

Educating HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki Teenagers on the Wise Use of Technology in the Digital Era: A Practical-Theological Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Adolescents, Church Education, Digital Era, Digital Technology, Practical Theology	The rapid development of digital technology has transformed many aspects of human life, including the mindset and behavior of adolescents who are growing up alongside this technological advancement. On one hand, digital technology offers opportunities for youth to access information, communicate, and participate more broadly in church ministry. This study aims to analyze the reality of digital technology use among youth at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki, identify its impact, and formulate concrete forms of church ministry in educating adolescents to use technology wisely through a practical theology approach. This research employs a qualitative method, with data collected through observation and interviews involving church workers, parents, and adolescents undergoing catechism (sidi) instruction at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki. The findings reveal that adolescents in this congregation have utilized social media platforms to share devotionals, disseminate worship schedules, and participate in fellowship activities; however, they continue to face the risk of technology dependence, which may weaken their direct spiritual engagement. The church is found to need closer collaboration with parents, adequate training for educators, and a structured, participatory educational approach to help adolescents balance technology use with faith development. This study concludes that practical theology-based education can serve as an effective foundation for the church in guiding adolescents to use digital technology wisely, without compromising Christian values, thereby supporting the sustainable intellectual and spiritual growth of youth.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Technology stands as tangible proof that the advancement of human knowledge has the power to reshape the global civilizational order. The digital era provides a platform for individuals to discover and express their aspirations. Technology is accessible to all age groups, particularly children and adolescents. In this digital era, users enjoy the freedom to access information and communicate transparently. However, adolescents face critical challenges, as their thinking is susceptible to indoctrination regarding risky ideas. Today's digital technology offers a space that can either build up or tear down an individual's mindset, character, and personality (Ganguli et al, 2021). Technological advancements provide electronic and digital media encompassing various platforms and systems designed to facilitate virtual information exchange, communication, and interaction.

Adolescence is a pivotal stage of human growth that largely determines mental and psychological development. It is a time when young people develop their mindsets and perspectives based on what they observe, consume, and learn from their social environments. The digital era has transformed aspects of human life, giving rise to the concept of the "digital generation." Technologies such as internet connectivity, smartphones, and easily accessible applications significantly influence the lives of adolescents (Ngwainmbi, 2022). Intensive guidance is required to ensure they use technology wisely and purposefully. Users must consider the potentially dire consequences of technology use, as negligence in consuming information can compromise personal integrity and character.

The digital era represents a shift in lifestyle driven by electronic systems, where human needs are met through applications available on mobile devices. Systems now manage information, communication, and coordination to support societal activities. Conventional service models operating within digital technology frameworks can impact societal stability and discipline. Misuse of digital technology can lead users into cultures of hate speech or provocation, as well as traps involving gambling, fraud, and theft (Park, 2015). Church members themselves can be perpetrators of such behavior, which can damage reputations and erode relationships within the fellowship. According to the 2024 Indonesian internet penetration survey, 34.40% of online users fall into the Gen Z and Gen Alpha adolescent categories (born between 1997–2012 and 2010 onwards, respectively). Adolescents face negative impacts from digital technology use, specifically an increased vulnerability to cyber threats and hate speech. Within the church context specifically at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki—adolescents addicted to social media risk losing the spiritual and ethical values fostered through worship, service, and fellowship interactions.

A church oriented toward practical theology must establish an intensive ministry to address the struggles of modern society. The church does not reject development and change, provided they support its ministry. It is the church's duty to reflect upon and address these changes based on doctrinal teachings and the Bible (McLemore et al, 2019). The digital era impacts the lives of adolescents, who require conducive and structured guidance. The church can achieve this through a ministry that addresses both the soul and the intellect, emphasizing that technology should be used to build the spirituality of the congregation, particularly the youth. Guiding adolescents in technology use through the lens of practical theology requires creativity and an innovative mindset, as the church seeks to involve young people in ministry via digital technology. The church plays a significant role in opening hearts and minds to the understanding that everything in this world including digital-era technological advancements can be utilized for ministry and evangelism.

This study presents a novel perspective grounded in practical theology, serving as a foundation for educating and guiding adolescents in their response to technology usage. Previous research has primarily focused on leveraging technology to strengthen adolescent faith specifically through the church's role in deepening religious understanding via social media platforms. The novelty of this study lies in its approach: moving beyond a static view of adolescents merely using technology, it explores how technology can be harnessed to shape their intellectual and spiritual lives within the context of the faith community. The study examines various social media platforms, considering their potential as instruments for ministry, spaces for creativity, and means of building spiritual relationships without compromising the essence of communal fellowship (Doma, (2025).

Utilizing technology as a supporting tool in church ministry represents a strategic approach to reaching adolescents. Smith (2017) argues that the church's use of technological tools can maximize ministry strategies for adolescents by facilitating more effective digital interactions. Smith's research highlights how technology offers a breakthrough in relationship-building for adolescent education; however, it focuses primarily on church leadership models rather than providing an in-depth analysis of the practical theology involved in fostering adolescent intellectual and spiritual growth through technology (Smith, 2017). Consequently, this study seeks to build upon those findings by incorporating practical theology as a transformative foundation for educating and guiding adolescents in the digital age.

Barron (2016) explains that technology has spawned various social media platforms that expand the scope of ministry, thereby shaping virtual interactions, discipleship, and service. Barron's work emphasizes the active role of adolescents in leveraging digital tools for ministry. Yet, Barron focuses mainly on the functional aspects of technology within ministry, overlooking its potential to foster intellectual and spiritual development in adolescents (Barron, 2016). This study develops a ministry model that combines the roles of church leaders and parents as supportive figures in nurturing the intellectual and spiritual well-being of adolescents. This approach differs from previous studies, which tended to position the church and parents merely as supporting factors in the education and guidance of adolescents. Church ministry that actively involves parents must be understood as part of an effective strategy to address challenges and mitigate the risks of technology misuse, thereby strengthening the spirituality of adolescents. Another novel aspect of this study lies in its specific focus on adolescents at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki representing Christian Generation Z as they navigate the digital era. A practical theology framework serves as the foundation for introducing innovation through the development of a church ministry model designed to shape adolescent character holistically and relevantly in the context of digital technology usage. Consequently, this research yields contextual and relevant ministry recommendations that enable the church to respond effectively to the rapid advancement of digital technology.

2. METHODS

Qualitative research is an inductive approach primarily aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals or groups. It can be defined as a social investigation method that emphasizes how people interpret and comprehend their experiences and their environments. In this study, the author engaged church workers, parents, and teenagers undergoing confirmation classes as respondents, as this setting allowed for interviews regarding the theories and methods essential to the church's educational program (Wahyuni, 2024). While various methods exist within the qualitative research framework, they generally share a common vision: to explore the social realities of specific individuals, groups, and cultures. Researchers employ qualitative approaches to investigate the behaviors, perspectives, and experiences of their subjects (Remler, 2021). Fundamentally, qualitative research is interpretive, focusing on the social realities present within the object of study.

Qualitative research is an influential approach in social science, particularly valuable for generating and developing theories and achieving other research objectives. Researchers must be familiar with key qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, case studies, and the analysis of documents, social media, and other available forms of qualitative data. When collecting data, qualitative researchers observe subjects or informants using instruments such as structured questionnaires that yield numerical or categorical data representing various characteristics, behaviors, or attitudes (Bell, 2019). The author employed observation and interview techniques to enrich the study. The research findings must incorporate transparent data and sources derived from the participating teenagers. In qualitative research, interview results are cross-referenced with the literature used by the researcher to test hypotheses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The reality of teenagers at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki regarding digital technology usage

Innovation in the education and intellectual and spiritual nurturing of teenagers within church ministry is a crucial step toward enhancing the effectiveness of teaching. Engaging and relevant development programs must go beyond standard church instruction; they need to touch the souls of teenagers amidst the rapid advancement of digital technology and socio-cultural shifts. Church teaching should not merely focus on analyzing current technologies and trends but must also prioritize the quality of innovative content capable of strengthening the teenagers' intellect and spirituality within the Christian faith. Social media platforms can significantly influence how communication and

information needs are met; however, teaching must remain grounded in a consistent and rational biblical foundation while offering opportunities for teenagers to experience spiritual transformation.

Practical theology implemented through the Diakonia section within an educational framework serves as the basis for ministry aimed at teaching and guiding teenagers to achieve a balance between faith and knowledge, as innovation must remain committed to fostering Christian character. Teenagers contributing to the ministry at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki have utilized social media platforms to share devotionals and Sunday service orders, as well as to participate in Sunday worship. Educational church programs can encourage teenagers to engage in spiritual formation without the constraints of time or space. An educational church must foster flexibility in how teenagers respond to digital technology without abandoning fundamental doctrines and dogmas.

The teaching methods employed by the church must prioritize high-quality material that aligns with the biblical context. Digital platforms serve as effective tools for delivering creative and efficient ministry content. Teenagers possess a deep curiosity when encountering new things; therefore, the church must establish two-way communication in its educational efforts. Teenagers should be encouraged and supported to participate in discussions where they can share their experiences and knowledge within their social spheres (Rantung et al, 2020). The church plays a vital role in fostering the teenagers' aspiration to build a community characterized by integrity in both faith and knowledge. Digital technology represents a breakthrough for the church in developing its ministry, worship, and teaching. Youth fellowships such as Naposobulung serve as communities that foster the spiritual growth of their members, enabling relationships to remain strong in the digital era (Smith, 2017). Mentoring youth requires consistent and structured effort to ensure that the ministry process is inclusive and participatory.

Technology can drive significant change if harnessed to meet needs that foster intellectual growth among youth. However, social media platforms and digital technology also pose challenges, potentially influencing youth mindsets and perspectives in problematic ways (Nababan, 2023). Since young people gravitate toward engaging, trending, and creative content, the church must strive to develop spiritual ministries that align with the changing times. Social media platforms are highly effective for reaching the younger generation, necessitating creative, high-quality, and Bible-centered educational methods (Stiles, 2016). The church must continue to oversee and guide the use of technology to ensure the growth of the youth's faith and intellect.

The impact of digital technology usage on youth at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki

The church has embraced technological advancements as a means to engage youth by comprehensively proclaiming the Word, providing instruction, and facilitating worship. HKBP operates within a framework of digital ecclesiology, utilizing social media platforms to enhance the effectiveness of evangelism through teaching and education. Youth participation in digital ministry is crucial for fostering strong connections with congregants who face geographical limitations in attending in-person worship services. Leveraging social media platforms and digital technology to educate youth has become a vital strategy in today's digital age. Through digital technology, the church can collaborate with youth to systematically develop its ministry and reach congregants scattered across various locations (Purba et al, 2025). It is not enough for the church merely to adopt digital technology in its ministry; it must also involve and empower youth to play an active role in fostering a dynamic and contemporary church.

The use of social media platforms in the digital era plays a significant role in educational systems, as these developments enhance the ability of youth to adapt to change. Educational methods implemented by the church must be supported by appropriate resources, as youth development focuses on more than just the consumption of spiritual content (Heryanto et al, 2024). An interactive relationship between the church and the youth must be cultivated to achieve a balanced approach that enhances the potential of both parties. Collaborative interaction is essential for achieving shared wholeness and establishing a robust forum for constructive dialogue. The church must manage social media platforms with care and responsiveness to ensure their function remains consistent with biblical

principles. Teaching strategies must be systematic, as youth have the potential to build their spirituality within relevant communities when using technology wisely.

The church's methods for educating youth on the wise use of digital technology must be supported by innovation and breakthroughs across various aspects of its ministry activities. By leveraging popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the church can creatively and innovatively expand the reach of its proclamation of the Word. Educating teenagers on the wise use of technology offers the church an opportunity to connect with the entire congregation, particularly the youth who are deeply engaged with digital platforms. Spiritual content created by teenagers has the potential to reach congregants who are unable to participate directly in fellowship gatherings. In the current digital era, the church is called upon to provide online worship services as a form of ministry, ensuring it remains connected to congregants who are otherwise unreachable (Gulo et al, 2023). The church must facilitate structured education to empower teenagers to use technology wisely, thereby enabling their active involvement through creative ministry.

Careless use of technology by teenagers can create social divides within the fellowship. The church certainly requires close collaboration with parents in educating teenagers, allowing parental influence to make a significant impact. Educating teenagers on the wise use of technology aims to prevent them from becoming overly dependent on modern conveniences. Teenagers must learn to conduct themselves wisely in both the real and virtual worlds, maintaining a balanced perspective even when systems spiral out of control. The church needs to adopt teaching methods that actively engage teenagers in practical ways, as direct involvement allows them to experience tangible change firsthand.

As they develop intellectually, teenagers form their own perceptions in response to the concepts they encounter. The church should harness the potential of its youth to maintain a commitment to using technology innovatively. Wise education requires a positive connection, ensuring that spiritual and intellectual growth is fostered regardless of the situation or habits involved (Apriyanti et al, 2023). Through its educational approach, the church does not seek to restrict teenagers' use of technology; rather, it aims to cultivate their potential by utilizing technology as a tool that benefits the fellowship and ministry. Technological advancement calls for a contemporary mindset, as the innovations introduced by teenagers can enhance the efficiency of church ministry for the future.

Concrete ministry by HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki in educating teenagers to use digital technology wisely.

Before engaging in digital-era technology education grounded in practical theology, HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki should first prepare innovative training and guidance for its instructors. Consistently equipping instructors will enhance the structured methods applied to the audience (teenagers). With supportive and adequate empowerment, the church can not only sustain consistent ministry but also potentially foster the objective intellectual and spiritual growth of teenagers. The church must first equip instructors based on Christian values, subsequently supported by adequate intellectual knowledge regarding digital technology. The structured educational concept within the church must be capable of evaluating every contribution arising from the dialogue between instructors and participants (Pandie, 2022). A church that educates wisely aims to facilitate teenagers in developing mature spiritual faith alongside knowledge that aligns with and supports ministry within the church and congregation.

The ministry implemented by HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki to educate teenagers through practical theology involves structured education delivered via confirmation classes and fellowships during categorical worship services. HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki utilizes teaching materials appropriate for Christian religious education, ensuring the content delivered is accurate and organized (Waruwu, 2021). As digital technology heavily captures the attention of teenagers in the church, teaching concepts must incorporate educational methods that collaborate with digital technology. Educational methods involving digital technology have successfully influenced teenagers' interest in participating in church activities. However, the ministry at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki must strive to provide the necessary supporting resources for all learners to utilize. The educational methods

implemented at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki must actively involve all participants, as an authoritarian educational approach would diminish teenagers' interest. The emergence of various social media platforms presents a challenge for contemporary church life. Technology has permeated many aspects of human existence, often ensnaring users in a comfort that causes them to lose their way. Christian adolescents and young adults are frequently exposed to the negative influences of digital technological advancements. Structured teaching methods are essential to equip Christian youth to face these technological challenges. From a Christian perspective, adolescence is viewed as a period of significant spiritual struggle. Church instruction aims to guide youth toward behavior consistent with the Christian faith and reflective of Christ's way of life. As the future of the church, Christian youth must uphold appropriate character and conduct as they mature as individuals. The church serves as a nurturing environment that educates youth, fostering faith and spiritual growth in the face of digital advancements. Without wise management, the digital era can lead to moral or spiritual deviation; the church must therefore employ strategies to address erroneous mindsets. A supportive community is required one deeply engaged in fostering spiritual growth amidst change. Christian education must be implemented in a structured manner to shape how youth interact with the evolving times.

As members of Generation Z growing up in the digital age, these young people possess a natural understanding of how to use and leverage technology. HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki should capitalize on this knowledge, viewing it as an opportunity to collaborate on integrating technology into church ministry. The church needs to develop an efficient strategy for engaging Generation Z, ensuring that educational methods go beyond faith-based ministry to incorporate digital technology education. Through this strategy, HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki must uphold spiritual values, thereby delivering education that is purposeful and impactful within the framework of the Christian faith. At the same time, the church must remain critical and discerning when evaluating contributions arising from discussions with the youth. Christian education must be grounded in the Christian faith, producing knowledge that integrates spiritual depth with structured intellectual development.

4. CONCLUSION

Technology influences the actions of teenagers based on the functions and utilities it offers. An educational church must guide teenagers to view technology as an opportunity to develop their personal potential. A key initial step for the church is to foster an understanding among teenagers regarding the consequences of technology use, prioritizing the positive impact on the development of their perspectives and mindsets. Teenagers engaging with the world of technology must learn to balance productive and counterproductive activities. As an educational institution, the church must firmly guide teenagers to avoid stereotypical attitudes when using digital technology.

An educational approach grounded in practical theology at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki can stimulate teenagers' interest in cultivating their creativity. Insights contributed by teenagers, combined with the theories presented, serve as a bridge to create new creative spaces within the church fellowship. Educational methods at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki should not rely solely on theory-based instruction but must be realized through concrete practice. Leveraging digital platforms encourages teenagers to become directly involved in strengthening their position and role as a specific group capable of driving significant change. As an educational entity, HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki must remain responsive to innovation without compromising the Christian faith, thereby guiding teenagers to bring about meaningful change within the congregation.

The concept of wise education at HKBP Maranatha Payung Sekaki rooted in practical theology and focused on empowering teenagers through digital technology can be realized through tangible contributions. By adopting this wise educational approach, the church can collaborate on creative ideas stemming from the teenagers' perspectives and mindsets, thereby broadening the intellectual scope of church ministry. A church that educates wisely through practical theology should employ structured methods, such as conducting intensive dialogues to explore teenagers' creativity regarding digital

technology and harnessing it for ministry purposes. The church must maintain its existence as a venue for ministry and teaching shaping the faith and intellect of adolescents by utilizing technology wisely.

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