

The Role of Social Media in Disseminating Information About The Church in GMIM Baitani Matani

Peran Media Sosial dalam Penyebaran Informasi Gereja di GMIM Baitani Matani

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Abstract

This paper discusses how social media works as a communicative and spiritual space in Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa (GMIM), a synodal Protestant church in Minahasa. This study examines the application of social media in sharing church information, congregational interactions, and spiritual life. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used, which entailed a survey of 34 congregants, in-depth interviews, and digital ethnography of the official accounts of GMIM. Quantitative data convey the trends of platform usage, time clocked, role, perceived spiritual influence, and involvement in online religious materials, whereas qualitative data demonstrate how leaders and members perceive the chances and threats of digital communication. The results show that social media is integrated into the life of congregations and represents a digital continuation of communal relationships, assisting in the provision of information, worship resources, and support. Meanwhile, the respondents referred to ambivalence, acknowledging social media as a source of grace and a distracter, conflict, and superficial religiosity simultaneously. The research also reveals that the digital communication used by GMIM is, to a great extent, one-sided, although the congregants want to interact more dialogically through two-way communication. The article proposes that the church should have cohesive policies on digital communication, invest in digital literacies, and unite online practices with embodied worship and diaconal action so that social media may be used as a place of proclamation, koinonia, and Christian service and not as a convenient channel to make announcements.

BACKGROUND

The evolution of digital technology over the past 20 years has led to drastic alterations in the manner in which individuals associate with and communicate with one another. One of the most powerful innovations has become social media, which has changed the trends of communication owing to its one-way character, turning it to be more open, faster, and participatory (Haro et al., 2024). In a bigger picture, social media has enhanced the logic of the network society, where information and social relations are intertwined in a fluid and dynamic global communication system (Aziz, 2025). The availability of social media has altered the way people communicate and the

manner in which social institutions, such as religious institutions, communicate with their communities (Purba et al., 2025).

Social media is becoming increasingly significant in religious contexts as a platform for sharing religious messages and creating communities of faith over the Internet. In the capacity to be a social and spiritual body, the church must also evolve to stay relevant in the lives of believers who have now lived in a digital culture (Sinaga, 2024). On social media, the church can reach more people in a congregation, establish social relationships across generations, and provide more open and participatory forms of ministry (Phillips, 2019).

One of the religious institutions in Indonesia that is currently in the process of adapting itself is the Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa (GMIM). With a service structure spread over multiple regions and being a large organization, GMIM is facing the issue of managing information flows effectively and transparently in the context of the ever-growing digital requirements of its congregation (Simaremare, 2024). Thus, the adoption of social media is a strategic move towards enhancing communication, increasing the coverage of the ministry, and creating spiritual connectedness in the technological age.

Other studies conducted in the past have revealed that social media has played a significant role in creating a new horizon of religious communication. As Utomo (2025) notes, digital spaces allow the building of faith communities that are interrelated across borders of time and space. This observation is commensurable with ROMADHONI (2025), who states that worship and ministry practices are turned into online media, which establishes new types of rituals; however, traditional values of religion are maintained. Kahfi (2025) also proposes the notion of networked religion - the religious activities implemented in the digital social networks, where the religious power becomes more discourse and open to the involvement of believers.

Studies conducted by Lovheim and Hia (2023) also prove that social media pushes the mediatization of religion, that is, the adoption of religious expression to the logic of digital media. Similar patterns have been found in several studies in the Indonesian context. According to Silambi (2024), social media has improved congregational attendance in church operations by enabling quicker and better accessibility to information. According to Nugroho and Sirait (2025), social media strengthens the formation of identity of faith communities in online spaces and encourages youth participation in ministries. Meanwhile, Maulina et al. (2025) pointed to the use of social media as a powerful tool for moral education and spreading spiritual messages.

However, the majority of these studies continue to apply to churches in the city and have yet to examine the socio-cultural background of local churches such as GMIM, based on Minahasan communitarian principles (Mandey & Pinatik, 2022). Hill et al. (2023) contribute that most of the religious organizations have structural impediments, including low digital literacy and technological innovation resistance. Kalalo et al. (2023) report in the case of GMIM that the application of social media is almost exclusive to publication activities and general information, without a long-term and systematic digital communication strategy.

However, Nuresa (2025) explains that social media is not only a source of information distribution but also a space for co-construction, through which churches and congregations can create narratives of faith and digital solidarity together. Nuresa (2025) then adds that social media forms new social spaces of spiritual practice that necessitate that the church is not just symbolically present but also provides an active presence in the digital world when it comes to building relationships of trust. As such, it becomes important to know how GMIM handles its digital communication to study how far these changes alter the relations between the church as an institution and the members of the local Minahasan society.

According to the literature review above, a gap in knowledge exists in the literature on the role of social media in the lives of Protestant churches in Indonesia, especially GMIM. To begin with, the majority of past studies dwell on the usage of social media within urban churches or international denominations, whereas in the local context where communitarian cultures like Minahasa prevail, little research has been done. Second, minimal research has been conducted on explicit studies

regarding the application of digital communication strategies in complex and congregation-based synodical structures. Third, the cultural, theological, and digital literacy aspects that determine the success of social media communication in local churches are seldom empirically studied. This gap renders the current research topical, innovative, and contributive to the creation of a digital church communication theory in Indonesia.

The role of social media in the life of churches has been investigated in numerous studies in the country. Even though the number of such studies is still insufficient, one such instance is Siahaan (2022), who explores Facebook as an information distribution channel and the development of congregational faith. Simaremare (2024) also undertakes research that reveals that churches have changed to utilizing Instagram and YouTube to establish and sustain church image among the younger generations. Nevertheless, these studies do not yet offer a deep examination of communication patterns, congregational mobilization, and local culture as the issues that determine the spread of information about the religion.

The measures of cultural asymmetry considered in this study have also been found in studies conducted in other related fields. These articles show that the social media that nonprofit organizations, such as religious institutions, use has changed unidirectional information publishing to dialogues. According to Heryawan et al. (2025), social media can be a means of communication between non-profit organizations and the community and a means of empowerment. This means that in the church setting, information can no longer flow in just one direction but rather is proclaimed and communicated in a way that is understandable and engaging for the congregation, even in decision-making and social ministry. However, the model of communication in the case of the synodical GMIM, with its own planning and governance, has not been explored in depth in the literature.

In short, this study shows that the role of social media in Indonesian Protestant churches, particularly GMIM, is a research gap. First, there are no studies related to local communitarian settings such as Minahasa, as most studies concentrate on urban churches or international denominations. Second, the literature is deficient in research that specifically examines the implementation of digital communication strategies in complex congregation-based synodical forms. Third, the cultural, theological, and digital literacy aspects have seldom been studied in the empirical context of the effectiveness of social media communication in local churches. This gap highlights the topicality and innovation of the current research and its possible role in the formation of a digital ecclesial communication theory in Indonesia.

This study thoroughly examines the purpose of social media in passing religious information in GMIM. In particular, it aims to achieve three major objectives. To establish the types and nature of the informational content shared on GMIM's social media; In order to examine digital communication efforts by congregations, church workers and synod leadership in disseminating information; and to measure how the use of social media influences the involvement of the congregation, the effectiveness of internal communication, and the image of the church in the online environment.

To this end, this research will hopefully shed more light on the intricacy of the use of social media in communication within the church contextually, theologically, and the extent to which it has adapted to the overall changes in society.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications for the field. Theoretically, this study adds value to the scholarly discourse on digital religious communication, especially in terms of local religious institutions in Indonesia. The empirical results will also help in developing further insight into the role of social media as a form of communication, as well as a social and spiritual space that produces novel social constructions of the church and congregation relationship.

Practically, the study will provide guidance to the GMIM and other churches on ways of establishing Christian practices of digital communication that are strategic, ethical, and in line with the Christian values of ministry. In addition, the discovered results can be used as the beginning of more organized strategies in digital communication within the church, such as synodical information management, activity promotion, and interaction with age groups and territories.

The originality of this work lies in the audacious combination of digital communication, local culture, and contextual theology. It goes beyond the descriptive mapping of the process of information dissemination in GMIM to explore the strategic and social aspects of this process. The analysis considers the GMIM synod, service structure, hierarchical relationships, and Minahasan culture. The methodology of the study is a mixed-method study that involves the integration of statistical data concerning the use of social media and qualitative information. The integration aids in developing a body of knowledge on communication by filling gaps in the literature on integrated digital communication in local churches.

METHOD

The research design applied in the study is a mixed-methods design with an explanatory sequential design to provide a holistic view of the role of social media in church information spread in GMIM. This method was selected because it enables the integration of both quantitative data, which will provide general trends of using social media, and qualitative data, which will further enrich the knowledge of meanings and digital communication practices in the church (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023). The mixed-method research method is especially suitable for research on digital religious communication because it may describe the system of interactions between the technological, social, and spiritual levels (Fuadi et al., 2025).

The initial stage (quantitative) will be conducted by surveying 34 members of the congregation, who will be chosen by proportional random sampling. The survey will focus on the tendencies of social media usage, content interests, and perception of church members regarding the effectiveness of communication inside the church. The variables that measure the intensity of social media use, engagement with the congregation, and trust in the information about church-related matters were measured with the help of a 5-point Likert scale (1–5).

The second step (qualitative) implies detailed interviews with five major informants, who will be chosen according to the principles of purposive sampling depending on their involvement in the ministry's work (Alfarizi, 2024). Along with the survey and interviews, digital observation of the official Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts of GMIM will be utilized over the course of six months (digital ethnography). The types of content, frequency of postings, and interactions that a user has with the congregation, as well as the response of the congregation to the spiritual posts, are observed. The digital ethnographic method is used to comprehend religious practices in virtual space, which is an amalgamation of digital culture and life of faith (Evolvi, 2022).

Moreover, synodical communication guidelines, digital bulletins, and GMIM activity reports were analyzed to enhance the data and allow triangulation of the sources (Nugraha, 2023). The research tools included a questionnaire, semi-structured interview guide, and digital observation checklist. Three experts in the field of church digital communication checked the content validity, and the reliability of the survey instrument was tested with the help of Cronbach's alpha, and a minimum value of 0.7 was considered a sign of internal consistency (Sari et al., 2025).

Descriptive and inferential statistics are methods of analyzing quantitative data (Collaboration et al., 2022). It will involve frequencies, Pearson's correlation, and simple regression to determine the effect of digital communication strategies on congregational engagement. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data to identify narrative patterns of digital communication practices, online spirituality, and Minahasan cultural values in GMIM ministries (Braun et al., 2022).

Quantitative and qualitative results are integrated to provide a clear understanding of the social context in the field through triangulation and narrative integration so that numerical results can be described (Miska Irani Br Tarigan, 2025). By doing so, this research not only presents the statistical picture of the use of social media, but also describes the way in which the faith values, culture, and community relations of GMIM have been designed and supported with the help of digital environments (Purba et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The survey involved 34 respondents from GMIM congregations, representing diverse age groups, genders, and congregational statuses. Overall, the profile of respondents indicates that they are active church members who are familiar with both traditional church life and the use of social media in their daily routines. This composition is consistent with the aim of the study, which is to understand how ordinary congregants—not only leaders or digital operators—experience and perceive the role of social media in disseminating church information. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in Table 1, with age categories, gender, and congregational status adjusted according to the actual distributions obtained from Google Forms.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	17–25 years		
	26–35 years		
	36–45 years		
	46 years and above		
Gender	Male		
	Female		
Congregational status	Baptized member		
	Confessing/communicant member		
	Elder/deacon or lay leader		
	Pastor/other church worker		

With regard to patterns of social media use, the survey shows that nearly all respondents used at least one major platform, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, in their everyday lives. Social media is used for personal and family communication, accessing general information and news, entertainment, and engaging with religious content. The daily duration of social media use tended to fall in the medium to high range, with some respondents accessing social media several times a day in short sessions and others spending relatively long, continuous periods online. This indicates that social media has become an integral environment in the rhythm of congregational life rather than a marginal tool. The distribution of platform preferences, daily usage duration, and main purposes of use is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Patterns of Social Media Use

Variable	Category	n	%
Most used platforms*	WhatsApp		
	Facebook		
	Instagram		
	YouTube		
Daily usage duration	Less than 1 hour		
	1–3 hours		
	More than 3 hours		
Main purposes of use*	Personal/family communication		
	News and general information		
	Entertainment/leisure		
	Spiritual and church-related content		

When respondents were asked to assess the contribution of social media to their spiritual growth and faith life, they expressed clear ambivalence. On the one hand, a considerable portion of respondents stated that social media helped them grow spiritually, especially through easier access to sermons, devotions, worship songs, and other edifying content. On the other hand, respondents also acknowledged spiritual risks such as distraction, excessive use of time, exposure to content that is not constructive, and the possibility of conflict or misunderstanding in digital spaces. When these

evaluations are summarized in terms of whether social media brings “more blessing” or “more challenge” to the spiritual life of the congregation, the distribution of responses appears relatively balanced, although there remains a visible tendency among some respondents to emphasize its positive potential. A summary of these perceptions of spiritual impact is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Perceptions of the Spiritual Impact of Social Media

Item	Response category	n	%
“Social media helps my spiritual growth”	Strongly agree		
	Agree		
	Neutral		
	Disagree		
	Strongly disagree		
Overall impact on congregational spiritual life	More blessing than challenge		
	Balanced blessing and challenge		
	More challenge than blessing		

Open-ended responses on the positive and negative impacts of social media provide a richer picture of congregants’ experiences. On the positive side, respondents mentioned the ease of accessing church information, such as worship schedules and program announcements, as a key benefit of the app. Social media also enables them to follow services, sermons, and devotions when they cannot be physically present, and helps maintain relational connectedness with fellow congregants and church leaders during the pandemic. Many respondents also reported that Bible verses, spiritual quotations, and testimonies shared via social media often become sources of encouragement amidst daily busyness and pressure. On the negative side, respondents highlighted the dangers of distraction and time-wasting, exposure to provocative, confusing, or misleading content, the potential for miscommunication or conflict in digital spaces, and a tendency toward shallow, consumerist religiosity that reduces faith to the consumption of religious content. The thematic categories of these positive and negative impacts are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Thematic Summary of Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media

Dimension	Theme	Illustrative description (short)
Positive impact	Easier access to church information	Faster updates on worship schedules and church programs
	Access to sermons and devotions	Following sermons/devotions when unable to attend worship
	Strengthening relational connectedness	Staying in touch with fellow congregants and leaders
	Everyday spiritual encouragement	Bible verses and testimonies shared on social media
Negative impact	Distraction and time-wasting	Reduced focus on prayer and Bible reading
	Exposure to confusing or divisive content	Conflicting teachings and religious debates
	Online conflict and misunderstanding	Misread messages leading to tension among members
	Superficial or consumerist spirituality	Limiting faith to “liking” or “sharing” religious posts

The study also examined how frequently respondents followed spiritual content online, such as devotions, sermons, and worship music. The survey results show that most respondents access such content at least occasionally, with a subset doing so regularly (for example, daily or several times a week), while others access it only occasionally, depending on their needs and circumstances. Almost no respondents reported never accessing spiritual content online. This indicates that social

media has become an important channel for faith formation, although the depth and consistency of engagement vary between individuals. The distribution of the frequency of engagement is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency of Engagement with Online Spiritual Content

Item	Category	n	%
Frequency of following devotions/sermons/worship content	Daily		
	Several times a week		
	Several times a month		
	Rarely		
	Never		

In addition to the quantitative data, in-depth interviews with several key informants and digital ethnographic observations of GMIM's official Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts enriched the understanding of the church's digital communication practices. The interviews revealed that church leaders recognized social media as a strategic extension of pastoral communication, yet they faced limitations related to time, technical skills, and the absence of clear institutional guidelines. They noted that the use of social media has largely been one-directional, consisting mainly of announcements and documentation of church events. Digital ethnographic observations confirm this pattern: GMIM's official accounts present a variety of content, including worship services, sermons, synodal information, and activity publications, but the interaction patterns remain dominated by top-down communication, with relatively limited dialogical engagement from the congregants. These qualitative findings form an important basis for interpreting the survey results and formulating both strategic and theological implications.

Discussion

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the broader context of the social transformations brought about by digital technologies and the emergence of network society. Social media no longer merely functions as an additional channel but as a lived space in which information, social relations, and religious expression are intertwined within fluid and dynamic networks. The first important point emerging from the results is the profile of GMIM congregants who are deeply embedded in the networked environment. The demographic data, combined with the patterns of usage, show that respondents are both active church members and regular social media users. Their everyday lives are shaped by offline worship and community practices and continuous exposure to digital communication. This confirms the theoretical perspectives on networked religion, which argue that communities of faith are no longer confined to physical localities but exist as hybrid communities whose identity and practices are partially configured online. For GMIM, such a profile implies that its communicative and pastoral presence cannot remain limited to the pulpit, printed bulletins, and face-to-face meetings; the church is called to recognize and engage the digital sphere as an integral dimension of its ministry.

The second key point relates to the general patterns of social media use and their encounter with Minahasan communal ecclesiology. The survey data indicate a high penetration of major platforms and significant daily usage, while qualitative insights show that these platforms are used to maintain relationships, share information, and access spiritual content. In the Minahasan context, characterized by strong communal ties, solidarity, and mutual care, social media often functions as a digital extension of existing community practices. It enables congregants to remain connected, coordinate church activities, and express support and concern for one another beyond physical meetings. Simultaneously, this extension introduces tension. The more community life migrates to digital platforms, the greater the risk that the embodied practices of fellowship may be weakened or displaced by quick and fragmented online interactions. Moreover, the absence of nonverbal cues and the speed of digital communication can exacerbate misunderstandings and accelerate conflict among members. Thus, the observed patterns of use suggest that GMIM is in a transitional moment

in which its traditional communal ecclesiology is being reshaped by the digital media. The challenge is to translate Minahasan values of solidarity, mutual care, and respect into responsible and life-giving digital practices, rather than allowing these values to be eroded.

Third, the respondents' perceptions of the spiritual impact of social media were marked by strong ambivalence. Quantitative responses reveal that a substantial number of congregants experience social media as helpful for their spiritual growth, particularly through easier access to sermons, devotions, and other edifying content. Yet, at the same time, many recognize that the same platforms can distract from prayer and Bible reading, consume excessive time, and expose them to confusing or divisive religious messages. This ambivalence resonates with discussions of the mediatization of religion, in which religious life must continually negotiate between amplifying religious messages and the risk of their distortion or trivialization. For GMIM, these perceptions highlight the need for intentional digital discipleship. Social media must not be treated as a neutral instrument; its algorithms, attention economy, and interaction patterns shape how congregants encounter and interpret the religious content. Accordingly, the church must equip its members with the capacity to discern, evaluate, and engage with digital media in ways that are consistent with the call to follow Christ. Teaching on time management, content curation, and theological reflection on digital practices should therefore be considered part of the broader formation of the Christian character.

Fourth, closely linked to the thematic analysis of positive and negative impacts, concerns the nature of GMIM's current digital communication model and the potential shift toward co-constructed meaning. The data show that social media is perceived as bringing clear benefits—especially in terms of access to church information, worship resources, and everyday spiritual encouragement—while also generating risks such as distraction, conflict, and superficial religiousness. These dual experiences are rooted in the fact that GMIM's digital communication has been dominated by a one-way dissemination model. Official accounts primarily function as digital notice boards, with limited deliberate efforts to foster dialogic interaction, feedback, or collaborative sharing of testimonies. However, open-ended survey responses and interviews revealed that congregants desired more than just announcements. They express a need for spaces where they can ask questions, share life struggles, and relate biblical teachings to concrete issues such as family, work, mental health, and youth challenges. This desire aligns with the idea of social media as a site for the co-construction of meaning, where the church and congregation jointly shape narratives of faith and solidarity. For GMIM, moving toward such a model would involve designing content and interaction patterns that encourage participation, structured conversation, and mutual learning while maintaining theological coherence and pastoral responsibility. In practical terms, this might include interactive devotional series, moderated discussion threads, testimonial campaigns, and question-and-answer sessions with pastors and lay leaders.

The fifth and final point arises from the frequencies of engagement with online spiritual content and qualitative insights regarding leadership, guidelines, and the integration of online and offline church life. The results show that most respondents access spiritual content at least occasionally, and many do so regularly, confirming that social media is a significant channel for faith formation. At the same time, leaders acknowledge limitations in their time, technical competence, and lack of clear synodal frameworks for digital ministry. This situation has several strategic implications. The GMIM needs a coherent digital communication policy that articulates the theological rationale for its online presence, sets ethical standards for content and interaction, and clarifies the division of roles across synod, district, and congregation levels. Such a policy would help move digital communication from ad hoc, personality-driven initiatives toward a more intentional and sustainable ministry. Capacity building in digital literacy—for both leaders and congregants—is also essential so that enthusiasm for social media is matched by the skills needed to create, moderate, and critically assess content. Finally, the integration of online and offline practices is crucial; digital activities should reinforce, rather than replace, embodied worship and fellowship. Online devotions can prepare congregants for Sunday worship, digital testimonies can be linked to diaconal initiatives, and social

media campaigns can channel attention toward concrete acts of service in the local community. In this way, the space of social media becomes not merely a convenient distribution channel but a context in which GMIM's theology, culture, and communal life are woven together into a coherent witness.

Taken together, these five strands of the discussion—concerning the profile of congregants in a networked society, patterns of social media use in relation to Minahasan communal life, ambivalent perceptions of spiritual impact, the tension between one-way information and co-constructed meaning, and the strategic integration of digital and offline ministry—show that social media has become a structural component of GMIM's communicative and spiritual ecosystem. The task facing the church is neither to reject nor to romanticize digital media, but to critically and creatively integrate it with local culture and contextual theology so that social media becomes a space where the Gospel is proclaimed, fellowship is deepened, and solidarity is enacted.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the use of social media as a communicative and spiritual field in GMIM, a synodal church with a Minahasan communal culture background. In an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, in which survey data of 34 congregants are combined with in-depth interviews and digital ethnography of official accounts, the study demonstrates that social media has become structurally part of congregational life and should not be viewed as a peripheral instrument. To begin with, the results show that GMIM churchgoers are active social media users whose everyday lives are influenced by both offline church activities and digitally mediated interactions. Second, social media functions as a digital continuation of Minahasan community life that strengthens relationships, allows the transmission of information and nurturing, and introduces new vulnerabilities connected to the conflict and disappearance of embodied fellowship.

Third, the attitudes of respondents towards spiritual influence are characterized by a high level of ambivalence: social media are perceived both as a source of grace and a distraction, confusion, and surface religiosity, creating the necessity of purposeful digital discipleship. Fourth, the research demonstrates that even the current digital communication of GMIM is still based on one-way dissemination, despite the congregants' willingness to receive more dialogical, contextual, and participatory engagement tactics. Fifth, the rates of use of online spiritual resources, along with the reflections of leaders, indicate the strategic urgency of elaborating cohesive policies for digital communications, investing in digital literacy, and combining online activities with embodied worship and diaconal practice. Hypothetically, this research adds to the recent debates regarding networked religion and digital ecclesiology in Indonesia by basing them on the actual experience of a local Protestant church. Practically, it also provides guidance on how GMIM and other churches of this type could go beyond their online presence to the development of digital spaces as places of proclamation, koinonia, and service. Meanwhile, the quite compact, context-specific sample should be generalized cautiously and tested further in more heterogeneous contexts. Further longitudinal research on shifting digital strategies, comparative studies across denominations and geographies, and evaluative studies of particular digital interventions to enhance spiritual formation in networked contexts could expand this work.

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