From Institutional Authority to Digital Actors: The Transformation of Interfaith Dialogue in the Digital Technology Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of interfaith dialogue, reshaping not only patterns of communication among religious communities but also the distribution of religious authority and the formation of religious public spheres. This study aims to systematically examine how digital transformation—through social media, artificial intelligence, and online ecosystems—reconfigures the practices, actors, and meanings of interfaith dialogue in the contemporary era. This research is particularly significant given the growing role of digital technology as both a medium and a mediating structure of religious dialogue, which generates new opportunities while simultaneously raising complex ethical, epistemological, and theological challenges. This study adopts a qualitative approach through the *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* method by examining journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic books published between 2020 and 2024 and sourced from reputable international databases. The analysis follows stages of systematic selection, thematic coding, and conceptual synthesis to identify major patterns of findings, shifts in authority, and theoretical tendencies within the scholarship on digital interfaith dialogue. The findings indicate that digital platforms significantly expand the space for interfaith dialogue by enhancing inclusivity, accessibility, and participation across geographical and institutional boundaries. At the same time, this transformation accompanies a shift in religious authority from institutional structures toward decentralized digital actors, including religious content creators and artificial intelligence–based systems that function as epistemic mediators. On the other hand, the study also reveals serious challenges, such as algorithmic bias, disinformation, the commodification of religious practices, and increasing dependence on AI-based dialogue systems, all of which risk reducing the depth of theological reflection and the overall quality of interfaith engagement. The implications of this study underscore the urgency of developing a prophetic and theological

approach as a normative framework for responding to digital transformation. Such an approach positions religious communities as critical actors in shaping digital ethics, strengthening technological literacy, and fostering cross-sector collaboration with technology stakeholders. The originality of this study lies in its critical synthesis that integrates interfaith dialogue studies, digital religion, and artificial intelligence within a single analytical framework, thereby enriching the conceptual understanding of religious studies amid global digital transformation.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mengubah secara mendasar lanskap dialog lintas iman, tidak hanya dalam pola komunikasi antarumat beragama, tetapi juga dalam distribusi otoritas keagamaan dan pembentukan ruang publik religius. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara sistematis bagaimana transformasi digital—melalui media sosial, kecerdasan buatan, dan ekosistem daring—membentuk ulang praktik, aktor, dan makna dialog lintas iman di era kontemporer. Studi ini penting mengingat meningkatnya peran teknologi digital sebagai medium sekaligus struktur mediasi dialog keagamaan, yang menghadirkan peluang baru sekaligus problem etis, epistemologis, dan teologis yang kompleks. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode Systematic Literature Review *(SLR) dengan menelaah artikel jurnal, prosiding, dan buku akademik yang dipublikasikan pada periode 2020–2024 dan dihimpun dari basis data internasional bereputasi. Analisis dilakukan melalui tahapan seleksi sistematis, pengkodean tematik, dan sintesis konseptual untuk mengidentifikasi pola temuan, pergeseran otoritas, serta kecenderungan teoritis dalam kajian dialog lintas iman digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa platform digital memperluas ruang dialog lintas iman melalui peningkatan inklusivitas, aksesibilitas, dan partisipasi lintas geografis serta institusional. Namun, transformasi ini juga disertai pergeseran otoritas keagamaan dari struktur institusional menuju aktor-aktor digital terdesentralisasi, termasuk kreator religius dan sistem berbasis kecerdasan buatan yang berfungsi sebagai* epistemic mediator. *Di sisi lain, penelitian ini mengungkap tantangan serius berupa bias algoritmik, disinformasi, komodifikasi praktik keagamaan, serta ketergantungan pada sistem dialog berbasis AI yang berpotensi mereduksi kedalaman refleksi teologis dan kualitas dialog lintas iman. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya pendekatan dialog profetik dan teologis sebagai kerangka normatif untuk merespons transformasi digital, dengan menempatkan komunitas agama sebagai aktor kritis dalam perumusan etika digital, penguatan literasi teknologi, dan kolaborasi lintas pemangku kepentingan. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada sintesis kritis yang mengintegrasikan kajian dialog lintas iman, agama digital, dan kecerdasan buatan dalam satu kerangka analisis, sehingga memperkaya pemahaman konseptual studi agama di tengah transformasi digital global.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the ways people communicate, interact, and make sense of religious life (Perszon, 2023; Ziaul Haq et al., 2023). The internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) have not only reshaped the landscape of social communication but have also transformed religious practices and spaces of interreligious engagement. Dialogues that previously took place face-to-face within community settings increasingly shift to virtual spaces, crossing geographical, cultural, and even theological boundaries. This transformation expands the reach of religious dialogue while simultaneously generating new challenges that require critical, research-based analysis (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024).

Within plural societies, these changes carry strong social significance. Zaluchu (2020)demonstrates that digital culture and the use of technology, including IoT, can function as strategic media for fostering Muslim–Christian dialogue in Indonesia, one of the most religiously plural societies in the world. Shared digital platforms, interfaith digital literacy, and online public dialogue spaces open new possibilities for overcoming communication deadlocks that frequently emerge in conventional dialogue settings. Several studies further emphasize that digital technology holds substantial potential for strengthening social harmony and countering intolerance and radicalism, although such potential is not without risks (Wet et al., 2024; Yin & Mahrous, 2022).

Despite its social relevance, the scholarly value of this issue lies precisely in the presence of a significant knowledge gap. Research on religion and digital technology has developed along several major trajectories. First, a body of studies focuses on the influence of digital technology on worship practices, religious commitment, and communal attachment. These studies demonstrate that digital technology shapes how individuals and communities live out their religious lives; however, they tend to remain descriptive and concentrate on the internal practices of single traditions or specific communities (Wachukwu, 2024).

Second, studies on digital religion emphasize the importance of understanding the contextual relationship between emerging technologies and religious practices. Campbell and Evolvi (2020) argue that research on digital religion should move beyond merely describing new phenomena and instead explain how technology reshapes religious meanings, authority, and social relations. Nevertheless, in many of these studies, interfaith dialogue appears only as a marginal theme rather than a central analytical focus.

Third, research on religious authority and digital mediation highlights the emergence of new actors in cyberspace. Campbell (2020) shows how digital creators and media innovations simultaneously challenge and reconstruct traditional religious authority. Power relations in religion no longer remain monopolized by formal institutions; rather, they undergo renegotiation in digital spaces where individuals or groups with technological competence can assume the role of new authorities. This dynamic directly affects interfaith dialogue, as the production and circulation of interreligious narratives no longer depend solely on official institutions but also involve independent digital actors (Erwahyudin, 2024).

Beyond questions of authority, ethical and epistemological dimensions increasingly come to the fore. Le Duc (2023b) proposes the framework of *prophetic dialogue* as a religious approach to engaging with the future of technology, emphasizing dialogue that remains both affirmative and critical toward technological development. At the same time, research by Zhai et al. (2024) indicates that excessive reliance on artificial intelligence–based dialogue systems can weaken critical thinking, decision-making, and analytical reasoning. If left unaddressed, AI-mediated interfaith dialogue risks becoming shallow, biased, or even misleading.

Taken together, these trajectories reveal the absence of a systematic study that integrates digital technology, interfaith dialogue, shifting religious authority, and their ethical and epistemological implications within a single, coherent analytical framework. To address this gap, the present study employs a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* approach to synthesize key findings

from recent scholarship and to answer the following questions: how does digital technology transform interfaith dialogue, what opportunities and challenges emerge, and what implications do these transformations hold for the future development of interfaith dialogue?

Conceptually, this study draws on three main frameworks: digital religion (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020), *mediatization of religion*, and *prophetic dialogue* (A. Le Duc, 2023a). These frameworks enable an understanding of interfaith dialogue in the digital era as a socio-religious practice mediated by technology, negotiated epistemologically, and demanded to remain ethically accountable. The central argument of this study holds that digital transformation not only expands the space and participation of interfaith dialogue but also drives shifts in authority and introduces new epistemic risks, thereby requiring a dialogical approach that remains critical, reflective, and ethically oriented.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of a corpus of academic literature that examines the relationship between digital technology and interfaith dialogue. The analyzed literature includes journal articles, scholarly proceedings, and academic books that explicitly address themes of digital religion, interfaith dialogue, religious authority, and the ethical and epistemological implications of technology within the context of religious communication. By treating the literature as the unit of analysis, this study conceptualizes digital interfaith dialogue as a scholarly discourse constructed and developed within the fields of religious studies and media studies.

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing the *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* approach (Maxwell, 2009). This approach allows the researcher to trace, evaluate, and synthesize previous research findings in a systematic and transparent manner. Compared to a narrative review, SLR provides a more rigorous framework for mapping research trends, identifying knowledge gaps, and formulating conceptually accountable syntheses. The SLR process in this study follows the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)* guidelines, which serve as an international standard for conducting systematic literature reviews.

The data sources derive from reputable international academic databases, primarily Scopus and Google Scholar. The publication period spans from 2015 to 2025 in order to capture recent dynamics in the development of digital technology and interfaith dialogue. The inclusion criteria encompass scholarly publications that address digital technologies such as social media, artificial intelligence, and networked technologies; interfaith dialogue; digital religion; and issues of religious authority and ethics within new media contexts. Conversely, non-academic articles, popular opinions, and publications that do not align with the research focus are excluded from the analytical corpus.

Data collection proceeds through a structured keyword search combined with a staged screening process. The first stage involves the selection of titles and abstracts to ensure topical relevance to the research focus. The second stage consists of full-text review to assess analytical depth, theoretical relevance, and academic contribution of each publication. This iterative process ensures that the selected literature accurately represents the development of interfaith dialogue discourse in the digital era.

Data analysis employs thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis. The selected literature is categorized according to key themes, including forms of technological engagement in interfaith dialogue, emerging opportunities and challenges, shifts in religious authority, and the ethical and epistemological implications of digital technology. The study then synthesizes these findings to construct a comprehensive conceptual account of the transformation of interfaith dialogue in the digital era. Through this approach, the research moves beyond descriptive mapping and offers analytical reflections relevant to the advancement of academic scholarship and the future practice of interfaith dialogue.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Technology as a New Medium for Interfaith Dialogue

The transformation of interfaith dialogue spaces in the twenty-first century closely follows the expansion of digital technology in the social, political, and religious lives of global society. The presence of the internet, the Internet of Things (IoT), social media, and digital culture has reshaped how religious adherents build interactions, form networks, and maintain bridges of communication across traditions (Elvinaro et al., 2022). Whereas interfaith dialogue previously took place primarily in physical settings—such as interfaith forums, seminars, or community meetings—it now increasingly unfolds in open, interactive digital spaces that transcend territorial boundaries. In the Indonesian context, the penetration of IoT and digital culture marks a significant shift in Muslim–Christian dialogue practices. Digitalization enables the development of shared platforms, including online forums, digital databases, and virtual public dialogue spaces. These innovations function not merely as technical tools but as practical strategies for overcoming communication impasses that often characterize traditional dialogue patterns (Idris et al., 2024).

This shift in medium operates through two interrelated mechanisms: it expands access to religious participation and reduces spatial and temporal barriers that previously constrained engagement. Wachukwu (2024) emphasizes that the digital era transforms not only how religious adherents access teachings and rituals but also the degree of commitment and patterns of communal attachment. Through social media, individuals share spiritual experiences, access cross-traditional religious resources, and form virtual interfaith communities that conventional encounter spaces could scarcely imagine. From the perspective of intercultural communication, digital technologies generate what scholars describe as a *virtual public space*, where interfaith interactions take place in more fluid and participatory forms (Malović & Vujica, 2021). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok, and YouTube, alongside online conferencing applications like Zoom, have become important arenas for the exchange of religious ideas. Moreover, the expansion of online worship practices following the COVID-19 pandemic has broadened possibilities for cross-community observation. Religious adherents no longer witness only the internal practices of their own traditions; they can also observe—and to a certain extent participate in—the practices of other traditions. As a result, interfaith dialogue shifts from institutional conversations toward increasingly transparent and cross-boundary religious experiences, while simultaneously demanding adequate educational capacities regarding both one's own tradition and those of others.

At the same time, digital mediation introduces an ambivalence that requires critical attention. Wachukwu (2024) identifies a dual impact: on the one hand, expanded access to information can strengthen religious commitment; on the other hand, it opens possibilities for the commodification of religion and the emergence of shallow religious practices. When worship reduces to digital content designed for public consumption, religious experience risks losing its spiritual depth and shifting toward easily shareable visual representations that lack reflective substance. Digital dialogue spaces can therefore enrich interfaith encounters, yet they can also diminish the meaning of spirituality if they lack adequate digital literacy and communication ethics (Idris et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, digitalization reshapes the configuration of actors involved in interfaith dialogue. Whereas religious leaders, academics, and formal institutions previously mediated dialogue, individuals at the grassroots level who possess technological access can now emerge as dialogue facilitators. Social media users with large followings, for example, can play key roles in disseminating narratives of peace within plural societies without occupying positions within institutional authority structures (Kulahina-Stadnichenko, 2022). This shift signals the democratization of dialogue spaces: authority no longer remains monopolized by institutions but becomes mediated through digital networks that enable more decentralized production of religious discourse. In this vein, Zaluchu (2020) proposes six practical strategies to optimize

digital interfaith dialogue: building shared interreligious platforms; strengthening digital literacy supported by databases; transforming religious studies centers into digital services; utilizing advanced digital media for interfaith outreach; organizing virtual public dialogues; and optimizing the role of social media. These strategies underscore that technology functions not merely as a supportive tool but as a new social space that requires strategic governance to ensure the productive growth of interfaith dialogue (Thomas et al., 2024).

Digitalization also shifts the character of dialogue from exclusivity toward greater inclusivity. Public access to religious teachings, interpretations, and discourses now extends beyond formal religious authorities. This condition can broaden interfaith understanding, yet it also generates new problems, including misinformation, misinterpretation, and the rapid spread of hate speech in digital spaces (Rahawarin, 2023). In other words, technology opens pathways for more participatory dialogue while simultaneously amplifying the risk of meaning distortion. At the same time, digitalization produces hybrid forms of spirituality. Individuals can practice religion privately through prayer applications, online meditation, or virtual worship, while simultaneously publicizing these spiritual experiences through social media. Wachukwu (2024) characterizes this phenomenon as a form of religiosity that remains private yet globally connected. Within the context of interfaith dialogue, such hybrid spirituality holds potential for fostering empathy and cross-community understanding, as religious experiences no longer remain fully confined within group boundaries (Mutalib & Ramly, 2023).

In sum, digital technology has transformed interfaith dialogue into a more open, participatory practice that transcends boundaries previously limiting encounters across traditions. IoT, social media, and digital culture provide new media for the exchange of religious ideas on a scale that earlier contexts could scarcely imagine. Nevertheless, this transformation remains ambivalent. It offers significant opportunities to strengthen pluralism and social harmony, while simultaneously carrying risks of spiritual reduction, religious commodification, and meaning distortion driven by misinformation. Consequently, the use of technology in interfaith dialogue requires digital literacy, communication ethics, and appropriate institutional strategies to ensure that its potential genuinely serves peacebuilding and the maintenance of social cohesion within plural societies (Hutabarat, 2023).

Accordingly, the transformation of interfaith dialogue through digital technology cannot be understood merely as a shift in communication media. Rather, it constitutes a process of *mediatization of religion* that reshapes religious practices, authority, and meaning within the public sphere. Within the framework of *digital religion*, online spaces emerge as new loci where religious experience unfolds simultaneously as personal practice and globally connected social interaction. These dynamics, however, call for the presence of *prophetic dialogue* as an ethical-critical framework that enables religious communities not only to utilize technology to expand dialogue but also to reflect normatively on the direction, limits, and moral responsibilities of digital mediation itself.

Shifting Authority and the Role of Digital Actors in Interfaith Dialogue

One of the most fundamental transformations in interfaith dialogue in the digital era concerns the reconfiguration of religious authority. Whereas religious authority in earlier periods primarily attached to formal institutions—such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or religious study centers—the digital era introduces new dynamics in which authority no longer remains fully centralized within institutions but disperses among various digital actors. This shift carries far-reaching implications for interfaith dialogue, particularly with regard to accessibility, legitimacy, and the circulation of religious discourse in the public sphere.

Campbell (2020) describes this phenomenon as a process of *rethinking religious authority* in the digital context. The emergence of digital creatives—individuals or groups who produce, disseminate, and interpret religious content through digital media—has transformed how authority is constructed and exercised. Authority no longer rests solely on structural position or formal theological legitimacy, but increasingly depends on the ability to present persuasive,

accessible, and widely resonant narratives in digital spaces. Consequently, digital environments function as arenas of authority negotiation, where interfaith discourses are produced, contested, and circulated by actors who previously stood outside official institutional circles.

In line with this argument, Campbell and Evolvi (2020) emphasize that the study of digital religion must attend closely to how emerging technologies reshape religious authority and practice. Digital media enable the decentralization of authority: religious narratives that institutions once mediated now circulate independently through individuals or online communities. This process produces a pluralization of authority, allowing diverse voices to gain visibility and influence within interfaith dialogue. At the same time, such pluralization challenges the relatively stable boundaries of authority that characterized earlier institutional arrangements.

This shift becomes particularly visible in interfaith dialogue practices on social media. An influencer with a cross-religious follower base, for instance, can play a significant role in disseminating narratives of peace and moderation without holding a formal position within a religious institution. In this context, legitimacy no longer derives solely from institutional structures but also from the capacity to build audiences and networks. Religious authority thus increasingly operates under digital logics—such as algorithms, virality, and engagement—that determine the visibility and reach of messages in the public sphere.

Although the decentralization of authority opens space for the democratization of religious discourse, it remains deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, it enables broader and more inclusive participation in interfaith dialogue. On the other hand, it heightens the risk of authority fragmentation, where claims to religious truth circulate without adequate mechanisms of verification or accountability. Such conditions can generate confusion and even conflict, especially when circulating narratives promote intolerance or exclusivism.

In the Indonesian context, Zaluchu (2020) underscores the importance of strengthening digital literacy in response to the digitalization of interfaith dialogue. The growing role of non-institutional digital actors requires adequate understanding of pluralism and interreligious ethics. Without this foundation, shifts in authority risk producing *pseudo-authority*, forms of symbolic legitimacy that obscure rather than strengthen interfaith relations.

Furthermore, Wachukwu (2024) demonstrates that the adoption of technology in religious practice alters patterns of communal attachment. Religious authority increasingly operates in relational and network-based forms rather than through hierarchical structures alone. This tendency appears clearly in virtual interfaith communities, where authority often derives from the ability to create safe and supportive spaces for conversation rather than from formal titles or positions. Digital authority thus rests on the capacity to build trust within networks and on concrete engagement in dialogical processes.

The shift in authority also manifests through tensions between theological authority and technological authority. Le Duc (2023a) emphasizes the importance of *prophetic dialogue* as a framework for responding to the future of technology. Within this framework, religious institutions must not merely react to technological change but engage proactively and critically in shaping its direction. This perspective suggests that theological authority now must interact with technological authorities emerging from innovators, policymakers, and technology users. Interfaith dialogue in the digital era therefore unfolds not only among religious communities but also between religion and technology itself.

In addition, algorithmic logic plays a crucial role in shaping digital authority. Social media algorithms determine which discourses gain prominence and which actors receive greater visibility in public conversations. Digital authority thus depends not only on human capacity but also on technological structures governing information distribution. When algorithms prioritize sensational or provocative content, intolerant narratives may spread more rapidly than dialogical and moderate voices.

From an epistemological perspective, Zhai et al. (2024) warn that excessive reliance on AI-based dialogue systems can weaken critical thinking capacities. When religious authority shifts

toward AI platforms—such as religious chatbots—new risks emerge, as such authority rests on systems that may be biased, erroneous, or misleading. The digital era thus introduces a new form of authority—algorithmic authority—that requires serious critical scrutiny within interfaith dialogue frameworks.

Overall, shifts in authority in the digital era should not be understood merely as the decline of traditional authority but as a complex process of transformation. Religious authority becomes increasingly plural, dynamic, and shaped by interactions among humans, technologies, and institutions. In the context of interfaith dialogue, success no longer depends solely on institutional legitimacy but also on the capacity of digital actors to construct inclusive, credible, and ethical narratives. Interfaith dialogue in the digital era therefore demands a dual strategy: strengthening the relevance of religious institutions while equipping digital actors with adequate literacy and ethical awareness so that they can function as responsible facilitators of dialogue in digital public spaces.

Table 1. The Shift of Religious Authority in Interfaith Dialogue in the Digital Era

Aspect of Change	Traditional Religious Authority	Digital Authority in the Technological Era	Implications for Interfaith Dialogue
Basis of legitimacy	Institutional structures, theological authority, formal hierarchy	Digital visibility, social networks, engagement, and virality	Dialogue is no longer monopolized by official institutions; non-institutional actors become increasingly significant
Main actors	Religious leaders, religious institutions, academics	Digital creators, influencers, online interfaith communities	Democratization of dialogical space occurs, accompanied by the risk of authority fragmentation
Mechanisms of discourse distribution	Face-to-face forums, official publications, institutional sermons	Social media, digital platforms, algorithms	Dialogical narratives compete with sensationalist and intolerant content
Pattern of authority relations	Hierarchical and centralized	Relational, decentralized, network-based	Authority is constructed through trust and participation rather than formal position
Role of technology	Communication support tool	Medium and structural force shaping authority	Technology is not neutral; it actively directs the dynamics of dialogue
Main risks	Institutional exclusivity	Disinformation, *pseudo-authority*, algorithmic dominance	The need for digital literacy and interfaith dialogue ethics
Ethical–theological dimension	Preservation of doctrine and tradition	Challenges posed by algorithmic and AI-based authority	The necessity of *prophetic dialogue* as a critical–ethical framework

Shifts in religious authority in the digital era demonstrate that interfaith dialogue now unfolds within increasingly plural, decentralized, and technologically mediated fields. Authority no longer rests solely on institutional legitimacy but emerges through digital networks, relational trust, and discursive visibility shaped strongly by algorithmic processes. This transformation opens significant opportunities for democratization and inclusivity in interfaith dialogue, while simultaneously posing serious challenges in the form of authority fragmentation, disinformation,

and algorithmic dominance. Interfaith dialogue in the digital era therefore requires a dual approach: strengthening the capacity of religious institutions to remain relevant and equipping digital actors with literacy, ethical awareness, and theological sensitivity so that they can serve as responsible facilitators of dialogue in digital public spaces.

Ethical and Epistemological Dimensions of Religious Dialogue in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The development of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly dialogue systems based on generative models, introduces a new dimension into the practice of religious dialogue. AI no longer functions merely as a technical tool that supports communication; it increasingly operates as an epistemic actor that shapes how religious communities engage in dialogue, interpret teachings, and reflect on religious meaning. This transformation raises fundamental ethical and epistemological questions: to what extent can AI function as a facilitator of interfaith dialogue, and what risks accompany the growing reliance on this technology.

A growing body of research indicates that excessive dependence on AI-based dialogue systems can weaken human cognitive capacities, especially in decision-making, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning (Hermansyah et al., 2023; Trotta et al., 2024; Zhai et al., 2024). These findings carry particular relevance for interfaith dialogue, where the quality of conversation depends heavily on the depth of reflection, clarity of argumentation, and openness to diverse perspectives. When users treat AI as a primary authority without critical verification, dialogue risks becoming superficial, inaccurate, or biased, thereby distorting rather than enriching interreligious understanding.

This epistemological problem intensifies with the phenomenon known as AI hallucination, namely the tendency of AI systems to generate information that appears convincing but lacks valid referential grounding (Murphy et al., 2021). In religious dialogue, such hallucinations may take the form of erroneous theological interpretations or inaccurate doctrinal quotations that uncritical users nonetheless accept as authoritative. This risk threatens the integrity of interfaith dialogue, as misleading narratives can circulate rapidly and shape distorted understandings of other religious traditions, potentially triggering tension and conflict among religious communities.

Algorithmic bias constitutes another ethical challenge of comparable seriousness. AI algorithms rely on training data that often embed specific cultural, political, or religious preferences. As a result, AI outputs tend to reproduce dominant perspectives while marginalizing minority voices (Yang et al., 2024). Within interfaith dialogue, such bias undermines principles of equality and inclusivity by producing imbalanced representations of religious traditions. Rather than reinforcing an approach of *open integrity*, AI may inadvertently reproduce existing power asymmetries. From an ethical standpoint, this situation also raises questions of responsibility: when a religious chatbot delivers a particular interpretation, who bears responsibility for its accuracy and consequences—the technology developer, the religious institution that adopts it, or the user who consumes it?

Zhai et al. (2024) further demonstrate that reliance on AI can erode motivation for learning and self-reflection, a tendency reinforced by the findings of Park and Jung (2025). In religious contexts, this dynamic means that individuals may increasingly depend on instant machine-generated answers instead of engaging in sustained processes of meaning-making, contemplation, and interpersonal dialogue rooted in deep spiritual experience. Yet the core value of interfaith dialogue lies precisely in human encounter—one that involves empathy, lived experience, spiritual awareness, and what scholars often describe as *tasted knowledge of God*, a dimension of religious experience that artificial systems cannot fully replicate.

Nevertheless, AI also offers opportunities that deserve careful consideration. AI-based dialogue systems can bridge linguistic barriers, expand access to interfaith literature, and facilitate simulated conversations across traditions that remain difficult to realize in face-to-face settings. Within this framework, AI can function as an *epistemic mediator* that opens new imaginative spaces

for religious dialogue. However, such potential can reach realization only when ethical regulation, adequate digital literacy, and rigorous verification mechanisms accompany its use.

From a theological perspective, the presence of AI challenges established understandings of revelation, authority, and interpretation. Can an AI system that generates scriptural interpretations claim any form of theological legitimacy, or should religious communities regard it solely as a technical aid devoid of interpretive authority? These questions underscore the need for deeper reflection on the epistemology of religion, particularly concerning how religious knowledge emerges, circulates, and gains validation. Through the framework of *prophetic dialogue*, Le Duc (2023a) reminds scholars and practitioners that religion must play a critical role in responding to technological developments. In the context of AI, religious institutions must move beyond passive consumption of technology and engage actively in raising ethical questions, setting normative boundaries, and directing AI use toward the common good.

Taken together, these considerations reveal that AI presents a dual dilemma for interfaith dialogue, operating simultaneously as opportunity and threat. On the one hand, AI can expand the reach of dialogue, enhance access to interreligious knowledge, and facilitate cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. On the other hand, it can reinforce bias, generate misinformation, weaken human critical capacities, and produce forms of *pseudo-authority* that lack theological legitimacy. Interfaith dialogue in the AI era therefore requires a clear ethical and epistemological framework. Strengthening digital literacy, ensuring active involvement of religious institutions, and fostering collaboration among technology developers, academics, and religious leaders constitute essential conditions for enabling AI to function as a critical partner that enriches dialogue without displacing human beings as the primary subjects of interreligious encounter.

Prophetic and Theological Approaches to Digital Transformation

The radical changes brought about by digital technology do not merely create practical opportunities for religious dialogue; they also unsettle the theological and ethical foundations of religion itself. A fundamental question therefore emerges: how does religion, with its long tradition of interpreting revelation and guiding the moral life of believers, respond to a rapid and disruptive digital transformation? In this context, prophetic and theological approaches become particularly relevant, not as reactive responses but as reflective and proactive frameworks for discerning the direction of technological development.

Le Duc (2023a), proposes the concept of *prophetic dialogue* as a normative framework that enables religion—and especially interfaith communities—to engage critically with the future of technology. This approach consists of two interrelated dimensions: *energizing dialogue* and *criticizing dialogue*. The first dimension emphasizes the positive involvement of religion in harnessing technology for the common good, while the second underscores the critical role of religion in warning against the dangers and negative consequences of unregulated technological development (Benanti, 2023). In this sense, prophetic dialogue moves beyond theological rhetoric and functions as an ethical strategy that seeks to ensure that digital transformation continues to respect human dignity and social justice.

Within the context of interfaith dialogue, the prophetic approach expands the very meaning of dialogue itself. Dialogue no longer remains confined to encounters among religious traditions mediated by digital platforms; it also encompasses the collective engagement of religions in critical conversations with the technological world. Interfaith dialogue can thus serve as a shared forum for articulating positions on contemporary digital issues such as data privacy, unequal access to technology, and the use of artificial intelligence in religious practices (Busro, 2024). In this way, religious dialogue in the digital era aims not only to foster mutual understanding but also to articulate a prophetic voice that addresses the direction of digital civilization.

Zaluchu (2020) emphasizes that practical strategies—such as developing shared digital platforms, strengthening digital literacy, and organizing online public dialogues—must rest on a firm ethical foundation. Without clear moral orientation, digital spaces remain vulnerable to

exploitation by actors who promote intolerance or radicalism. From a prophetic perspective, every digital strategy must therefore aim not merely to facilitate communication but to reinforce values of peace, justice, and respect for plurality. At this point, theological reflection must also address questions of authority and interpretation. Campbell (2020) demonstrates that the digital age has produced *digital creatives* who reconstruct religious authority. From a prophetic standpoint, this shift offers an opportunity to broaden popular participation in dialogue while simultaneously requiring ethical oversight to ensure that circulating religious discourses retain their moral substance. The prophetic approach thus calls for a balance between democratizing authority and preserving doctrinal integrity (Cheruvallil-Contractor & Shakkour, 2016).

Historically, religious traditions have long exercised prophetic roles in responding to social and cultural change. In the Abrahamic traditions, prophetic voices frequently emerge as critiques of oppressive power structures while offering alternative visions of just and humane life (Sheret, 2021). In the digital context, this prophetic role translates into critiques of data monopolies held by large technology corporations, algorithms that intensify polarization, and surveillance practices that violate personal privacy (Bezklubaya, 2023). In this way, prophetic dialogue functions as a bridge between faith and technology, linking transcendent values with concrete digital realities.

The theological approach further insists that technology cannot be understood as a neutral instrument. Wachukwu (2024) shows that digitalization influences patterns of religious commitment within communities, indicating that technology shapes religious habitus rather than merely facilitating it. From a theological perspective, this condition demands renewed reflection on the role of digital media in processes of revelation, communion, and sacredness (Baffoe, 2023). Questions concerning the status of online worship, the spiritual meaning of prayers or sermons delivered through applications, and experiences of religious presence in virtual spaces highlight the need for theological frameworks capable of interpreting the signs of the digital age.

Moreover, the prophetic approach requires interdisciplinary openness. A. L. Duc (2024) argues that religious engagement with technology should adopt a proactive stance by cultivating dialogue with innovators, policymakers, and technology users. Prophetic theology in the digital era therefore does not speak only within places of worship but also enters technology conferences, public policy forums, and the global digital ecosystem. In practice, this approach may take the form of developing interfaith digital ethics, forming religious alliances to advocate fair technology regulation, integrating digital literacy into religious education, and collaborating with technology developers to ensure that digital products align with values of inclusivity and diversity.

The prophetic approach does not reject technology; rather, it seeks to orient its use. Technology remains neutral until human beings employ it, and religion thus bears responsibility for ensuring that digital transformation genuinely supports human dignity and social harmony. Within this framework, interfaith dialogue in the digital era becomes not only a space for conversation but also a field of ethical advocacy that shapes the direction of digital civilization. Overall, prophetic and theological approaches to digital transformation affirm three central points: religion must serve as a critical voice against the negative consequences of technology; religion must engage actively in shaping the trajectory of technological development; and interfaith dialogue must expand into a collective conversation between religion and the technological world. Through this framework, digital transformation appears not merely as a challenge but also as an opportunity to realize the prophetic mission of religion—to bring justice, peace, and hope within an ever-changing world (Baffoe, 2023).

Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions of Digital Religious Dialogue

The transformation of religious dialogue in the digital era, as demonstrated by the findings of this *Systematic Literature Review*, reveals a complex dynamic that is rich in opportunities yet simultaneously fraught with challenges (Widjaja & Siahaan, 2020). The four preceding sub-findings—namely digital technology as a new medium of dialogue, the shifting configuration of

religious authority, the ethical and epistemological dilemmas posed by artificial intelligence, and the need for prophetic and theological approaches—indicate that digital religious dialogue cannot be understood in a fragmented or partial manner. This section synthesizes these findings to articulate a more comprehensive picture of the future trajectory of religious dialogue within digital spaces.

First, in terms of opportunities, digital technology has significantly expanded the scope of interfaith dialogue. Social media, the Internet of Things, and diverse digital platforms enable interreligious conversations to take place across geographical and cultural boundaries with an intensity previously unattainable. Easier access to religious information, the growing involvement of lay communities in interfaith conversations, and the formation of virtual religious communities have rendered religious dialogue more inclusive. Within the context of globalization, these developments carry strategic value because they strengthen the foundations of pluralism, tolerance, and interreligious solidarity. Furthermore, artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies open possibilities for more efficient cross-linguistic communication. AI-based applications, including religious chatbots, can bridge communication gaps, expand access to interfaith literature, and facilitate simulations of interreligious dialogue that remain difficult to realize in offline contexts. Within this framework, AI functions as an *epistemic mediator* that enriches both the imagination and the reach of religious dialogue (Permassanty & Muntiani, 2018).

Second, these opportunities unfold alongside serious challenges that threaten the quality of interfaith dialogue. Digitalization may indeed strengthen religious commitment, yet it also risks producing shallow and fragmented forms of religiosity. Excessive reliance on AI can weaken critical thinking capacities, causing dialogue to become trapped in instant answers devoid of deep reflection. Moreover, algorithmic bias, AI's propensity to generate misinformation, and the dominance of virality logic on social media amplify the risks of disinformation, polarization, and intolerance. Another equally significant challenge lies in unequal access to technology, which creates a widening gap between communities with high levels of digital literacy and those that remain structurally marginalized.

Third, the synthesis of findings confirms a substantial shift in religious authority. Authority no longer remains monopolized by formal institutions but increasingly operates through digital creators and other non-institutional actors. This shift generates two simultaneous implications. On the one hand, it promotes the democratization of dialogue by opening wider participation. On the other hand, it risks fragmenting authority and producing *pseudo-authority* that lacks theological and ethical accountability. In this context, digital literacy and communication ethics become essential prerequisites to ensure that the redistribution of authority does not culminate in epistemic disorder within interfaith dialogue (Perszon, 2023).

Fourth, prophetic and theological dimensions provide a normative framework for responding to these dynamics. Through the concept of *prophetic dialogue*, the literature underscores the necessity of a proactive and critical religious stance toward technological development. Prophetic dialogue teaches that religions must not only engage in dialogue with one another but also participate collectively in critical conversations with the technological sphere. Consequently, digital religious dialogue extends beyond the pursuit of interreligious harmony and evolves into a field of ethical advocacy that seeks to ensure that digital transformation aligns with justice, human dignity, and the common good (Muttaqin & Sriyono, 2021).

Fifth, based on the synthesis of the literature, the future of digital religious dialogue appears to move in three principal directions. The first involves the *hybridization of dialogue spaces*, marked by the coexistence of face-to-face and digital dialogue. Online worship, virtual forums, and social media interactions will continue alongside conventional forums, forming hybrid dialogical spaces that broaden religious participation (Setia & Rosele, 2024). The second direction concerns the strengthening of interdisciplinary collaboration, as interfaith dialogue increasingly involves non-religious actors such as technology developers, policymakers, and scholars from diverse disciplines. Such collaboration proves essential for addressing ethical issues—including privacy,

access inequality, and algorithmic bias—through collective efforts. The third direction emphasizes the reinforcement of a prophetic orientation, whereby religious dialogue not only focuses on interreligious relations but also assumes a critical role in shaping a just, inclusive, and sustainable digital civilization.

Overall, this synthesis demonstrates that the future of religious dialogue in the digital era is dynamic, complex, and inherently ambivalent. Digital transformation offers significant opportunities to strengthen global pluralism and solidarity, yet it simultaneously demands ethical and epistemological vigilance to prevent dialogue from becoming ensnared in algorithmic bias, disinformation, or the commodification of religion. Accordingly, digital religious dialogue can develop meaningfully only when it is accompanied by critical awareness, a robust ethical framework, and the active engagement of religious communities in shaping the direction of digital civilization (Fairuza et al., 2023).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious dialogue in the digital era undergoes a multidimensional structural transformation. Digital technology does not merely function as a new medium for interfaith dialogue; it also reshapes authority relations, patterns of participation, and the epistemological and ethical frameworks that underpin dialogue itself. The main findings reveal four key dynamics: (1) the expansion of dialogical spaces through digital platforms; (2) the shift of religious authority toward digital actors; (3) the emergence of ethical and epistemological dilemmas, particularly those related to artificial intelligence; and (4) the urgency of prophetic and theological approaches as normative frameworks for responding to these transformations. Taken together, these findings affirm that digital religious dialogue cannot be understood solely as a technical innovation but must be approached as a profound transformation in how religion engages the public sphere.

From an explanatory perspective, this transformation occurs because digital technology operates not only as a communication tool but also as a structure of social mediation that regulates visibility, legitimacy, and the circulation of discourse. Social media, algorithms, and AI-based systems facilitate interfaith dialogue by reducing spatial and temporal barriers and by enabling the participation of non-institutional actors. At the same time, these mechanisms generate new logics—such as virality, engagement, and automation—that shape the quality of dialogue. Consequently, quantitative expansion does not necessarily correspond to qualitative deepening. Dependence on technology, especially AI, helps explain why interfaith dialogue risks reflective reduction when processes of verification, critical reasoning, and human encounter yield to instant machine-generated responses.

In comparison with previous studies, these findings extend and deepen the trajectory of research on digital religion. Early studies largely focused on the influence of technology on worship practices, religious commitment, and community attachment, yet they tended to remain descriptive and confined to single religious traditions (Wachukwu, 2024). Subsequent scholarship on digital religion emphasized the importance of technological contexts in reshaping religious meaning and authority, while interfaith dialogue often appeared as a marginal concern rather than a central analytical focus (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Research on shifting authority through digital creators has demonstrated the reconstruction of religious power relations (Campbell, 2020; Erwahyudin, 2024), but it has rarely connected these shifts systematically to the implications for interfaith dialogue. Likewise, studies addressing the ethical and epistemological dimensions of AI have highlighted risks such as bias, misinformation, and the weakening of critical capacity (Zhai et al., 2024), yet they have seldom situated these concerns within a framework of interreligious dialogue. The novelty of this study therefore lies in its integrative synthesis of these strands, positioning interfaith dialogue at the center of analysis for understanding digital religion, authority, and technology.

Interpretively, the findings carry historical, social, and ideological significance. Historically, digital interfaith dialogue signals a shift from institution-centered models toward more fluid and decentralized public spaces, in line with broader transformations in global communication (Howard, 2021; Rofiqi & Haq, 2022). Socially, the digitalization of dialogue broadens participation and fosters inclusivity, yet it also generates risks of polarization and authority fragmentation (Arifah et al., 2025; Ilomo, 2021; Widiyanto, 2023). Ideologically, these findings indicate that interfaith dialogue in the digital era does not operate within a value-neutral terrain; it remains shaped by technological ideologies, algorithmic logics, and the political–economic interests embedded within digital ecosystems. In this context, the framework of *prophetic dialogue* becomes essential for evaluating and directing religious dialogue so that it remains oriented toward human dignity, justice, and respect for diversity (A. Le Duc, 2023b, 2023a).

Reflection on these findings reveals both the functions and dysfunctions of digital religious dialogue. On the one hand, digital technology functions to expand the reach of dialogue, strengthen interfaith solidarity, and provide new spaces for more open religious expression. On the other hand, dysfunctions emerge when dialogue reduces to shallow symbolic exchanges, when authority fragments without clear ethical mechanisms, and when AI generates *pseudo-authority* that undermines human reflective autonomy (Muzakki & Widiyanto, 2023). These dysfunctions demonstrate that digital transformation does not proceed linearly toward positive outcomes; rather, it remains ambivalent and requires serious normative governance.

Based on this reflection, the study proposes several action plans to address the identified dysfunctions. First, interfaith digital literacy must become a shared agenda so that religious communities can engage technology critically and ethically. Second, religious institutions should develop robust digital ethics frameworks—including guidelines for AI use—that emphasize responsibility, accountability, and the verification of religious discourse. Third, interfaith dialogue should expand into policy and technological domains through collaboration with developers, policymakers, and interdisciplinary scholars, enabling structural responses to issues such as algorithmic bias, access inequality, and privacy protection. Through these measures, digital religious dialogue can evolve beyond a mere conversational space and become a form of ethical advocacy that helps shape a more just and humane digital civilization.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of religious dialogue in the digital era constitutes a complex and ambivalent process that cannot be understood merely as an expansion of communication media. Digitalization has reshaped interfaith dialogical spaces through the widening of participation, the shifting of religious authority, and the emergence of new ethical and epistemological dimensions, particularly in relation to artificial intelligence. Digital religious dialogue offers significant opportunities to strengthen inclusivity, pluralism, and interfaith solidarity, yet it simultaneously presents serious risks, including the fragmentation of authority, the reduction of reflective depth, and the dominance of algorithmic logics that may undermine the quality of dialogue. The main findings of this study affirm that the success of interfaith dialogue in the digital era depends largely on the capacity of religious communities to navigate the tension between technological openness and ethical responsibility in the production and circulation of religious discourse.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study offers a conceptual synthesis that integrates digital religion studies, the mediatization of religion, shifts in religious authority, and the framework of *prophetic dialogue* within a single analytical lens for examining interfaith dialogue. By employing a Systematic Literature Review approach, the study advances an understanding of digital religious dialogue not merely as a technological phenomenon, but as an interconnected social, epistemological, and theological process. Its primary contribution lies in positioning interfaith dialogue as the central focus of analysis within digital religion studies, while also demonstrating how artificial intelligence and digital actors reshape relations of authority,

legitimacy, and religious meaning in the contemporary public sphere. The resulting synthetic framework provides a normative foundation for developing more reflective, ethical, and socially just forms of digital religious dialogue.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a literature-based investigation, it does not incorporate empirical field data that could directly capture the lived experiences of actors engaged in interfaith dialogue within digital spaces. Moreover, its broad and cross-contextual focus limits the depth of analysis regarding the dynamics of digital religious dialogue within specific traditions or regions. Future research should therefore combine literature-based approaches with empirical methods—such as digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, or platform-based discourse analysis—to gain a more concrete understanding of practices, forms of resistance, and negotiations of meaning in digital religious dialogue. Further studies may also explore more specifically the role of artificial intelligence in the production of religious authority and its implications for power relations and the ethics of interfaith dialogue across diverse social and cultural contexts.

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