

LOCAL RITUALS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This study discusses the transformation of local rituals in Indonesia in the face of the digital age, particularly at the intersection between religious traditions and the penetration of global technology. Through literature review and analysis of various sources, this study identifies patterns of adaptation in local rituals, ranging from virtual documentation and participation, the use of digital applications, to the emergence of new figures such as spiritual influencers. The findings reveal that digitalisation opens opportunities for the preservation and revitalisation of traditions, but also poses challenges such as the potential commodification of traditions, shifts in religious authority, and the risk of losing sacred meaning. Successful adaptation depends heavily on the community's ability to balance the use of technology with the protection of core traditional values. This study emphasises that technology can be a tool for cultural empowerment and preservation, provided it is used wisely and based on ethics that respect the essence of religious rituals.

Keywords: Local Rituals, Digital Age, Intersection, Religious Traditions, Global Technology.

Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought changes to various aspects of human life, including religious practices and local rituals (Aslan & Ningtyas, 2025). Religious practices and local rituals are a series of actions or ceremonies carried out by communities from generation to generation based on certain rules, either in a religious or traditional context, with the aim of establishing a relationship with transcendent powers, asking for safety, or express cultural and spiritual values that are considered sacred in communal life (Madri et al., 2021; Aslan & Putra, 2020).

In today's digital age, religious traditions that have been practised for generations are beginning to undergo transformations in form, media, and delivery methods. This phenomenon opens up new spaces for interaction between sacred local

rituals and dynamic and rapidly evolving global technologies, creating complex dynamics between tradition preservation and modern adaptation (Hsu, 2024). Digital technology enables rituals that were previously geographically and community-bound to be accessed globally through live streams, social media content, or religious apps. This transformation not only expands the scope of participation but also alters how younger generations interact with traditions, as spiritual experiences shift from physical presence to virtual participation (Hutchings, 2020).

However, this adaptation creates tension between the authenticity of rituals and the logic of the digital market. The commodification of rituals as tourist attractions or entertainment content risks diminishing their sacred meaning, as seen in the commercialisation of the Lunar New Year celebrations by multinational companies or the transformation of the Mapag Sri ritual in West Java into TikTok content (Possamai, 2022). On the other hand, some communities, such as the Tengger tribe, strategically blend technology with traditional education, using digital media to teach ritual values to younger generations while maintaining the authority of traditional leaders. This hybridity demonstrates that technology can serve as a preservation tool if managed within an ethical framework that respects the core values of rituals (Wang, 2021).

Religious rituals and local traditions have long been one of the key pillars in preserving cultural identity. These rituals not only serve as forms of spiritual devotion but also as vehicles for preserving cultural and social values. However, the emergence of digital technology raises questions about how these rituals adapt and survive amid the currents of globalisation and digitalisation (Aslan, 2019).

One interesting aspect to examine is how digital technology, such as social media, mobile applications, and video streaming platforms, influences the implementation of local rituals. For example, rituals that were previously only performed in person can now be watched or even participated in virtually. This has led to changes in the meaning and experience of the rituals themselves, as well as influencing how people interpret their religious traditions (Campbell, 2022).

The digitalisation of rituals also opens new opportunities for the dissemination and promotion of local culture on a global scale. Through technology, rituals that were previously limited to specific communities can now be known by a wider audience across the globe. However, this process also carries the risk of cultural homogenisation and the potential loss of the original meaning of rituals due to adaptations that overly follow market logic and technology (Helland, 2021).

In this context, a dilemma arises between preserving the sacred values of rituals and the need to adapt to technological developments. Some indigenous and religious communities strive to maintain the authenticity of their rituals by limiting the use of technology, while others embrace technology as a means of revitalising traditions to remain relevant in the modern era (Kim, 2022).

This study aims to analyse the intersection between local rituals and global technology, particularly how religious traditions adapt in the digital age. Through a literature review, this research will examine various literature related to the digitalisation of rituals, global-local dynamics in a religious context, and the ethical challenges that arise from this process.

Research Method

The appropriate research method for examining the intersection between local rituals and global technology in the digital age is a qualitative method with a literature study (library research) and virtual ethnography approach. Literature review is conducted by collecting, reviewing, and analysing various written sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, official documents, and digital archives relevant to the theme of local ritual transformation due to digitalisation (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Additionally, virtual ethnography is used to observe and understand religious practices and communication patterns within digital spaces, such as through observing activities on social media, online forums, or video streaming platforms that feature religious rituals. Research instruments include content analysis, virtual observation, and digital documentation, while data analysis techniques involve data reduction, classification based on themes, data presentation, and systematic conclusion drawing. This approach enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics, opportunities, and challenges that emerge in the digitalisation of local rituals (Snyder, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Patterns of Local Ritual Adaptation in the Digital Ecosystem

The pattern of adaptation of local rituals in the digital ecosystem shows interesting and complex transformations. One of the most prominent forms of adaptation is the documentation and dissemination of rituals through various digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Ceremonies that were previously only witnessed in person at the location can now be captured in video or photo form and shared with a wider audience. This not only serves as a preservation effort but also as a means of promoting local culture to a global audience (Lim, 2022).

In addition to documentation, participation in rituals has also undergone changes. With the advent of video conferencing and live streaming technology, community members who are outside the region or even abroad can still follow the rituals virtually. This transformation allows for the maintenance of emotional and spiritual involvement, even without physical presence. The concept of sacredness is also beginning to shift from limited space and time to a more flexible virtual space (Tan, 2023).

The development of specialised digital applications has also become a popular adaptation pattern. Various applications now offer features such as ritual timing

reminders, important date reminders, and guidelines for performing ceremonies. These innovations make it easier for people, especially young urban dwellers, to stay connected to their ancestral traditions without always having to physically return to their hometowns (Judijanto & Aslan, 2024).

The younger generation is also taking an active role in this adaptation process by creating creative content that combines traditional and popular cultural elements. For example, they make short videos featuring ritual dances set to modern music or viral challenges on social media. These efforts not only introduce rituals to a wider audience but also foster pride and a sense of belonging towards cultural heritage (Singh, 2021).

Virtual reality technology is beginning to be used to create immersive ritual experiences. Through VR devices, people can virtually participate in ritual processes with the sensation of being present at the location. This innovation opens new opportunities for the preservation and transmission of spiritual values, especially for the younger generation who are familiar with digital technology (Cheong, 2021).

On the other hand, digitalisation has also brought about the phenomenon of spiritual commodification. Rituals that were once sacred and exclusive are now accessible as paid services or digital products, such as online spiritual consultations, the sale of digital amulets, and live-streamed mantra recitations. This phenomenon has sparked debates about the ethical boundaries of using technology for economic gain without compromising the core values of tradition (Campbell, 2022).

Not all communities embrace technology openly. Some choose to engage in selective resistance by limiting the use of technology in ritual practices. Some only use digital media for promoting crafts or cultural products but maintain the core of the ritual to prevent it from being widely exposed. This strategy demonstrates an awareness of the importance of preserving the sacredness and authenticity of traditions amid the tide of digitalisation (Aslan, Sihaloho, et al., 2020).

The transmission of ritual values has also adapted by leveraging modern communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Telegram, or Discord. Traditional elders and religious leaders use these platforms to share knowledge, answer questions, and guide the younger generation in understanding the philosophy behind each ritual. This approach is effective in maintaining the continuity of traditions amid physical meeting constraints (Tan, 2023).

The emergence of new figures such as spiritual influencers on social media has also influenced the adaptation of local rituals. They often offer new interpretations or simpler versions of traditional rituals, sparking discussions and even debates among the community. This shift in authority marks a change in the social structure and distribution of religious knowledge in the digital age (Lim, 2022).

Overall, the patterns of adaptation of local rituals in the digital ecosystem demonstrate a dialectic between preservation and innovation. The success of adaptation depends heavily on the community's ability to balance the use of technology

with the protection of sacred values. Thus, digitalisation can be an effective tool for strengthening the sustainability of traditions, provided that it continues to prioritise respect for the meaning and essence of the rituals themselves.

The Impact of Technology on Power Relations in Religious Practice

Technology has brought fundamental changes to the power relations of religious practices, particularly through the shift from traditional authority to more open and decentralised models. Previously, religious authority was highly centralised in religious figures, community leaders, or official institutions that possessed social and spiritual legitimacy. However, the advent of the internet and digital media has enabled anyone to access, produce, and disseminate religious knowledge without having to go through formal or institutional channels (Kim, 2022).

This change has given rise to the phenomenon of impersonalisation of religious authority, where authority is no longer based solely on formal qualifications such as pesantren education or institutional recognition, but also on digital expertise, online visibility, and the ability to build a reputation in the digital space. Someone can become a religious reference simply because they have many followers on social media or viral content, even without adequate religious education (Helland, 2021).

On the one hand, technology opens up democratic access to religious information. People can easily choose various sources, compare opinions, and build a more personal understanding of religion. Holy book apps, live broadcasts of lectures, and online discussion communities strengthen the position of people as active subjects in shaping their own spiritual experiences (Campbell, 2022).

However, these changes also bring serious challenges.

Religious authority has become more fluid and vulnerable to fragmentation. The proliferation of religious interpretations circulating without institutional filters can trigger the emergence of unrestrained, even extreme, understandings that are difficult to control. This raises concerns about the loss of scientific standards and moral authority that have been upheld by religious institutions (Aslan, Suhari, et al., 2020).

Technology has also created new spaces for digital religious celebrities or ‘micro-celebrities,’ who build influence through persuasive aesthetics, self-image, and social media algorithms. Popularity and recognition no longer stem solely from depth of knowledge but from the ability to build engagement and compelling narratives in the virtual world. This phenomenon often challenges traditional authority and creates tension between older and younger generations in religious communities (Hsu, 2024).

In addition, technology accelerates political mobilisation and religious activism. Social media and the internet enable the rapid and widespread dissemination of religious ideas, transcending geographical and institutional boundaries.

This can strengthen the position of certain groups within the power structure, but it also has the potential to cause polarisation, radicalisation, and identity conflicts in

the public sphere (Hutchings, 2020). The transformation of power relations is also evident in daily worship practices.

The use of electronic devices, digital payment applications for offerings, and even robot priests in religious ceremonies shows that technology is not only changing the way people worship, but also disrupting the traditional roles of religious leaders. These innovations are often welcomed with enthusiasm, but they also draw criticism regarding the authenticity and depth of the spirituality they produce (Possamai, 2022).

Amidst these changes, increasingly complex negotiations of religious identity and authority have emerged. A person's religious identity can now be seen from the applications installed on their mobile phones, rather than solely from physical participation in certain communities or rituals. These new forms of identity and authority often spark debates about the authenticity and genuineness of religious experiences (Wang, 2021).

Another equally important impact is the change in social interaction patterns within religious communities. Dependence on digital technology can reduce the quality of face-to-face relationships and emotional togetherness, which have long been at the core of religious practices. While virtual interactions expand connections, they do not always replace the depth and meaning of personal involvement in a community (Campbell, 2022).

Finally, the integration of technology into religious practices requires new wisdom and ethics. Religious communities need to balance the use of technology for progress with the preservation of core values that form the foundation of spirituality. In this way, technology can become a tool for empowerment, not merely an instrument of disruption in religious power relations.

Conclusion

Local rituals in the digital age are undergoing complex transformations, where religious traditions not only survive but also adapt to global technological advances. Digital technologies, such as social media and online applications, have become effective tools for documenting, promoting, and expanding the reach of local rituals to a wider audience, even across national borders.

This process allows younger generations to stay connected to their cultural roots, even if they live far from their communities of origin, and to act as cultural ambassadors bridging the gap between locality and globalisation. However, this adaptation also brings new challenges, such as the potential erosion of meaning and spiritual depth due to the commodification and simplification of rituals in digital formats.

Younger generations tend to view traditions as digital information rather than direct experiences, which can reduce physical interaction and the collective meaning inherent in rituals. Nevertheless, digitalisation still offers opportunities for the

revitalisation of traditions and the preservation of cultural values, provided that local communities are able to select aspects of tradition that can be adapted without losing their essence and cultural integrity.

Thus, the digital era is not an absolute threat to the continuity of local rituals, but rather an opportunity to strengthen collective identity and expand cultural heritage for future generations. The key to successful adaptation lies in the community's ability to utilise technology wisely, engage the younger generation, and maintain a balance between innovation and the preservation of core religious traditional values.

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