates in the interaction between faith and technology presenting ethical challenges related to the application of technology in care settings, the application of advanced technologies in human reproduction and genomic research, and the use of information and communication technology in humanitarian medical assistance. These challenges underscore the need for ethical awareness and decision-making in the integration of technology in sensitive and complex domains.

### **5. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the above research, the impact of Information Technology (IT) on religious dynamics is diverse and includes various dimensions. Sundararajan *et al.*, (2019) highlight the influence of religious traditions and gender dynamics on family planning absorption, demonstrating the complex interplay between religious beliefs and technological interventions. Faoziyah, (2022) emphasizes the positive impact of information technology on empowering Muslim communities through religious education and life skills, underlining the potential of IT in improving religious practice and social resilience. Furthermore, McClure, (2017, 2020) discusses the effects of internet use on religious beliefs, behaviors, and possessions, suggesting that the internet fundamentally impacts religious dynamics [15], [36]. One of the most widespread in the development of information technology is social media which is used as a medium for new cyber-religious movements that can have a positive and

negative impact. Awareness of the use and selection of religious news and information is important for the community, especially students of Cokroaminoto Palopo University, because not all religious information is true and can be used as a source of authority. Students perceive religious phenomena on social media as a consequence of the rise of preachers and religious leaders who are aware of the power of the media as a tool to convey religious teachings.

In addition, studies by Kluver and Cheong, (2007) discusses the integration of information technology into religious practice, pointing to the demand for the incorporation of IT in religious activities. In addition, Mylenka and Anhelova, (2021) explore the role of augmented reality in contemporary religious practice, highlighting the transformative impact of new technologies on religious consciousness. These findings collectively demonstrate the diverse ways in which IT influences religious dynamics, from empowerment and education to the integration of technology into religious practice and the transformation of religious experiences.

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