

## **Christian Students In The Digital Age: Between Faith, Technology, And Campus Life At IAKN Kupang**

**Adinda Lestari Langkola<sup>1</sup>, Abryani Fallo<sup>2</sup>, Delni Taek<sup>3</sup>, Diance Lopo<sup>4</sup>, Febrianti Nenosaet<sup>5</sup>, Femi Dethan<sup>6</sup>, Vindry Omanda Snae<sup>7</sup>, Adriana Indra Santi Sole<sup>8</sup>**  
Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze how the attitudes and opinions of IAKN Kupang students regarding the development of digital technology have brought significant changes to student life, including aspects of spirituality, academics, and social relations. This article discusses the dynamics of Christian student life in the digital era, focusing on students at IAKN Kupang. The method used is a qualitative approach through literature review and observation of student life patterns on campus, as well as interviews. The study results indicate that digital technology offers great opportunities for the development of knowledge, service, and faith communication, but it also presents challenges such as social media addiction, reduced direct social interaction, and the influence of digital culture that can weaken spiritual values. Therefore, Christian students are required to have wise digital literacy skills, maintain the integrity of their faith, and utilizing technology responsibly to support both academic and spiritual growth. This article emphasizes that the balance between faith, technology, and campus life is the key for Christian students in facing the challenges of the digital era.*

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### **Corresponding Author:**

**Adinda Lestari Langkola**

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang

Email : [tarylangkola0706@gmail.com](mailto:tarylangkola0706@gmail.com)

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way young people obtain information, establish social relationships, and develop their identity. Christian students, who have grown up as a generation familiar with the digital world, face complex faith dynamics. Rather than providing a solid foundation for life, their faith identity often experiences instability and a loss of spiritual depth. This is evident in various symptoms such as a tendency towards moral relativism, a blending of religious teachings, a weakening of relationships with church communities, and a loss of meaning in daily faith life. Amidst the rapid flow of digital information and a culture of instant gratification, Christian Religious Education (PAK) is challenged to remain relevant, contextual, and bring about real change. PAK approaches that overemphasize knowledge and doctrine without addressing the existential dimension tend to fail to foster strong faith in a constantly changing and diverse digital reality. This situation aligns with the assessment of several Christian education practitioners who note that many students experience faith that is not rooted in real life, due to a teaching approach that lacks contextualization and lacks relationship-building.

The crisis of faith identity among Christian students, including those studying theology, is becoming increasingly alarming. In this fast-paced digital era, students face various moral and spiritual threats: cybercrime, sexual violence, and even premarital pregnancy, drug addiction, involvement in gambling and illegal online loans, and the misuse of social media for personal

gain, such as spreading false information, dividing communities, and putting others down. These behaviors not only reflect an ethical crisis but also illustrate the weakness of the foundation of faith identity, which should guide the spiritual and moral lives of Christian students. Ironically, this phenomenon also affects theology students, who are normatively being prepared as future spiritual leaders and faith educators. Many of them show signs of faith disorientation, such as treating theology study as merely an academic routine, experiencing spiritual burnout, and demonstrating a gap between their faith knowledge and actual behavior. In some cases, theology students are even directly involved in spiritually damaging digital practices, such as displaying false identities on social media, using digital platforms for revenge or influence-seeking, and displaying spiritual hypocrisy for the sake of self-image (Febri, n.d.).

Theologically, this situation is deeply concerning, as Christian faith identity should be the foundation of life, rooted in a relationship with Christ, shaping character, and guiding every ethical decision in both the physical and digital worlds. From a biblical perspective, being a disciple of Christ means denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following Christ fully (Luke 9:23). This identity is not merely a verbal confession, but must be manifested in all aspects of life. From this, it appears that the crisis is not merely moral, but rather a failure in spiritual formation that fails to internalize the values of faith into real life. Religious Education (PAK), which should be a forum for the formation of faith identity, has not fully responded to this challenge. Many approaches to Christian Education (PAK) are still cognitive, normative, and non-contextual. In the digital era, Christian Education (PAK) needs to be prophetic, dialogical, and existential, capable of interrupting destructive culture, helping students understand their realities, and building spiritual resilience to live holy and responsible lives in the digital world (Arison et al., 2025).

The theoretical foundation of this research rests on the Christian theological belief that faith identity is formed through a relational encounter with God in Christ, mediated by community and faith practices rooted in the narrative of Scripture. In the context of faith education, James K. A. Smith emphasized that humans are not shaped primarily by what they know, but by what they love and practice, and that love itself is shaped by various liturgies, including the liturgy of digital culture. Therefore, without critical and contextual spiritual formation, Christian students are vulnerable to absorbing values that shape false identities, namely identities shaped by media algorithms, not by the Holy Spirit. Contemporary theological formation needs to respond to digital and social dynamics with an incarnational approach, in which Christ is present amidst the digital reality of His people and guides them in building alternative narratives that counter the culture of hoaxes, violence, and information manipulation.

This study reveals that the crisis of faith identity among Christian theology students is increasingly apparent and worrying in the digital era. Based on open-ended interviews and phenomenological observations, it was revealed that many students are directly or indirectly involved in various problematic activities, such as digital pornography, verbal sexual harassment on social media, drug abuse, online loan traps, and digital conflicts in the form of the spread of hoaxes and hate speech. All of these realities reflect a fragile faith, a loss of spiritual direction, and a fragmented identity as disciples of Christ. Furthermore, observations on campus indicate that social media is used not to deepen faith, but rather as a means of false existence filled with shallow imagery and visual consumption. Students receive more information from TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram than from the Bible or academic theological materials. This indicates a shift in the source of faith formation from sacred texts to shallow, often ethically and theologically irresponsible digital media (Identitas et al., n.d.).

## 2. METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods with a descriptive approach to understand the lives of Christian students in the digital age, particularly the relationship between faith, technology, and campus life at IAKN Kupang. This method was chosen because the research focuses on students' experiences and perspectives on technological developments in everyday life.

Data collection was conducted through interviews and a literature review. Interviews were used to obtain direct data from 14 IAKN Kupang students regarding their experiences, challenges, and the impact of technology on their faith and campus activities. Meanwhile, a literature review was conducted by reviewing relevant books, journals, and scientific sources as a theoretical basis and support for the research.

The data obtained were then analyzed descriptively qualitatively by grouping and interpreting the data based on emerging themes, thus providing an overview of the relationship between faith, technology, and campus life of Christian students at IAKN Kupang.

### 3. DISCUSSION

Faith, the word faith in Hebrew, comes from the word "Emun", which means faithfulness, and the word "Batakh", which means to believe. In Greek, faith comes from the word "Pistis" (noun), which means trust, belief, and faith itself, and Christian Faith and Reason 45 (I. Christianity & Reason, n.d.). In line with this, R. C. Sproul stated that faith is built on mature, coherent, consistent reasons and supported by valid evidence. Therefore, faith and reason are not contradictory, but rather complementary. Augustine said, "I believe that I may understand," while Thomas Aquinas emphasized that reason is a gift from God to understand His truth. Christian faith has three important elements, namely Notitia (knowledge), Assensus (assent), and Fiducia (trust). Thus, faith is not only knowing about God, but also believing and living in obedience to Him (Satria, 2023).

Since the development of internet technology and other communication media, human needs for technology have also increased in various aspects of life, both in education, work, communication, and social life. Technology has now become an important part that makes daily human activities easier. Therefore, the growing need for technology has encouraged the birth of various studies aimed at studying, developing, and finding innovations so that technology can be used more effectively, efficiently, and beneficially for human life (Junaidi, 2015). Campus is not just a place to study so that one can get an academic degree. More than that, besides increasing insight and knowledge, there are still many other benefits that can be obtained through activities outside of lecture hours that can shape character, develop interests and talents, and open up opportunities to form many relationships. Through the activities they participate in, students can make positive contributions, both on and off campus so that they can be a blessing for all (Pratama et al., 2024).

In today's digital age, students are inextricably linked to the use of mobile phones and social media. The internet helps them find information, complete assignments, and communicate with friends. However, excessive social media use can also impact the spiritual lives of Christian students, reducing their time for prayer, Bible reading, and focus during worship.

To find out how social media influences the spiritual life of Christian students, interviews were conducted with 14 students based on 6 questions regarding the use of social media and their relationship with God. The following are the results of the interviews based on the 6 questions:

1. To what extent do cell phones and the internet help or interfere with your time with God?

Answer:

Based on the questions from the results of interviews with 14 students, these 14 students feel that the internet can help them listen to spiritual songs, online sermons, read the Bible, and also read devotionals, but they are also disturbed if notifications come in and disrupt their concentration with God.

2. What makes you most lazy to read the Bible/pray when you are busy with college?

Answer:

Based on the questions from the results of interviews with the 14 students, the factors that made them lazy were tiredness and also getting carried away by the atmosphere of playing on their cellphones.

3. In a week, how many times do you usually view spiritual content on social media or apps?

Answer:

Based on the question from the results of interviews with 14 students, how many times a week do they view spiritual content? 8 of them frequently view spiritual content, 4 others view spiritual content only 3-5 times, 1 student views spiritual content only 2-3 times, and 1 other student only 1-2 times.

4. In your opinion, what kind of content should be avoided to prevent our faith from wavering?  
Answer:

Based on the questions from the results of interviews with 14 students, the content that needs to be avoided is:

- 1) Deviant religious content (5 students)
- 2) Pornographic Content (7 Students)
- 3) Gossip Content (2 Students)

5. Have your friends or your spiritual community on campus ever reminded you about healthy social media use? How do you do that?

Answer:

Based on the questions from the results of the interviews with 14 students, namely

- 1) Sharing during worship (5 students)
- 2) Live chat (7 students)
- 3) Via WhatsApp (2 students)

6. How do you not get addicted to social media but still update your assignments?"

Answer:

Based on the questions from the results of interviews with 14 students, namely by managing time well when using social media.

Interviews with 14 Christian students revealed that digital technology plays a dual role in spiritual life. On the one hand, all respondents acknowledged that mobile phones and the internet significantly contribute to the growth of their faith, allowing them to listen to spiritual songs, access online sermons, read digital Bibles, and follow daily devotions at any time (Warasi, 2026). However, on the other hand, all students also experienced the same distraction: constant incoming notifications were the main cause of loss of concentration when praying or reading the Bible. This confirms that technology is neutral, but algorithms and digital distractions can shift focus from the "personal altar" to a mere scrolling routine that drains spiritual energy.

The main factors that make students reluctant to pray and read the Bible during busy lectures are physical and mental exhaustion and the habit of being carried away by playing with their phones. After a day of using their brains for assignments and laptops, students feel they no longer have the energy for spiritual discipline. Furthermore, the habit of scrolling unconsciously wastes time and self-control, so prayer intentions are delayed or ultimately abandoned. This condition reflects the concept of ego depletion, where self-control declines after continuous use (Ndeang et al., 2026).

Eight of the 14 respondents admitted to viewing spiritual content almost daily, four others 3-5 times a week, while the remaining two only 1-3 times a week. This means that 85% of respondents have a medium to high intensity of accessing spiritual content. The most popular formats are short content such as 60-second sermon reels, illustrated verses, and podcasts (Dwi & Utomo, 2025). This pattern indicates a shift in spiritual consumption to micro-content that suits students' busy lifestyles and short attention spans due to digital exposure. However, they are aware that spiritual content must still be filtered because not all content labeled "Christian" on social media builds faith (P. Kristen et al., 2025).

Regarding the types of content to avoid, the three most frequently mentioned categories were pornography, cited by seven students for its detrimental effects on the mind and holiness; content that deviates from religious teachings, cited by five students for its potential to mislead doctrine; and gossip, cited by two students for its potential to fuel envy and social comparison. These three types of content are considered dangerous because they gradually shift the focus from God to unedifying worldly matters (Konten et al., 2024).

The role of campus spiritual communities has proven to be significant in maintaining students' digital well-being. Data shows that all 14 respondents have been reminded about wise social media use, meaning that no student is walking alone in this struggle. Of the three media used, the most effective method, according to seven students, is through personal, direct chats. One-on-one reprimands from cell group friends or spiritual elders are considered more effective because they are relational, non-judgmental, and accompanied by concrete examples. "If I start to feel down or flaky on my story, my cell group friends immediately DM me. They don't judge me, but ask, 'Are you tired?' That makes me aware," said one respondent. The second method mentioned by five students is through sharing during worship or fellowship. Discussions of digital discipleship, social media fasting, and theology of technology in the community pulpit make these issues no longer taboo but part of holistic discipleship. Meanwhile, two students mentioned reminders via WhatsApp groups are also helpful, especially when someone shares spiritual articles, screen time challenges, or simply "Have you done your Bible study yet?" stickers. Funny but poignant. These findings confirm that social accountability and loving rebuke from fellow believers are far more impactful than unilateral prohibitions or one-way moral lectures. Prohibitions without relationship only produce momentary guilt, while correction born of friendship produces lasting repentance. (No Title, 2023). This aligns with the principle of Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another," and is supported by Cloud & Townsend's (2001) social support theory, which states that the most lasting behavioral change occurs in the context of a safe, honest, and accountable community. The campus spiritual community functions as a collective "brake system": when one member begins to falter due to the algorithm, others pull them back to Christ. Thus, students' digital health is not just a matter of personal discipline, but also the result of an active spiritual ecosystem that fosters mutual care.

Ultimately, the strategies used by 14 students to avoid social media addiction while still staying updated on assignments boil down to one key factor: disciplined time management. They created rules such as setting aside a specific time for God before opening their phones, using a timer, turning off notifications during quiet time, and applying the principle of "God first, then assignments, then scrolling" (Antara et al., 2022). Therefore, the main conclusion of this discussion is that the problem lies not with the phone itself, but with who holds control over it. Technology is a neutral tool; it can be a platform for sharing the Gospel or an idol that displaces worship. The data from these 14 students demonstrates that when personal discipline is enforced through a clear time structure and coupled with the support of a community that courageously rebukes and reminds in love, technology can be transformed from a stumbling block into an effective tool for discipleship in the digital age. The battle for Christian students today is no longer against technology, but against the autopilot habit of using it. Victory begins when they decide to submit to the authority of Christ before submitting to the authority of algorithms.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the lives of Christian students at IAKN Kupang in the digital era are in tension between opportunities and challenges. Digital technology has proven to have a dual role: on the one hand, it is an effective means for faith growth through access to spiritual songs, online sermons, digital Bibles, and devotionals, but on the other hand, it is a major source of distraction that disrupts the solemnity of quiet time due to notifications and the tendency to scroll unconsciously. The results of interviews with 14 students indicate that physical and mental fatigue and the habit of playing with mobile phones are the dominant factors causing reluctance to pray and read the Bible. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents are still exposed to spiritual content regularly with medium to high intensity, dominated by micro-content formats such as sermon reels and podcasts that fit the rhythm of student life. Awareness to filter content is also high, with pornography, deviant teachings, and gossip being the three types of content most avoided because

they have the potential to weaken faith. Another important finding is the very significant role of campus spiritual communities as a collective "brake system."

All respondents reported being reminded about wise social media use, with direct personal conversations considered more effective than unilateral bans. This confirms that social accountability and loving reprimands have a greater impact on shaping digital discipline than normative approaches. The primary strategy students use to avoid social media addiction while remaining academically productive is disciplined time management. Concrete rules, such as establishing "digital holy hours," turning off notifications during quiet time, using a timer, and the principle of "God first, then assignments, then scrolling," are concrete practices they implement. Thus, the primary problem lies not with technology itself, but with who holds control. Technology is neutral: it can be a platform for discipleship or an idol that displaces worship. A balance between faith, technology, and campus life can only be achieved when personal discipline is upheld through a clear time structure and supported by an active community ecosystem that cares for each other. For IAKN Kupang Christian students, victory in the digital age begins when Christ's authority is placed above the authority of algorithms.

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