

Overview of Gadget Use and Its Impact on the Spiritual Development of Youth

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the use of gadgets and their impact on the spiritual development of teenagers within the church community. This research identifies that today's youth spend more time with gadgets, both for entertainment and learning, compared to spiritual activities such as prayer and Bible reading. A qualitative method was employed, utilizing interviews and observations with teenagers in the church. The findings reveal that excessive gadget use disrupts teenagers' focus during worship, with many preferring to engage with social media apps or play games during service time. Additionally, the research highlights the significant role of parents and educators in guiding teenagers to balance their time between gadget use and spiritual activities. The conclusion of this research emphasizes the importance of awareness regarding the negative effects of uncontrolled gadget use, as well as the need for a wise approach to utilizing technology to support the spiritual growth of teenagers.

Keywords: *Gadgets, Spirituality Development, Church Youth*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan gadget dan dampaknya terhadap perkembangan spiritualitas remaja di kalangan jemaat gereja. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bahwa remaja saat ini menghabiskan lebih banyak waktu dengan gadget, baik untuk hiburan maupun belajar, dibandingkan dengan aktivitas spiritual seperti berdoa dan membaca Alkitab. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara dan observasi terhadap remaja di gereja. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan gadget yang berlebihan mengganggu fokus remaja saat beribadah, banyak di antara mereka yang lebih tertarik untuk membuka aplikasi media sosial atau bermain game selama waktu ibadah. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa orang tua dan pengajar memiliki peran penting dalam membimbing remaja untuk membagi waktu antara penggunaan gadget dan aktivitas spiritual. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya kesadaran akan dampak negatif dari penggunaan gadget yang tidak terkontrol, serta perlunya pendekatan yang bijak dalam memanfaatkan teknologi untuk mendukung pertumbuhan spiritual remaja.

Kata kunci: *Gadget, Perkembangan Spiritualitas, Remaja Gereja*

Received 7 July 2024

Received in revised form 14 February 2025

Accepted 14 March 2025

Available online 28 April 2025

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, where support from parents and the surrounding environment plays a crucial role in ensuring that adolescents can develop maturely. During this period, the changes that occur in adolescents—physically, mentally, and socially—become a primary focus of attention. With the advancement of modern times, today's adolescents are more familiar with technology, particularly gadgets like smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Nowadays, the use of gadgets as modern electronic tools has become an inseparable element of daily activities, especially amid the rapid advancement of technology." (Jannah, 2023)

Technological advancements, especially in digital social networks and wireless mobile devices, have transformed the way people live. In the context of church ministry, the faith community is no longer limited to those physically present in the church building, but can also extend to digital technology. Gadgets (handphones), as small and practical electronic devices, serve to facilitate communication, access to information, and entertainment (Iswidharmajaya, 2013). Nowadays, owning gadgets with advanced features has become part of the lifestyle of many adolescents (Anggraini, 2019).

Adolescents are also starting to pay more attention to their spirituality during this stage of life. Gadgets can be defined as technological and informational devices that play a role in facilitating human activities and supporting communication between individuals (Aldiansyah, 2023). Spirituality is understood as the inner connection of humans to understand, respond to, and make decisions about life's reality and purpose. Christian spirituality refers to a person's existence in a right relationship with God, others, and creation.

Based on the issues outlined above, it is evident that gadgets have a dual role in the spiritual lives of church adolescents. On the one hand, gadgets can help adolescents draw closer to spiritual content through apps and social media. On the other hand, uncontrolled use of gadgets can become a distraction that reduces focus on spiritual activities, such as prayer and direct worship. This has led the researcher to conduct a study titled *"The Impact of Gadget Use on the Spiritual Development of Adolescents in the GMIT Paulus Church Congregation, Kupang."* This study aims to explore the multifaceted impact of gadget use on the spiritual development of adolescents in the GMIT Paulus

Congregation, Kupang. Specifically, it seeks to describe the relationship between gadget use and religious activities, examine the role of technology in spiritual education, investigate the effects of gadget use on interactions within families and religious communities, explore how gadgets are utilized in spreading spiritual information and inspiration, and analyze the influence of gadget use on spiritual dynamics within both family settings and peer relationships.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design as it aims to understand the influence of gadget use on the spiritual development of adolescents in the GMIT Paulus Church congregation in Kupang. This approach allows the researcher to explore in depth the experiences and perceptions of adolescents, as well as to examine how gadgets may support or hinder their spiritual growth.

The selection of participants for this study follows a purposive sampling method, where participants are specifically chosen based on certain characteristics that are relevant to the research objectives. This approach ensures that the sample includes individuals who can provide valuable insights into the research topic.

A total of 10 participants will be selected for this study, with the following criteria:

1. Participants are adolescent members of the GMIT Paulus Church congregation in Kupang.
2. Participants must be adolescents who own and actively use gadgets (such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops).
3. Participants must be between 13 to 15 years old (junior high school age).
4. Participants must reside in Kupang City.
5. Participants must be willing to participate in the study, as indicated by their signed informed consent.

This purposive sampling strategy ensures that the selected participants meet the specific criteria to address the research questions and provide relevant data regarding the relationship between gadget use and spiritual development in adolescents.

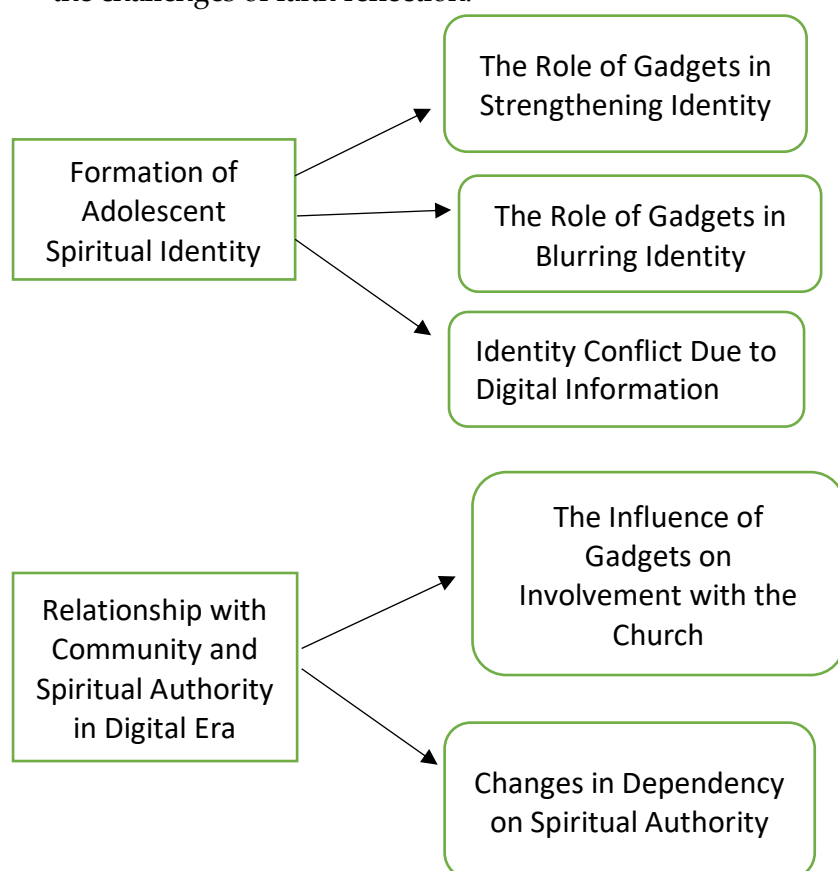
The researcher will use a qualitative research method with data collection conducted through interviews. The data gathered from the interviews will be transcribed

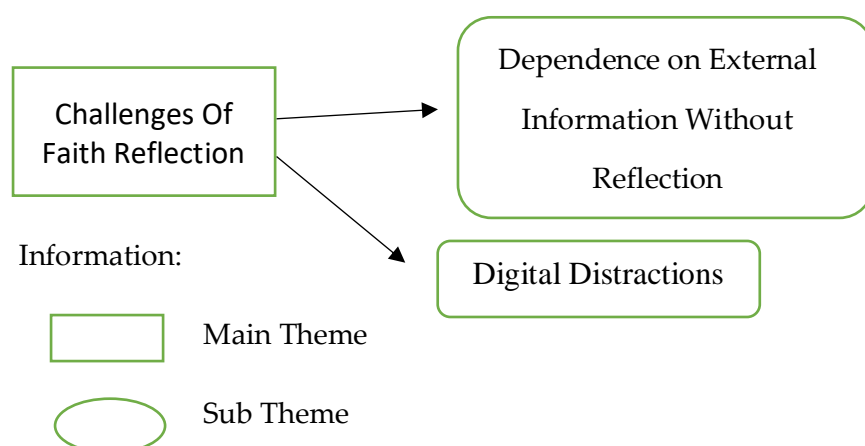
verbatim to ensure that all participants' responses are accurately recorded. This approach shows a detailed representation of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

For data analysis, the researcher will use thematic analysis, which is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (or themes) within qualitative data. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to systematically organize the data, categorize recurring themes, and interpret these themes in the context of the research questions. This method will help uncover key insights into how gadget use influences the spiritual development of adolescents in the GMIT Paulus Church congregation. This study involves a total of 10 participants.

Results

The researcher began to classify the data into specific themes. The themes identified based on the interview descriptions are: the formation of adolescent spiritual identity, the relationship with spiritual authority and community in the digital era, and the challenges of faith reflection.





A. Formation of Adolescent Spiritual Identity

Participants explained that there are several influences of gadgets that impact the formation of adolescent spiritual identity, such as:

1. The Role of Gadgets in Strengthening Identity

Gadgets can strengthen the spiritual identity of adolescents by providing easy access to spiritual resources and facilitating communication with spiritual communities. Therefore, proper guidance is needed to ensure that gadgets are used positively to reinforce the spiritual identity of adolescents. As expressed by the participants:

"I often feel there has been a change in my spiritual development. When I got a gadget, I started using prayer and meditation apps to help me focus more. The gadget also makes me more disciplined with my time for prayer because I usually set reminders. It also makes it easier for me to find spiritual materials that increase my knowledge about my faith."
(Participant AB)

2. The Role of Gadgets in Blurring Identity

Gadgets can blur the spiritual identity of adolescents by diverting their attention from deep spiritual activities. Excessive use of gadgets causes adolescents to focus more on the virtual world than on strong and meaningful interpersonal relationships, which are essential for spiritual growth. As expressed by the participant:

"I often feel that when I play with gadgets too much, I end up forgetting to pray and spend time reflecting on the Word because I spend too much time on social media. Sometimes, I focus more on playing Instagram than to pray with God." (Participant MN)

3. Identity Conflict Due to Digital Information

Identity conflict due to digital information is a complex phenomenon in the digital age. Gadgets play a significant role in shaping and influencing an individual's identity, especially adolescents. As expressed by the participant:

"I feel like gadgets block me because I end up focusing more on worldly things like social media. Sometimes I come across content that contradicts religious teaching, such as violence and other negative things." (Participant LT)

B. Relationship with Community and Spiritual Authority in the Digital Era

1. The Influence of Gadgets on Involvement with the Church Community

Gadgets have a complex influence on adolescent involvement with the church community. In this case, gadgets can enhance engagement by providing easy access to spiritual resources and communication tools, allowing adolescents to interact with the community more broadly and inclusively. However, excessive use of gadgets can also reduce concentration and the quality of social interactions during worship, causing adolescents to focus more on digital activities rather than direct participation in church community events. As expressed by the participant:

"In my opinion, being online is more comfortable. I can access worship materials online and participate in youth activities through live streaming anytime without needs to go to church. But, this makes me less involved in church activities directly." (Participant SB)

2. Changes in Dependency on Spiritual Authority

The change in dependency on spiritual authority is currently influenced by technological advancements and globalization. Adolescents are in a phase of self-discovery and begin to question traditional authority, including spiritual authority. In the past, adolescents were more passive in receiving teachings from parents, pastors, or educators. However, today, adolescents are more independent in shaping their beliefs by obtaining information widely through current technology. As expressed by the participant:

"Using gadgets has made me pray less often. However, I also listen to spiritual music or meditation through my gadget, which helps me feel more at peace. So, there has been a change, but my way of approaching spirituality is more flexible now." (Participant IB)

C. Challenges of Faith Reflection

1. Dependence on External Information Without Reflection

Adolescents' dependence on external information without reflection, caused by excessive gadget use, is a complex issue. Today's adolescents rely heavily on information gathered from social media and the internet, which often reduces their time for personal reflection and direct social interaction. As expressed by the participant:

"Since using gadgets, I've become more interested in things related to spirituality. I often follow inspirational accounts that share quotes and spiritual insights. This helps me reflect more on the meaning of life, even though it's not always deep." (Participant GS)

2. Digital Distractions

Today, adolescents spend a significant amount of time in front of gadgets screens, with an average of 4 – 5 hours per day. This not only disrupts their concentration and productivity but also affects their mental and physical health. As expressed by the participant:

"Honestly, my brother often struggles to focus because of gadgets. Especially during worship when I use the Bible from my phone, it's really hard to focus because suddenly I end up opening TikTok or playing games." (Participant NE)

Discussion

This study aims to explore the impact of gadget use on the spiritual development of adolescents in the GMIT Paulus Congregation, Kupang. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with 10 participants. The findings revealed three main themes: The Formation of Adolescent Spiritual Identity, the Relationship between Community and Spiritual Authority in the Digital Era, and the Challenges of Faith Reflection.

The first theme in this study is the Formation of Adolescent Spiritual Identity. The formation of spiritual identity in adolescents is a complex process involving interactions between self-exploration, commitment, social factors, and the influence of technology. In this process, adolescents need to undergo exploration, which involves

seeking and discovering values, beliefs, and spiritual practices that align with their identity. This process can include spiritual experiences such as prayer, meditation, and other religious activities. Adolescents also need to undergo reflection, where they think about and evaluate their spiritual experiences to understand the meanings and values associated with them. Desi Siyanti Tonis (2025), explains that adolescents have begun to experience confusion in seeking their spiritual identity. Therefore, the church must consistently provide guidance and teaching to help them discover and understand their faith identity.

Gadgets can strengthen the spiritual identity of adolescents by providing access to a wide range of spiritual information and allowing them to connect with spiritual communities, such as joining Bible study groups. This helps adolescents deepen their religious knowledge and apply Biblical values in their daily lives. According to Campbell, H. A. (2020), the use of gadgets can influence adolescents' spiritual identity, particularly in terms of the search for meaning and purpose in life, by remaining engaged in spiritual communities through these devices. For example, participants AB and JS expressed that gadgets help them stay connected with their community and access spiritual information quickly and clearly.

Gadgets can blur the spiritual identity of adolescents by providing inaccurate information about religion, which can confuse them and lead them astray. The current development of technology has caused many adolescents to become trapped in their search for identity, as they lack a strong foundation to identify themselves as individuals who have already found their identity in Christ." (Pasaribu, 2025). Additionally, social media can influence adolescents with views that contradict their spiritual beliefs. Research by Halawa (2023) indicates that gadget use can interfere with time for prayer and Bible reading, which are crucial for adolescents' spiritual growth.

Identity conflicts due to digital information occur when adolescents are confronted with information that contradicts their spiritual values and beliefs. Fatima et al. (2024) found that internal and interpersonal conflicts experienced by adolescents can complicate the process of self-identity formation and emotional maturity, ultimately affecting their psychological well-being. This can lead adolescents to become confused, lose direction, and experience identity conflicts. Therefore, adolescents need to develop

critical thinking skills to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information. Additionally, they should cultivate genuine spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, and other spiritual activities, while seeking support from spiritual communities that can help strengthen their spiritual identity.

To face identity conflicts due to digital information, adolescents need the ability to filter the information they receive and distinguish between accurate and inaccurate content. They also need to develop genuine spiritual practices and seek support from spiritual communities to strengthen their spiritual identity. Research by Putri and Nasril (2023) shows that social media significantly influences adolescents' self-identity formation. Peer pressure and social expectations on social media can complicate the identity-searching process. By doing so, adolescents can overcome identity conflicts from digital information and strengthen their spiritual identity.

The second theme of this study explores the Relationship between Community and Spiritual Authority in the Digital Era. Gadgets are not only used for communication but also for seeking information, sharing experiences, and engaging in worship. Research by Hidayat and Putri (2020) found that inspirational content on digital media has a significant impact on adolescents' spiritual engagement. In the church context, gadgets can facilitate youth participation through online platforms such as social media and church apps, enabling activities like online worship and discussions. However, gadgets may also reduce direct engagement with the church community, as some adolescents prefer digital interaction over face-to-face contact. According to Fananda, Ismail, and Bahiroh (2021), gadget use significantly influences students' emotional intelligence, social behavior, and religious practices. Furthermore, gadgets shift adolescents' reliance from traditional spiritual authorities to online spiritual content, which they find more relatable and relevant to their life experiences, as shared by participants JW and SB.

For church adolescents, spiritual authority often comes from figures such as pastors, church leaders, or parents who serve as spiritual guides. These authorities provide a moral and spiritual framework that shapes how adolescents understand faith and live out their spirituality. However, in an increasingly digital world, this dependency is shifting due to access to unlimited information through gadgets. Adolescents are now more likely to seek spiritual insights from social media and digital content. Kuss and

Griffiths (2017) explain that reliance on social media and the internet can reduce the quality of face-to-face relationships with spiritual authorities in the church.

The use of gadgets has shifted adolescents' dependence from traditional spiritual authorities to online sources of information. Studies by Ho et al. (2018) show that social media can influence adolescents' engagement with church communities, while also reducing face-to-face interactions. Similarly, research by Cheong et al. (2020) highlights that gadgets contribute to a change in adolescents' reliance—from spiritual leaders to digital content. Overall, the relationship between community and spiritual authority in the digital era is complex, with gadgets playing a significant role in shaping adolescent spiritual engagement and patterns of dependence.

The final theme of this study is the *Challenges of Faith Reflection*. Faith reflection plays a crucial role in adolescent spiritual development, as it allows individuals to understand and internalize spiritual values and principles. However, excessive gadget use can disrupt this process. Nurhayati (2020) explains that adolescent spirituality grows through activities such as prayer, meditation, and participation in spiritual practices that require focus and stillness. Gadgets often distract adolescents, reducing their time and focus for deep reflection. Moreover, a strong reliance on external information may lead adolescents to seek spiritual answers online rather than engaging in meaningful personal reflection. Nuraini (2021) adds that extended gadget use can cause adolescents to deprioritize religious practices such as prayer and worship.

Lack of time due to busy schedules can disrupt adolescents' faith reflection process. Janicke-Bowles (2024) introduces the concept of *digital flourishing*—a pattern of positive interactions on social media that supports character development and psychological well-being. Through authentic self-presentation and civic participation in digital spaces, adolescent spiritual engagement increases by up to 35% compared to conventional methods.

In today's digital era, dependence on external information without reflection can impact adolescents' faith reflection. Online information may lead teens to believe they have all the answers, reducing the need for deep spiritual reflection. Bolo (2024), The dependency on gadgets may reduce adolescents' ability to engage in deep conversations and self-reflection, both of which are essential for the development of their spirituality.

Additionally, digital distractions, such as social media, emails, and notifications, can hinder focused spiritual reflection. Participant NE shared the difficulty of maintaining focus during worship due to digital distractions. Digital addiction, particularly social media dependence, further disrupts spiritual development. Kuss and Griffiths (2017) note that social media addiction among teens can lead to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, which affect spiritual well-being. Teens immersed in the virtual world may feel lonely, as online relationships lack the emotional and spiritual fulfillment of face-to-face connections. Rucita (2022) highlights that deeper immersion in the digital world increases individuals' tendency to withdraw from real-life social interactions.

Digital distractions reduce adolescents' ability to focus on deeper, more meaningful aspects of life, such as the search for purpose within their faith. Campbell and Tsuria (2020) explain that while technology can serve positive purposes, excessive use can diminish the quality of direct spiritual experiences. The main challenge is mitigating the negative effects of digital distractions and finding a healthy balance between digital engagement and a deeper spiritual life. Heryanto et al. (2024) emphasize that the church plays a crucial role in strengthening adolescents' character by offering relevant spiritual guidance and creating an environment that supports faith growth. The church should educate teens on how to use technology wisely while helping them stay connected with God and the church community authentically. It can also provide spaces for reflection, prayer, and interaction without digital interruptions.

Overall, digital distractions from gadget use can hinder the spiritual development of church adolescents. However, with a mindful approach and awareness of these impacts, technology can also be utilized to support their spiritual life. The key is to build awareness about the importance of balancing engagement with the digital world and deeper spiritual connection. As highlighted in research by Stella (2023), digital distractions affect the spiritual development of digital-native adolescents in religious communities, emphasizing the need for an integrative approach that leverages digital technology without neglecting direct interaction within the faith community.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the use of gadgets has a complex impact on the spiritual development of adolescents in the GMIT Paulus Congregation, Kupang. On one hand, gadgets can strengthen spiritual identity by providing access to spiritual resources; however, on the other hand, they can confuse adolescents with unfiltered information. Gadgets also reduce adolescents' involvement in church activities and shift their dependence on spiritual authority, as they prefer digital sources. Additionally, the dependence on gadgets hinders deep faith reflection due to distractions from entertainment and fast information. While gadgets offer access to spiritual content, their negative impact on spiritual identity, church engagement, and faith reflection requires attention. The church and parents must help adolescents manage gadget use wisely to support their spiritual journey.

Suggestion

Adolescents are encouraged to use gadgets to access spiritual content and manage their screen time so it does not interfere with spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible reading. The church should develop engaging digital programs, such as webinars and online discussions, while also providing education on healthy gadget usage to deepen faith. Parents are advised to guide their children's gadget use by encouraging access to positive spiritual content and setting time limits to maintain a balance between spiritual activities and the digital world. Future research is recommended to explore further how technology influences spiritual experiences and adolescent involvement in religious communities.

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