The Role of Christian Religious Education: Strengthening Teenagers' Christian Identity Amidst the Influence of Social Media

Rosnila Hura

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Abdi Allah, Mojokerto, Indonesia

Corresponding Author's e-mail : *rosnilahura2021@gmail.com*

Abstract : *The Role of Christian Education: Strengthening the Christian Identity of Teenagers in the Midst of the Influence of Social Media. Social media has become an integral part of teenagers' daily lives and affects the way they interact, think, and shape self-identity. In this context, the Christian identity of teenagers faces increasingly complex challenges due to various digital content that is not always in line with the values of the Christian faith. Although there is a lot of research on Christian education, empirical studies that specifically examine the role of Christian Education in strengthening the Christian identity of teenagers in the digital era are still limited. This research aims to describe the influence of social media on Christian teenagers and examine the role of Christian Religious Education in strengthening their Christian identity. This research uses a descriptive quantitative approach with the survey method. The data was collected through a Likert scale questionnaire given to 120 Christian teenagers in Mojokerto Regency and analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of a percentage. Research results show that social media has a positive and negative influence on the formation of adolescent Christian identity. In addition, Christian Religious Education plays an important role as a protective mechanism in strengthening the identity of youth's faith through the formation of faith awareness, critical attitude, and moral steadfastness in facing the challenges of the digital world.*

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Adolescent Christian Identity, Social Media, Descriptive Quantitative Research.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and the increasingly widespread use of social media has brought significant changes in social life, including the lives of teenagers. In the context of today's teenage life, social media is no longer just a means of communication, but has become the main space in daily social activities. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) announced by the General Chairman of APJII Muhammad Arif when announcing the results of the internet user survey at the APJII Office, Jakarta, Wednesday (1/2024) that in 2022 77.1% of the Indonesian population will use the internet, 2023 will reach 78.19 % and in 2024 it will reach 79.5%. with the majority of internet users aged between 15-24 years old. Looking at the data shows that teenagers live very close and intimately with social media. In general, the use of social media among teenagers at this time is something that cannot be avoided anymore. Almost every day teenagers access social media just to find information through twitter, then convey the activities they do through facebook or path (Ayun, n.d.). For

teenagers, social media becomes a platform that gives them the opportunity to interact, communicate, share information, and access various types of content from any part of the world.

A researcher mentioned that Teenagers in the context of millennials become a generation that is faced with technological advances. Teenagers have unique and sophisticated abilities. Communication and networking that are built using various technology facilities, including social media, which is also the strength and main need of me-ka (Jellyan Alviani Awang., n.d.).

Besides this positive side, the influence of social media on the formation of Christian identity in teenagers is still not widely understood. With the ease of access to this information, there are also negative impacts that must be considered and watched out for, especially in terms of the formation of their personal and social identities. Identity is an important concept in the psychological development of adolescents, which is related to how they see themselves and how they want to be recognized by others. At this stage, teenagers are very vulnerable to the influence of the surrounding environment, including the influence that comes from social media. Many teenagers form their self-image and identity based on what they see and consume on social media, both in the form of values, lifestyles, and worldviews introduced by various influencers or content that they follow. However, the formation of this identity does not always go well.

Besides this positive side, the influence of social media on the formation of Christian identity in teenagers is still not widely understood. With the ease of access to this information, there are also negative impacts that must be considered and watched out for, especially in terms of the formation of their personal and social identities. Identity is an important concept in the psychological development of adolescents, which is related to how they see themselves and how they want to be recognized by others. At this stage, teenagers are very vulnerable to the influence of the surrounding environment, including the influence that comes from social media. Many teenagers form their self-image and identity based on what they see and consume on social media, both in the form of values, lifestyles, and worldviews introduced by various influencers or content that they follow. However, the formation of this identity does not always go well.

In the context of religion, Christian teenagers often face challenges in maintaining their faith identity in the midst of popular culture on social media. The emergence of values that are contrary to Christian teachings or social pressure to conform to the norms that apply on social media can affect the way they see and practice their faith. On the other hand, Christian education is expected to play an important role in helping teenagers to remain firm in their faith identity. Christian education not only aims to teach religious knowledge, but also to form character and strengthen faith that can be the foundation in facing various social challenges, including the influence of social media. With this background, this research aims to analyze the influence of social media on the formation of Christian identity in adolescents and the role of Christian education in overcoming that influence. It is important to understand the extent to which social media shapes the views and behaviors of Christian teenagers, as well as how Christian education can play a role in strengthening their faith identity in this digital era.

Several previous literature studies such as the results of previous research (Valkenburg, P.M. and Peter 2011) show that social media can affect the formation of adolescent identity through the process of socialization and identification. Research conducted by Smith (Smith 2015) shows that social media can affect the formation of Christian identity in teenagers through the process of socialization and identification with the Christian community. In addition, there is still research stated in an article (Hess 2015) showing that social media can influence Christian teenagers in developing their identity, especially in terms of Christian beliefs and values. Likewise, other research (Kaveri Subrahmanyam 2011) shows that social media can affect teenagers in developing their identity, especially in terms of physical appearance and behavior. Furthermore, Kaveri explained that the negative influence of social media can be overcome by providing the right education about the healthy use of social media. By looking at the previous study, it is felt that it is also necessary to conduct further research on the influence of social media on the formation of Christian youth identity and the role of Christian education in overcoming it. Why go through Christian Education? Because Christian Education not only teaches about faith but also about the formation of morals, ethics, character and at the same time instills values and attitudes of fear of God. This research specifically examines the influence of social media on the

formation of Christian identity in Christian teenagers, which has not been widely explored in previous research. Previous research focused more on the impact of social media on teenagers in general. This research also emphasizes the important role of Christian education in helping teenagers overcome the negative influence of social media. This study uses a more comprehensive analysis method to understand the influence of social media on the Christian identity of adolescents. Research results show that social media has a significant influence on the formation of Christian identity of teenagers and the importance of the role of Christian Education to help teenagers in influencing that influence.

This research starts from the assumption that Christian education has a role in shaping and strengthening the identity of Christian teenagers in the midst of the rapid influence of social media. Christian education is believed to be not only the transfer of theological knowledge, but also a process of character formation and spirituality rooted in the teachings of Christ. On the other hand, social media as part of today's digital culture also affects the way teenagers see themselves, their life values, and their faith identity. Social media presents a variety of content and values that can be contrary to the principles of the Christian faith, thus causing its own challenge for teenagers in maintaining their Christian identity. Therefore, it is assumed that the stronger and more relevant the Christian education that teenagers receive, the greater their ability to filter the negative influence of social media and maintain their identity as followers of Christ.

This research aims to understand how Christian education contributes to strengthening the Christian identity of teenagers in the midst of challenges and the influence of social media.

This research has a novelty by placing Christian Religious Education as a protective mechanism for the identity of Christian youth faith in facing social media ambivalence in the local context of Indonesia, especially Mojokerto Regency.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive quantitative approach with the survey method. This approach was chosen to describe systematically and factually the influence of social media and the role of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in strengthening the Christian identity of adolescents. Related to the type and approach of research, this research is a descriptive quantitative research that aims to describe the phenomenon as it is without manipulating the variables. This research focuses on measuring the perceptions and experiences of Christian teenagers regarding the use of social media and the role of Christian Education in the formation of their Christian identity.

The research subjects are Christian teenagers who are in the teenage age range and actively use social media. There were 120 study respondents of Christian teenagers who were obtained through purposive sampling techniques, with criteria: Christian, being teenagers, and actively using social media. Data collection techniques are collected using a closed questionnaire (surne) compiled based on the influence of social media, Christian identity, and the role of Christian Religious Education. The questionnaire uses the Likert scale to measure the respondent's level of approval of the statements given.

The research instrument is in the form of a questionnaire compiled based on a theoretical study of Christian identity, social media, and Christian Religious Education. The instrument includes several indicators, including: the type of social media content consumed by teenagers, the influence of social media on attitudes and faith, understanding Christian identity, and the role of teachers and Christian Religious Education materials in guiding teenagers to face the influence of social media. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics by calculating the percentage of respondents' answers. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of tables and descriptive narratives to illustrate the tendency of Christian teenagers' perceptions towards the influence of social media and the role of Christian Education in strengthening their Christian identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Spiritual Content on Social Media.

The presence of social media technology is recognized as a communication tool that is very helpful and makes it easier for humans to share information, as well as interact with each other (Mesirawati Waruwu, n.d.).

Research results show that social media is a platform that is very close to the life of Christian teenagers. Based on the analysis of questionnaire data on 120 Christian teenage respondents in Mojokerto Regency, it was found that TikTok is the most frequently used social media to access spiritual content, followed by Instagram and YouTube. This finding shows that the characteristics of short video-based media that are communicative and visual have a high attraction for teenagers. As many as 59,64% of respondents stated that they often access spiritual content such as short sermons, Christian reflections, and Bible verses through social media. This percentage shows that social media not only functions as a means of entertainment, but also becomes a space for learning faith for Christian teenagers. This finding is in line with the research (Kinanti 2023) which states that TikTok is used by teenagers as a medium for expression and self-identity formation. However, this study expands the findings by showing that religious content also contributes to the formation of the faith identity of Christian teenagers

Furthermore, 53.71% of respondents stated that spiritual content helps their spiritual growth, while 68.23% of respondents admitted to gaining encouragement of faith, motivation, and spiritual inspiration through the content. This data indicates that spiritual content on social media functions as a spiritual reinforcement that is relevant to the lives of teenagers in the digital era. This strengthens the view (Hess 2015) that digital media can be a means of contextual faith education if used appropriately.

However, this study also found that 71.26% of respondents often find content that contradicts Christian values. This finding shows that there is an ambivalence of social media as a space for the formation of faith. On the one hand, social media provides constructive spiritual content, but on the other hand it also presents values that have the potential to weaken the Christian identity of teenagers. This condition emphasizes the importance of the role of Christian Religious Education in equipping teenagers with critical abilities to filter digital content based on Christian faith values.

Thus, the results of this study confirm that social media has a double potential in the lives of Christian teenagers, namely as a means of faith growth as well as a serious challenge for the formation of Christian identity. Therefore, Christian Religious Education needs to be present contextually to guide teenagers in using social media wisely and responsibly.

Christian Teenagers Self-Identity in the Middle of Social Media Influence.

Research results show that social media has a significant influence on the formation of Christian identity of teenagers. Based on the analysis of questionnaire data on 120 respondents, it was found that 40.23% of teenagers said they had experienced confusion or lost their identity due to the influence of social media. This finding indicates that social media can be a factor that interferes with the process of forming adolescent faith identity if it is not accompanied by adequate assistance. In addition, 61.63% of respondents stated that social media often displays content that normalizes behavior that is contrary to the values of the Christian faith. This finding is in line with the research (Felita 2016) which explains that what teenagers see on social media is used as a guideline to shape their own concept even though it is contradictory.

This condition shows that Christian teenagers are in a dilemmatic situation, where they are constantly confronted with different world values that are even contrary to the teachings of the Christian faith. This finding is in line with research (Valkenburg, P.M. and Peter 2011) which states that digital media can shape adolescent identity through an intense and repetitive value socialization process.

However, the research results also show a significant positive side. As many as 65.51% of respondents stated that they had a strong awareness of Christian values, and 55.82% of respondents stated that they never doubted their faith just because of information obtained from social media. This data shows that although social media presents serious challenges, the Christian identity of teenagers is not completely eroded. This indicates the existence of protective factors that play a role in maintaining the stability of adolescent faith.

From the point of view of Christian theology, the understanding of self-identity is not determined by worldly standards, but is rooted in the human relationship with God as the Creator. (Calvin 2013) emphasized that the recognition of Allah is the main basis for humans to understand their identity correctly. Thus, when teenagers build their identity based on digital values without a foundation of faith, then the identity crisis becomes difficult to avoid. On the other hand, if Christian identity is strongly implanted, teenagers will have a strong frame of mind in responding to the influence of social media.

This finding emphasizes that the formation of adolescent Christian identity is a dynamic process and vulnerable to the influence of the digital environment. Therefore, the role of Christian Religious Education is needed that consciously and structuredly guides teenagers to understand their identity in Christ and develop a critical attitude towards social media content.

Based on previous research, it was found that the impact of identity crisis due to the use of social media is to more often ignore people who live close to them and enjoy online friendships on social media, follow fashion trends, idolize people they see on social media, and not infrequently they also respond and reply to negative jokes (Koehuan 2024). Uploading photos, activities, experiences, even problems on teenagers' social media that are not always in accordance with the real situation is a way for teenagers try to show their good side (R. Meilanny Putri 2016).

The Role of PAK in the Formation of Christian Identity.

Self-identity is a unity of the belief system, value system and also behavior patterns. A study states that every teenager needs a clear and appropriate commitment in recognizing themselves (Krismawati, n.d.).

An article written by Berthold Anton Pareira O.Carm, he emphasized that Christian identity is a continuous journey and struggle to achieve life goals that are in accordance with the call of Christ. This view is based on a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians which states that knowing Christ and His resurrection power is the core of Christian identity, which must be realized in everyday life. The identity referred to in Paul's letter must be tested and accounted for through living behavior and testimony that reflects faith in Christ.

Christian identity can be understood as the center of a person's faith life, which is reflected in beliefs, values, and daily life practices as a follower of Christ. It is Christian identity that can distinguish teenagers as believers from other teenagers who do not believe in God. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the importance of the role of parents in building this identity through family discipleship worship, which is the basis and main place of Christian discipleship to realize children's spiritual growth (Loes 2022). And not only parents but also Christian educators or Christian teachers also have an important role. In directing the identity of teenagers, religious education must be able to balance the emergence of self image, self esteem and ideal self.

In the view of Reformed theology, Christian identity is understood as the result of God's grace that brings total transformation in the lives of believers. This identity not only includes the status of a saved person, but also a call to live according to God's will in all aspects of life. Reformed Theology emphasizes that Christian identity is formed through an intimate relationship with Christ, which is called unio cum Christo (united with Christ). John Calvin teaches that believers are united with Christ through faith, and in this unity, they receive justification, sanctification, and new life. Calvin described the church as a "mother" who gave birth and guided believers in their spiritual lives. In this context, Christian identity is not only personal, but also collective, manifested in the communion of the church as the body of Christ (Pattipeilohy 2017).

Thus, Christian identity includes a deep understanding of who we are in Christ, which is reflected in our faith, values, and behavior. The process of forming this identity takes place throughout life and requires commitment to continue to grow in faith and living the teachings of Christ. Based on the understanding that Christian identity is dynamic and also Christian identity is related to a transformed way of life in accordance with the will of Allah, the role of Christian Education is very necessary.

Christian Religious Education has a strategic role in shaping the identity of the faith of adolescents, especially in cultivating reflective abilities and moral considerations in the midst of the complexity of modern social life. In the midst of an increasingly complex social environment, Christian education should not only be limited to conveying the content of doctrine; Christian

education must also function as a strong moral compass that allows young people to face various challenges in their time (Rumondor 2025).

Research results show that Christian Religious Education (PAK) has a significant role in the formation and strengthening of Christian identity of teenagers in the midst of the influence of social media. Based on the analysis of questionnaire data, 79.27% of respondents stated that Christian Religious Education helped them strengthen their identity as Christians. This finding shows that PAK serves as an important foundation in instilling values, faith, and Christian views in teenagers. The findings are in line with thought (Numahara. 2007) where Christian education holistically touches all aspects of life cognitively, affection and behavior. This is where it is seen that the role of religious education is very important in controlling and balancing moral and social aspects.

In addition, 77,92% of respondents admitted that Christian Religious Education strengthens their faith identity especially in the midst of the great negative influence of social media. This data indicates that PAK acts as a protective mechanism that helps teenagers face the flow of digital values that are often contrary to the teachings of the Christian faith. Christian Religious Education not only functions as a transfer of theological knowledge, but also as a means of forming the character and spirituality of teenagers.

Furthermore, 81.82% of respondents stated that through Christian Religious Education they gained a clearer understanding of who they are in front of God. This understanding strengthens the identity of adolescent Christianity as God's creation and followers of Christ. This finding is in line with Calvin's view (2013) which emphasizes that true identity can only be understood through the recognition of God as the Creator. Thus, Christian Religious Education plays a strategic role in guiding teenagers to build a faith identity that is rooted in the relationship with Christ, not in the standards of the digital world.

The Effectiveness of PAK Teachers and PAK Materials in Answering Social Media Challenges.

The effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in shaping the Christian identity of teenagers cannot be separated from the role of teachers and the relevance of teaching materials. The research results show that 75.67% of respondents stated that PAK teachers directly discuss the faith challenges faced by teenagers in the digital era. This shows that PAK teachers play an active role in associating learning materials with the reality of teenagers' lives.

In addition, 85,13% of respondents stated that PAK teachers not only discuss the doctrine of faith, but also raise current issues, including social media and its influence on the lives of teenagers. This approach makes PAK learning contextual and relevant, so that it is easier to understand and apply by teenagers. This finding confirms that contextual religious learning has a stronger influence in shaping the attitudes and faith identity of adolescents.

Furthermore, 79.73% of respondents stated that PAK teachers discussed the social media phenomenon that affects the Christian faith, thus helping teenagers to be more critical and vigilant in using social media. In fact, 84,93% of respondents hope that PAK teachers will consistently discuss issues that are relevant to the lives of today's teenagers. This data shows that the effectiveness of teachers and PAK materials greatly determines the success of Christian Religious Education in answering social media challenges.

This finding is in line with the view (John Stott 2017) which emphasizes that God's word must be applied contextually in real life. Forming a character centered on the principles of love, truth, and obedience to Allah (Berek 2025). Through Christian Education can strengthen and strengthen the faith and identity of teenagers (Arifianto 2025).

PAK Approach in Preparing Teenagers to Face Social Media

The research results show that the Christian Religious Education approach applied by PAK teachers has a real contribution in preparing teenagers to face the influence of social media. As many as 64.79% of respondents stated that through PAK learning they were taught to remain faithful to their faith in Jesus Christ even though social media often displayed negative content. This finding shows that PAK instills the principle of faith loyalty as the main foundation in facing digital challenges.

In addition, 60,56% of respondents stated that PAK teaches teenagers to distinguish social media content that is appropriate and not in accordance with the values of the Christian faith,

while 87,32% of respondents believe that PAK guides them to filter social media content based on Christian faith values. This data shows that Christian Religious Education plays a role in building teenagers' reflective and critical abilities towards digital content.

Furthermore, 80.00% of respondents felt that PAK learning gave confidence to stay alive according to the Christian faith in the middle of an open digital world and full of external influences. This finding confirms that the PAK approach not only forms the knowledge of faith, but also builds the firmness of attitude and moral courage of Christian teenagers. Thus, Christian Religious Education plays a role as a means of holistic faith development, covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in the lives of teenagers in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The results of a study on 120 Christian teenagers in Mojokerto Regency, show that social media plays a significant role in influencing the formation of Christian identity of teenagers, both through constructive influences and those that have the potential to weaken faith. Social media is not only a means of entertainment and information, but also a place for value formation that can strengthen or weaken the identity of faith of teenagers.

Research results show that although Christian teenagers are often exposed to social media content that is contrary to Christian faith values, most of them still have a strong faith awareness. This condition indicates that the Christian identity of teenagers is not formed passively by social media, but is influenced by the faith development process that they receive.

Christian Religious Education is proven to play an important role as a protective mechanism in strengthening the Christian identity of teenagers in the midst of the challenges of the digital era. Through contextual and relevant learning, Christian Religious Education helps teenagers understand their identity as followers of Christ, develop critical attitudes towards social media content, and build firmness of faith and Christian character.

This research makes an empirical contribution to the development of Christian Religious Education, especially in designing learning that is responsive to the digital reality of teenagers. The findings of this research can be a practical reference for Christian Religious Education teachers, churches, and Christian educational institutions in strengthening the identity of the faith of adolescents to remain rooted in Christian values in the midst of the increasingly strong influence of social media.

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