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# NEGOTIATING THEOLOGICAL AUTHORITY AND THE LOGIC OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS: A STUDY OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE *GPIB'S 'MORNING AND NIGHT CALL'* PROGRAMME

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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyse how theological authority and the logic of digital platforms are negotiated in the management of the Morning and Night Call (MNC) programme of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) via YouTube. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three key informants representing the fields of theology, programme management and organisational communication, as well as digital documentation on the GPIB YouTube channel. The data were analysed thematically by comparing statements between informants and digital evidence. The findings indicate that the MNC has evolved from a means of expanding the visibility of ministry to becoming part of a routine of spiritual guidance that can be accessed on a regular basis. Theological authority is maintained through the setting of themes and Bible readings, the training of pastors, the legitimacy of the presenters, and the scrutiny of the substance of the messages. At the same time, the nature of YouTube necessitates adjustments to the audiovisual format, duration, production quality, publication schedule, and content distribution. These negotiations are supported by cross-departmental coordination and a non-commercial orientation, although the programme remains dependent on the platform's infrastructure. This study proposes a 'mission-anchored platform negotiation' model that emphasises theological integrity, communicative adaptation, socio-technical coordination, and evaluation based on pastoral benefits and audience response, rather than mere popularity. This model makes a conceptual contribution to the study of strategic communication and the mediatisation of religion, whilst also serving as a practical foundation for strengthening the governance of digital preaching.

**Keywords:** strategic communication; theological authority; the mediatisation of religion; digital platforms; digital religion

## INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has altered the way religious institutions conduct their evangelisation and pastoral care. Practices that previously relied primarily on the pulpit, face-to-face encounters, and pastoral relationships in physical spaces now also take place via social media and video-sharing platforms. This change is not merely a shift in channels, but also shapes the production, distribution, reception, and interpretation of religious messages. In the study of digital religion, online and offline practices are understood as intertwined spheres within religious life, rather than as two entirely separate spaces (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Hutchings, 2017). Digital media also enables religious organisations to expand their

communication reach and shape their public image, whilst simultaneously offering technology-mediated spiritual experiences (Belikova & Dulina, 2019; Mansour, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, the relationship between media and religion has evolved through a historical process involving technological change, socio-cultural dynamics, and the negotiation of religious authority. Consequently, digital transformation must be understood in terms of the character of local institutions and traditions, rather than solely through models developed from the context of other societies (Setianto, 2026). Within platform environments, audiences can access and share messages flexibly, whilst audiovisual features, recommendation algorithms, engagement metrics and comment sections help shape the conditions under which content is disseminated. However, visibility or high levels of interaction do not automatically indicate that religious messages are understood or internalised by the audience (Wajdi et al., 2026).

This situation relates to the mediatisation of religion, namely the process whereby the media are not merely neutral channels, but also help to shape religious practices, representations and authority through their operational logic. As religious institutions become increasingly reliant on the media to reach the public, the form of presentation, the rhythm of distribution and the manner in which communicators present themselves may adapt to media conditions. This process does not automatically undermine institutional authority; on the contrary, traditional authority and the legitimacy derived from visibility and audience acceptance can interact and be negotiated (Hjarvard, 2016; Lövheim & Lynch, 2018). Consequently, the church faces the challenge of presenting its message in a communicative and accessible manner without compromising its theological substance, ethical values, and pastoral objectives.

From a strategic communication perspective, digital evangelism cannot simply be understood as the act of uploading videos or posting sermons online. Strategic communication is the planned use of communication to support an organisation's mission and objectives (Hallahan et al., 2007). In religious organisations, these objectives may include the dissemination of teachings, the maintenance of pastoral relationships, the strengthening of institutional identity, and the expansion of ministry. Therefore, strategies must align messages, communicators, channels, audience needs, and programme evaluation. The literature has addressed digital religion, online churches, religious communication, and shifts in authority within media environments (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Cheong et al., 2020; Hutchings, 2017). Nevertheless, the concrete relationship between strategic communication planning, organisational coordination, the selection of platform formats, and the maintenance of theological authority within structured church evangelism programmes still needs to be elucidated through contextual research.

This gap is relevant to examine through the 'Morning and Night Call' (MNC) programme managed by the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) via YouTube. This programme features devotionals in the morning and at night. Based on research data, the programme originated from the need to introduce mission work and mission posts in specific or remote areas, and subsequently became increasingly important when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted face-to-face gatherings. Its development demonstrates that digital broadcasts can form part of the congregation's spiritual routine whilst simultaneously expanding the reach of

ministry. However, online ministry must still be positioned in a complementary relationship with in-person worship and fellowship (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Hutchings, 2017).

The management of MNC highlights the need to harmonise theological authority with communication expertise. The substance of the message falls under theological responsibility, whilst production, editing, packaging, distribution and channel management require technical skills and organisational coordination. At the same time, YouTube encourages attention to audiovisual quality, delivery style, scheduling consistency and ease of access. Such adaptations can support ministry, but must be implemented selectively so that the platform's logic does not supplant ecclesiastical objectives. Studies on mediatisation confirm that the relationship between media and religion is contextual; consequently, the ways in which institutions maintain their authority and adapt their communication practices must be examined within specific organisational contexts (Hjarvard, 2016; Lövheim & Lynch, 2018).

This study is based on the argument that MNCs constitute a strategic communication practice taking place within the context of the mediatisation of religion. The negotiation between theological authority and platform logic is analysed through five interrelated dimensions: message, actors, platform, audience, and communication objectives. The message dimension encompasses theological substance and its form of presentation; actors include institutions, pastors and management teams; the platform refers to the characteristics and distribution patterns of YouTube; the audience encompasses the needs and interpretations of the congregation; whilst the communication objectives relate to the nurturing of spirituality, the strengthening of the church's identity and the expansion of ministry.

The research question is: how are theological authority and the logic of the digital platform negotiated through the strategic communication practices of the GPIB's 'Morning and Night Call' programme? The study aims to analyse the management of messages and the programme, explain the roles of the actors and organisational coordination, and identify adaptations to YouTube's characteristics without neglecting theological authority and pastoral objectives. Using a qualitative approach and a case study design, this research examines these practices contextually (Yin, 2018). The novelty of the research lies in linking strategic communication with the mediatisation of religion within the context of a structured evangelism programme run by the Indonesian Protestant Church. Theoretically, the study brings together communication planning and the negotiation of religious authority; empirically, it presents the case of the GPIB's MNC; and practically, it provides a basis for the development of digital evangelism governance that is adaptable to the platform whilst maintaining theological integrity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Strategic Communication in Religious Organisations

Strategic communication is understood as the planned use of communication to support an organisation's mission and objectives. This perspective links the formulation of objectives, message management, channel selection, coordination of actors, stakeholder relations and communication evaluation as a single, interrelated sequence (Hallahan et al., 2007). In religious organisations, the success of communication cannot be assessed solely in terms of reach, view counts or engagement. Assessment must also take into account the accuracy of the teachings, their relevance to the congregation's needs, the continuity of pastoral relationships, and their alignment with the church's mission.

Hodøl's (2024) study indicates that a church's online ministry can be developed to introduce the church to new audiences, complement services for existing congregations, or support more decentralised forms of ministry. The choice of ' ' strategies must be tailored to the organisation's identity and the audience's needs, rather than applied as a one-size-fits-all model. This framework is relevant for understanding the GPIB's 'Morning and Night Call' (MNC) as a programme that combines thematic planning, preacher training, content review, audiovisual production, scheduling, distribution and evaluation. Consequently, programme management is a cross-functional endeavour: the theological unit maintains the direction and accuracy of the message, whilst the communications team ensures the message can be produced and delivered via digital media.

**Digital Religion and Online–Offline Relations**

Digital religion refers to the intertwining of digital technology with religious practices, experiences, identities, rituals, communities and authority. This perspective does not view the online space as a realm separate from offline religious life; the two can complement one another, reshape habits, or give rise to tensions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Digital media enables religious messages and services to be accessed beyond geographical boundaries and assists those facing limitations due to age, health, mobility or time constraints. However, access via a screen is not entirely equivalent to physical encounters, as the forms of participation, interaction and sense of community available differ.

Hutchings (2017) emphasises that online churches need to be understood through the relationship between ritual, community and new media, rather than solely on the basis of whether technology can replace face-to-face worship. Cooper et al. (2021) also demonstrate that social, digital and physical presence can be reconfigured through the practice of online churches. Research into digital religious communication also highlights the complexity of the relationship between technology, religious actors and audiences, as well as the need for a research agenda that considers these dimensions in an integrated manner (Cheong et al., 2020). In the context of MNCs, regular broadcasts may form part of congregants' spiritual routines, but their relevance must be distinguished from evidence regarding the depth of participation or measurable spiritual impact.

**The Mediatisation of Religion and the Logic of the Media**

The mediatisation of religion explains how the media, as a social environment and an institution with a specific operational logic, helps to shape religious practices, representations and authority. The media are not merely neutral channels for pre-formulated messages; the nature of formats, the rhythm of distribution, demands for visibility, and audience habits can influence how messages are presented and how religious actors present themselves in the public sphere (Hjarvard, 2016). These changes do not automatically erode institutional authority, but rather foster interaction and negotiation between traditional legitimacy and forms of acceptance shaped through the media.

Lövheim and Lynch (2018) point out that the relationship between the media and religion must be understood contextually, as it is shaped by differing histories, traditions, cultures and institutional structures. In the digital environment, authority derived from office, knowledge and institutional mandates coexists with communicative credibility, visibility and

the ability to forge connections with the audience. Cloete (2016) explains that digital mediation can alter the distribution of religious authority as access to religious sources and interpretations becomes increasingly open. Consequently, theological authority within MNCs must be examined through the establishment of substance, the legitimacy of the communicator, content vetting processes, and the adaptation of delivery methods. Audiovisual adaptation serves as a means to ensure messages are received, not as a substitute for theological accuracy.

Changes in the media environment also influence the sacred experience. Tsuria (2021) discusses how digital media can blur the boundaries between the sacred and the profane when religious content appears on personal devices and becomes intertwined with everyday activities. Studies on virtual churches also indicate that digital spaces can shape specific spiritual experiences and emotional responses (Mansour, 2022). This underscores the importance of evaluating digital innovations not merely from a technical perspective, but also in terms of pastoral objectives, the context of use, and the integrity of the message.

**Platformisation and YouTube's Affordances**

The concept of platformisation positions digital platforms as infrastructure that shapes the production, distribution, circulation and visibility of content. Platformisation encompasses the penetration of infrastructure, economic processes and platform governance frameworks into various sectors of life, alongside the accompanying reorganisation of cultural practices (Poell et al., 2019). In cultural production, platformisation also alters the conditions of content production and circulation through technical and economic configurations that are not entirely controlled by content creators (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Consequently, religious organisations using YouTube need to pay attention to audiovisual quality, duration, titles, consistency of uploads, accessibility, as well as patterns of distribution and interaction.

YouTube allows content to be saved, re-watched and shared with audiences who are not present at the same time or in the same location. However, the number of views and engagement do not automatically indicate an understanding or internalisation of the theological message. Platform metrics should be treated as limited indicators of media usage behaviour and supplemented by an evaluation of pastoral relevance, the quality of relationships, and the alignment of the message with the congregation's needs (Hodøl, 2024; Poell et al., 2019). The Indonesian context also underscores the importance of interpreting changes in media and religion by taking into account local historical and institutional conditions, rather than assuming that transformation occurs uniformly (Setianto, 2026).

The GPIB's decision not to monetise its MNC channel demonstrates that organisations can set ethical boundaries against the potential commercialisation of attention. However, a non-commercial orientation does not exempt the programme from the logic of the platform, as its production and distribution remain dependent on YouTube's infrastructure. This choice is best understood as a form of institutional agency: the platform is utilised selectively to support ministry, whilst the programme's objectives and principles remain determined by the church's mission (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019).

**Theological Authority and Digital Negotiation**

Theological authority within church organisations rests on theological knowledge, office or ordination, pastoral responsibility, and institutional recognition. In the digital space,

these sources of legitimacy interact with a communication environment that broadens the reach of messages and enables audiences to encounter and compare a variety of religious sources (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Hjarvard, 2016). This openness increases access, but also heightens the need for a clear communicator identity, verification mechanisms, and accountability for the substance of the message (Cheong et al., 2020).

Within MNCs, the negotiation of authority can be understood through the division of responsibilities between those who determine theological content and those who manage production and distribution. The selection of themes, readings and presenters ensures the message remains aligned with the church's mandate, whilst flexibility in delivery style, location and visual elements helps the message adapt to the audiovisual environment. The pre-publication review process serves as a governance mechanism linking theological accountability with media professionalism. Responsible adaptation is therefore not merely an attempt to pursue popularity, but rather an effort to make the message accessible without compromising the accuracy of the content or the ethical boundaries of ministry (Hjarvard, 2016; Hodøl, 2024).

**Conceptual Synthesis and Research Position**

Based on this literature, this study positions MNC as a strategic communication practice occurring within the processes of the digitalisation, mediatisation and platformisation of religion. Strategic communication explains the planning and coordination required to achieve the church's mission; the digital religion perspective elucidates the relationship between online and offline practices and their pastoral functions; the mediatisation of religion explains the influence of media logic on the presentation of messages and the appearance of authority; whilst platformisation demonstrates how digital infrastructure shapes both the opportunities and limitations of content distribution (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Hallahan et al., 2007; Hjarvard, 2016; Poell et al., 2019).

Analytically, the relationships between these concepts are explored through five dimensions: (1) message, encompassing theological substance and form of presentation; (2) actors, namely the church, the pastor and the production team; (3) platform, covering YouTube's features and distribution conditions; (4) audience, encompassing the congregation's needs, habits and interpretations; and (5) communication objectives, namely nurturing spirituality, preserving the church's identity and expanding its ministry. These five dimensions mutually influence one another in communication decision-making.

Previous research has addressed digital religion, online churches, mediatisation, and strategic communication; however, this study presents a specific context involving scheduled evangelism programmes within an Indonesian Protestant church, cross-departmental coordination, congregational engagement with diverse access needs, and the decision not to monetise. The aim of this research is to explain how theological authority is both maintained and negotiated through the management of digital communication. Consequently, the study proposes the analytical proposition of 'mission-anchored platform negotiation': adaptation to platforms occurs through the establishment of normative anchors, the translation of messages into audiovisual formats, socio-technical coordination, and evaluation based on pastoral benefits and audience response, rather than solely on popularity metrics.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to understand how theological authority and the logic of digital platforms are negotiated in the management of the Morning and Night Call (MNC) programme of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB). This approach allows communication practices, experiences, considerations and organisational processes to be interpreted within their natural context. The case study design is used to examine contemporary phenomena in depth by utilising a variety of sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The case is limited to the management of MNC's digital outreach via YouTube, covering the planning and review of messages, the roles of the various actors, the production and distribution of content, the selection of formats and publication times, and efforts to maintain theological substance whilst adapting to the nature of digital media. The researcher acts as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation, whilst maintaining reflexivity by distinguishing between informant accounts, documentary evidence and analytical interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement and knowledge of theological policy, programme management, and the production and distribution of content. The three key informants were Rev. Abraham Ruben Persang, Head of the Department of Theology and Church Councils at GPIB; Rev. Stephen G. R. Sihombing, Head of Division 3 (Word Division) of the Department of Theology and Church Assemblies of the GPIB; and Rev. Dewi Sintha Bratanata, Head of the Department of Information, Organisation, Communication, Research and Development of the GPIB. All three represent the perspectives of institutional structure and programme coordination, planning and the legitimacy of theological substance, and information management and media production. This selection follows the principle of participant selection based on the relevance of experience and knowledge in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data comprised in-depth interviews with the three informants and digital documentation/artefacts from MNC on the GPIB YouTube channel. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, with one session per informant lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Interview topics included theme planning, division of roles, cross-departmental coordination, content review, production decisions, publication schedules, the use of YouTube, audience responses, and the relationship between online services and in-person worship. The interviews were recorded and manually transcribed verbatim. Digital documentation was analysed based on textual elements, audiovisual content, upload descriptions, broadcast schedules, and relevant audience responses. The documents were treated as sources for understanding the context and comparing interview accounts, rather than as a substitute for the interview data (Bowen, 2009).

This research was conducted between January and April 2024, with the documentation of uploads covering the period from 1 January to 30 April 2024. Informant consent, organisational permission for the use of content, and the use of informants' names and quotations followed strictly implemented procedures; recordings and transcripts were securely stored for research purposes.

The analysis was carried out iteratively through five steps: (1) organising and re-reading the transcripts and documentation; (2) initially coding the data relating to theological authority, messaging strategies, organisational coordination, platform characteristics, distribution, audience, and ministry orientation; (3) grouping closely related codes into categories or themes; (4) reviewing themes by comparing accounts across informants and digital evidence; and (5) interpreting themes through the frameworks of strategic communication and the mediatisation of religion to construct a narrative of the findings. This procedure follows the principles of thematic analysis, which emphasises repeated engagement with the data, coding, the examination of patterns of meaning, and analytical transparency (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

The validity of the findings is strengthened through source triangulation—comparing the accounts of three informants with different roles—and methodological triangulation, namely by cross-referencing interview data with documentation and YouTube content. Discrepancies between sources are examined as potential differences in position or experience, rather than being immediately dismissed. Records of data selection decisions, code changes, theme development, and the basis for conclusions were used to support the audit trail. The description of the case context and the researcher's reflexivity were also taken into account in accordance with the criteria of credibility, accessibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## RESULTS

### Transformation of the Programme and Pastoral Functions

The GPIB's Morning and Night Call (MNC) programme originated from efforts to expand the visibility of ministry and witness in specialised posts and remote areas. This morning and evening devotional programme is estimated to have begun around 2017–2018, before the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the expansion of its role. When restrictions on face-to-face gatherings were imposed, the MNC became increasingly important as a form of spiritual accompaniment that could be accessed regularly. Consequently, the programme evolved from a means of documenting and providing information about ministry into an integral part of the audience's spiritual routine. Viewers' reactions to delayed broadcasts indicate that expectations regarding the consistency of publication have taken root. Nevertheless, digital services remain positioned as a complement to in-person worship, fellowship and pastoral care.

### Message Planning and the Maintenance of Theological Authority

The management of MNC's content is grounded in the church's vision and mission, which are translated into long-term themes, annual themes, Bible readings, and preaching focuses. Pastors receive training to ensure that the messages they deliver are aligned with the direction of the institution's ministry, rather than merely reflecting personal preferences. Within this framework, preachers retain the freedom to determine the emphasis, location and style of delivery so that the sermon feels communicative and appropriate to its context. The primary role of preacher is assigned to the minister, whilst the involvement of other ministers is permitted in different formats of ministry. Theological authority is maintained through the

establishment of a thematic framework, training, substantive review, and institutional legitimacy. This model demonstrates that adapting the method of delivery does not necessarily undermine the theological authority underpinning the message.

**Organisational Coordination and Adaptation to YouTube**

MNC is managed through a division of responsibilities between the Department of Theology and Church Assemblies and the Department of Information, Organisation, Communication, Research and Development (Inforkom Litbang). The theology unit coordinates content, themes, the availability of preachers, and the assignment of substitutes when a minister is unable to attend. Meanwhile, the Inforkom Litbang team handles the processing, editing, packaging and uploading of videos. The production calendar, briefings, communication via WhatsApp groups and rapid coordination help to ensure the continuity of the programme. Implementation still faces challenges, including delays in material, weather, network disruptions, ministry commitments and equipment limitations, thus requiring improvisation and alternative arrangements.

The nature of YouTube encourages administrators to pay attention to on-camera presentation skills, duration, audio clarity, lighting, background, and consistency of publication. Morning and evening scheduling also carries pastoral significance: 'Morning Call' is intended to provide encouragement at the start of the day, whilst 'Night Call' serves as a space for reflection and prayer. The distribution of broadcasts is expanded through WhatsApp groups and the congregation's social media channels. The comments section provides a space for appreciation and feedback, but it also needs to be moderated to deal with inappropriate links or comments. Adaptation to the platform is carried out selectively; technical quality is seen as a prerequisite for the message to be well received, not as a substitute for theological substance.

**Audience, Evaluation and Non-Commercial Orientation**

MNC's audience is not limited to the GPIB congregation, but also includes viewers outside the church community. The broadcasts are seen as helping those who are ill, elderly, live far from the church, or have limited mobility to continue participating in the services. The practice of waiting for broadcasts, offering appreciation, and reporting technical issues provides feedback on the programme's relevance and accessibility. However, the spiritual impact has not yet been measured through formal surveys. Consequently, the available audience responses are insufficient to conclude that the programme directly brings about changes in faith or religious behaviour.

Internal evaluations cover the appropriateness of content, the focus of devotionals, sound and picture quality, duration, and video readiness. Limitations in connectivity and equipment in a number of service areas also affect production quality, indicating that the programme's sustainability depends not only on editorial aspects but also on infrastructure. The commitment of pastors and teams needs to be supported by a division of labour and ongoing organisational support. The GPIB has chosen not to monetise its MNC channel as its primary objective is evangelism and ministry, not advertising revenue. This choice reaffirms ethical boundaries against the commercialisation of religious content, although the programme remains dependent on YouTube's infrastructure and technical requirements.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that GPIB's Morning and Night Call (MNC) is not merely a transfer of church devotions to YouTube, but rather a strategic communication practice that integrates pastoral objectives, message management, the division of organisational roles, channel selection, publication schedules, and audience relations. The programme's objectives include the proclamation of the Word, the continuity of spiritual guidance, the promotion of ministry in specific regions, the strengthening of GPIB's identity, and the expansion of access for congregants who are not always able to attend in person. This approach aligns with the view that strategic communication integrates organisational objectives, messages, channels, and the needs of stakeholders (Hallahan et al., 2007). Themes designed at an institutional level and training for pastors ensure consistency in the message, whilst flexibility in style, location and emphasis allows the message to remain contextually relevant.

From the perspective of digital religion, MNC demonstrates the intertwining of online and offline practices, rather than a separation between the two. Regular broadcasts have become part of the spiritual routine for some congregants and connect a geographically dispersed audience. Reactions to delayed broadcasts suggest that the consistency of these broadcasts has shaped religious expectations. However, the regularity of viewing is not sufficient to conclude that an interactive digital community has formed or that the audience's spirituality has increased. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) emphasise the interconnection between digital religious practices and everyday life, whilst the level of audience participation and interpretation still needs to be examined through more direct evidence. Therefore, online services are more appropriately positioned as a complement to in-person worship, fellowship and pastoral care.

The findings also indicate that the logic of the platform influences how religious content is presented and managed, but does not entirely determine its theological substance. The need for concise, communicative, visual, high-quality and scheduled content demonstrates an adaptation to the digital media environment. This aligns with the perspective of the mediatisation of religion, which views the media as an environment with institutional and technological logics that shape religious representation and authority (Hjarvard, 2016). Within MNC, the pastor remains the primary communicator, and content is reviewed prior to publication. Thus, formal authority is not lost, but manifests through a mediated form. Cloete (2016) explains that digital access can alter the distribution of religious authority; in the case of MNC, clarity of speech, audiovisual quality, and consistency of presence support the reception of the message, but do not replace theological legitimacy.

Preaching via personal devices and within domestic spaces also brings sacred messages into contact with everyday activities. This situation broadens access whilst simultaneously placing religious messages within a competitive landscape for attention. The challenge lies not in making reflections sensational, but in ensuring that accessible forms of presentation continue to support theological reflection and integrity. Tsuria (2021) discusses the blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the profane in digital media, whilst Zaluchu (2023) emphasises the importance of theological reflection on digital religious practices. Therefore, technical innovation must be accompanied by clear theological and ethical considerations.

The profile of MNC's audience demonstrates that digital services are not only relevant to the younger generation. The presence of viewers aged 45 and over, including the elderly and pensioners, highlights the importance of accessibility for congregants facing barriers such as distance, health issues, or mobility problems. A study by Liu et al. (2025) on Generation Z in China shows that the appeal of content and emotional engagement are linked to digital religious participation, although the context differs from that of MNC. The implication is not to mimic the communication style of the younger generation, but rather to provide content that is clear, easily accessible and relevant to a diverse audience. Videos can foster a sense of pastoral closeness, but they do not automatically replace dialogical relationships and individual follow-up. Studies by Sokolovskyi et al. (2026) on religious television and by Ding et al. (2025) on audiovisual media both help to explain that the medium itself shapes the experience and circulation of religious narratives.

The division of responsibilities between the Department of Theology and the Church Council and the Department of Information, Communication, Research and Development highlights the importance of cross-functional governance. The theological element ensures the accuracy of content and its alignment with the ministry's vision, whilst the communications team manages production, editing, packaging and distribution. Pre-publication review serves as an editorial mechanism that links theological accountability with media professionalism. In line with the model proposed by Müller and Friemel (2024), the sustainability of media use within religious communities is influenced by the interaction between the characteristics of the media, the community, and the users. Challenges such as internet connectivity issues, delays in receiving materials, and device limitations indicate that infrastructure disparities are an inherent part of the communication landscape. Consequently, realistic minimum standards—such as clear audio, adequate lighting, consistent formats, simple technical guidelines, and submission deadlines—are more appropriate than demands for expensive production that may restrict participation from regions with limited facilities.

The GPIB's decision not to monetise the MNC channel reaffirms its service-oriented approach and serves as an ethical boundary against the commercialisation of spiritual messages. However, non-monetisation does not mean that programmes are entirely free from the logic of the platform, as the distribution and visibility of content remain dependent on YouTube's infrastructure, interface and rules. The non-commercial stance is therefore best understood as a choice of institutional governance rather than complete freedom from the platform's structure.

In summary, this study proposes a model of "mission-anchored platform negotiation" through four processes: (1) establishing a normative anchor in the form of a vision for ministry and theological integrity; (2) translating messages into audiovisual formats suited to the nature of the platform; (3) cross-unit coordination to ensure accuracy, production quality and continuity of distribution; and (4) evaluation based on pastoral benefits and audience response, rather than merely reach figures. This model brings together strategic communication with mediatisation and digital religion, and demonstrates that platform adaptation can be carried out selectively without subordinating the substance of the message to popularity. These contributions are contextual in nature, rather than universal theories. As the research focused on a single programme and primarily utilised the managers' perspective, further studies should

involve the audience, systematically analyse comments and channel metrics, and compare other religious programmes. This step is essential to distinguish more precisely between access, engagement, interpretation and pastoral impact.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the Morning and Night Call (MNC) programme of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) is a strategic communication practice that has evolved from the need to expand the visibility of ministry and witness in specific and remote areas, and has become increasingly important as the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted face-to-face gatherings. This programme does not merely transfer church devotions to YouTube, but establishes a pattern of spiritual accompaniment that is regularly present in the daily lives of the congregation. The consistency of the broadcasts and the audience's response to delays in publication demonstrate that regularity of distribution has become part of the viewers' expectations. Nevertheless, digital ministry remains positioned as a complement, not a substitute, for worship, fellowship and direct pastoral care.

Key findings reveal that the negotiation between theological authority and the logic of digital platforms takes place selectively and remains anchored to the church's mission. Theological authority is maintained through the derivation of themes from the GPIB's vision and mission, the selection of Bible readings, the training of pastors, the affirmation of the preacher's legitimacy, and the scrutiny of the substance of the message. At the same time, the nature of YouTube encourages adjustments to delivery style, audiovisual quality, duration, publication schedules, cross-channel distribution, and the management of interactions. The platform is not merely a neutral channel, but an environment that helps shape the presentation and reception of religious messages, although it does not entirely supplant theological authority.

This negotiation is underpinned by coordination between the Department of Theology and Church Assemblies and the Department of Information, Organisation, Communication, Research and Development (Inforkom Litbang). The Department of Theology safeguards the direction and accuracy of the content, whilst Inforkom Litbang manages the production, editing, packaging and distribution of content. This division of roles demonstrates that the sustainability of digital ministry depends on organisational governance, resource readiness, realistic production standards, and the ability to address technical and infrastructural challenges. Therefore, strategic communication must align institutional objectives, messages, channels and audience needs, rather than merely pursuing digital reach or engagement.

Theoretically, this study brings together strategic communication, the mediatisation of religion, and digital religion through an analytical model of 'mission-anchored platform negotiation'. This model encompasses four interrelated mechanisms: (1) a normative anchor comprising a vision of service, church themes and theological integrity; (2) communicative translation through the adaptation of audiovisual formats without altering the core substance; (3) socio-technical coordination between theological managers, communicators and production teams; and (4) pastoral feedback through audience responses and internal evaluation. GPIB's decision not to monetise the MNC channel reinforces its service-oriented focus and serves as an ethical boundary against commercialisation. However, this non-commercial orientation does

not eliminate the programme's dependence on YouTube's infrastructure and governance. These findings suggest that religious organisations can utilise the platform's features selectively without subordinating their service objectives to the logic of popularity.

In practical terms, GPIB needs to strengthen its guidelines for the governance of digital ministry, covering the division of responsibilities, theological vetting, minimum audiovisual standards, deadlines for submitting material, contingency mechanisms, the management of interactions, and periodic evaluation. Training for communicators should combine theological accuracy with audiovisual communication skills whilst taking into account the limitations of equipment and connectivity in the areas served. Programme evaluation must also combine operational indicators, such as adherence to schedules and production quality, with pastoral considerations, including accessibility and the needs of elderly congregants, the sick, and those living far from the church. Digital ministry must continue to be linked with in-person services and fellowship so that online access expands ministry without replacing communal relationships. The principle of non-commercialism must also be emphasised in governance so that adaptation to platforms remains centred on pastoral objectives.

These findings should be interpreted whilst taking into account the limitations of the research, which focused on a single programme and relied primarily on interviews with three key informants from the institutional management perspective. The perspectives of the pastor in charge, the technical team, and the congregation have not been adequately represented. Furthermore, the spiritual impact has not been measured through formal surveys or systematic exploration of the audience's experiences. Audience response and regularity of access may indicate the programme's relevance, but do not yet prove a causal link to changes in faith or spirituality. Further research could involve congregants with diverse backgrounds in terms of age, region, mobility and viewing frequency; combine interviews with content analysis, comments and channel metrics; and compare programmes across denominations and platforms. Longitudinal studies could also examine the sustainability of organisational operations, infrastructure disparities, team workloads, and the implications of funding policies for editorial autonomy and pastoral accountability. Such an expansion could test the limits of the applicability of a mission-anchored platform negotiation model and deepen our understanding of the relationship between theological integrity, audience experience, and changes in the digital media landscape.

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