




Congregation members' response to worship and fellowship in the digital space during the COVID-19 pandemic

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This article investigates the congregation members to the transition from face-to-face worship and fellowship to digital spaces amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, with a sample of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP – Batak Protestant Christian Church), specifically in District Daerah Khusus Ibukota (DKI) Jakarta province, Indonesia. This study uses an empirical questionnaire method to assess the level of satisfaction, engagement and future preferences of the congregation regarding digital versus face-to-face worship practices. The questionnaire was built on current theories of encounter and fellowship and what the congregation members need in digital worship services. Data from 421 congregations with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error showed a dominant 62.7% preference for returning to face-to-face worship services and a participation decline during the pandemic. Respondents also felt a 60%–90% difference in digital services from church services, especially related to the need for communal fellowship. Participation in digital services correlates with higher education levels, while older congregations preferred face-to-face worship.

Contribution: This study highlights the importance of incorporating Batak cultural values into digital ministry strategies to increase community connectivity and engagement. This article suggests further research on integrating cultural elements into digital religious practices, aiming to provide insights for churches navigating the digital transformation of religious services.

Keywords: COVID-19; digital ministry; Huria Kristen Batak Protestan; fellowship; worship; Batak.

Introduction

During the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (Protestant Batak Christian Church) congregations, especially those who live in the capital of Indonesia, in District VIII in the DKI Jakarta province (one of the 32 districts) also stopped conducting direct meetings in churches. The congregations moved their services to digital spaces because of strict distance restrictions and health protocols in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. To help meet the needs of congregational services, the church uses digital space to carry out its services. These services are carried out at all levels of congregations. At the district level (regional), services are available through the *New Kairos* TV Studio, which is broadcast on *YouTube* and *Facebook* media, and *Zoom* for several services that require active participation from participants. This is also generally performed at the main congregation level (resort), down to the local congregation. Digital space is a medium used to carry out church services through *YouTube* channels, *Facebook*, *Zoom*, *WhatsApp* and *Video Conference* applications on Smartphones, etc.

Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) is the largest church in Indonesia with 3.5 million members, a church whose members and pastors are mostly Toba Batak people, originally from the Tapanuli region, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Huria Kristen Batak Protestan claims that it was founded on 07 October 1861. Historically, 07 October was the meeting of four missionaries – Gerrit van Asselt, W.F. Betz, J.C. Klammer and C.W.S. Heine – in Sipirok, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The meeting was held to decide that the *Reinische Mission Gessellschaft* (RMG) mission body from Germany would officially begin its work in Batak Land. The date was considered the starting point for establishing the Batak church. Furthermore, the name 'HKBP' was officially used in the HKBP Church Regulations 1930. This was in response to the birth of the independence movement seeking to establish new church organisations, specifically the Huria Christen Batak or Batak

Christian Church (HChB), Gereja Mission Batak or Batak Missionary Church (GMB) and Punguan Kristen Batak or Batak Christian Fellowship (PKB) from the RMG mission (Hutauruk 1993:132–133; Jan Sihar Aritonang 1988:301). The structure of the HKBP is as follows: The local congregation is led by local pastors; several local congregations form a main congregation (resort) under the leadership of a resort pastor; several resorts form a district under the leadership of a Praeses and the whole church synod is led by an Ephorus.

The HKBP congregations in the DKI Jakarta province are under the auspices of HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta, which is led by a pastor called Praeses (regional pastor). The number of congregation members covered by the service area of HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta until 2022 is 147 660 members. This number is spread across 80 local congregations in coordination with 54 resort congregations called resort churches, served by approximately 152 pastors.

The responses to the continuation of digital services in the district have varied post-pandemic. Some congregations continue to livestream their worship services and do ministries on *Zoom*, while others have closed their digital ministry altogether. Some argue that real church service should be conducted within the church building, and live streaming is a way of helping those who cannot congregate because of different reasons. Others argue that in the digital era, digital ministry is inevitable, the church should spread its messages beyond the physical church.

This study aims to determine the response of congregation members to digital ministry during the pandemic, in this case, the HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta congregations. The findings will assist churches with a strong sense of communal identity in assessing congregation members' responses, satisfaction, and expectations. Additionally, they will help determine which digital ministry services can be sustained in the post-pandemic era. The sample location was chosen because the church in Jakarta has the technological capability to deliver ministries in the digital space, and it is also conveniently located in Indonesia's capital city. The study will analyse the findings and make recommendations for the continuation of digital ministry.

The main research question is, What are the responses of HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta congregation members towards digital ministry in the form of worship and fellowship during the pandemic in the digital space? The research will be divided into three parts to examine the similarities and differences between online and onsite worship and fellowship, satisfaction levels, and preferences for the future.

Literature review

This article will discuss how congregation members interpret various services in digital spaces during the pandemic and whether they experience Sunday services or fellowship in digital spaces as they understand them in church buildings. Several studies have highlighted differences in the use of

video conferencing platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp video calls, Google Meet, Cisco, and others, compared to live streaming media such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and so on. The primary difference of these medias lies in the way interactions occur. In video conferences and meetings, participants can both see and hear each other, fostering two-way communication. Conversely, live streaming applications only facilitate one-way communication, as viewers can only watch the broadcast content.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a significant shift in the way we worship and engage in church activities, with almost all of them moving to digital space (Bullivant 2021; Hoffman 2021; Kgatele 2020; Pawar 2021). The transition has not been without its challenges as the congregation grapples with redefining the meaning of fellowship and church services in this new digital realm. Several studies have emerged, shedding light on the meaning of ministry in the digital space during the pandemic (Chow & Kurlberg 2020; Shirley 2017) and have discussed the challenges such as presence (Pakpahan 2021; Zsupan-Jerome 2015), fellowship (Pakpahan 2022; Pandya 2019), feelings of connectedness, worship (Berger 2013; Turnbull 2021) and sacraments (Ocampo 2019; Panzer 2020; Turnbull 2021), morality (Davisson & Booth 2016; Dobrick, Fischer & Hagen 2018), mission (Nehrbass 2018) and others. Worship in the digital space during the pandemic can be said to be the best choice to avoid the spread of the coronavirus, as a result, many churches use digital space to conduct worship (Amenyedzi 2024; Beukes 2020; Hoffman 2021; Pillay 2020).

This article understands digital systems as systems that utilize binary codes composed of ones, zeros, and electronic signals. Meanwhile, presence in the digital realm means an indication of one's existence representation through the transmission of electronic signals, specifically ones and zeros, which convey evidence of presence via text, images, sound, and video (Pakpahan 2021:5). The meetings happen in a digital space, which is a shared technological infrastructure, standards and processes. The digital space evolves from the comprehensive and appropriate use of current and emerging web technologies. Its purpose is multifaceted, significantly transforming communication, information access, commerce, and social interaction (Martin & Betrus 2019; ed. McNutt 2018).

The emergence of digital technology and the Internet has created new spaces for religious engagement and introduced alternative venues for community building, identity construction and religious practice. In this way, the boundaries of distinct communities and identities are increasingly invisible in an interconnected and increasingly globalised digital world (Borowik 2018:59). Although boundaries are increasingly invisible, Eric Trozzo said that there are still physical things that are needed to enter cyberspace, and the effects of cyberspace can be felt physically (Trozzo 2019:17). Hardware (physical) tools are still needed to enter digital space, and the people who use it are also part of something physical.

Regarding digital space, Jenine Kremling and Amanda M. Sharp Parker define cyberspace as:

[A] network of interdependent information technology infrastructures, and includes the internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers in critical industries. (US National Security Presidential Directive 54/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 23; Kremling & Parker 2018:47)

In other words, cyberspace refers to the virtual environment where people communicate and interact with others. Cyberspace consists of four distinct layers: (1) the physical layer, (2) the logical layer, (3) the information layer and (4) the personal layer (Kremling & Parker 2018:47). The Internet is like a city that provides many digital public spaces. These spaces are very flexible, can be tailored to specific tasks or missions, and can become popular and widely known to many people (Hemment et al. 2013:14).

As the digital space develops, there is much discussion about Digital Religion. For example, researchers in the field are aware of the distinction developed by Christopher Helland between 'online religion' (where religious activities actually take place in the online environment) and 'religion online' (where media is used as a tool to facilitate religious activities in the 'offline' world) (Phillips, Schiefelbein-Guerrero & Kurlberg 2019:33-4). Heidi Campbell further suggests that online religion is seen as the ability of religious organisations to bypass some of the barriers of offline religion, offline location and offline authority, by providing online resources to adherents of different faiths (ed. Campbell 2013). The former represents offline practices that are advertised or facilitated online; the latter describes religious practice online. Helland and others have questioned the distinction between the two, although Campbell argues that the latter is not represented by the concept of Digital Religion (ed. Campbell 2013). Of course, as with critiques of rituals that analyse religious practice (e.g., worship), it can be difficult to categorise religious communities into one or the other. In fact, the presence of digital tools in existing and emerging religious communities may allow for the expansion of physical religiosity and the emergence of digital religiosity simultaneously (Phillips et al. 2019:34).

One of the main challenges of doing ministry in the digital space is how to strengthen fellowship and worship through encounter and participation in the digital space. Encounter and fellowship in digital spaces requires presence (Kittler 2014). Pakpahan argues that like physical meetings that require an agreed address and time, encounters in digital spaces also require an 'address' in the form of an Internet link. In the digital era, the meaning of presence is an interesting topic that opens up a dialogue between sacramental theology and the increasingly developing digital culture that influences the lives of church congregations. Therefore, the encounter in digital space needs a common understanding of presence.

Theologians have long thought about the meaning of real presence in the case of Jesus' presence in the celebration of

the Eucharist (Kellenberger 2019). The classical view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, as put forward by Augustine, Aquinas, the Reformers, the Council of Trent and the Neoscholastics, highlights how Christ is present in the bread and wine (Zsupan-Jerome 2015). However, over time, the understanding of this presence has evolved. In the modern and postmodern era, theological reflection on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist opens up a new approach (Pickup 2014). Christ's presence is not only understood as physical presence but also a representation of presence that everyone can encounter.

Pakpahan's analysis of the metaphysics of presence reveals that presence necessitates certain conditions (Pakpahan 2021). Firstly, presence can be grasped through the representation of presence. Secondly, this representation necessitates the confirmation of presence, which in turn requires all parties to be able to see and hear each other's representation of presence. This understanding paves the way for real meetings to take place in digital spaces, where technology enables us to see and hear each other, bridging the physical gap.

Understanding the concepts of worship and fellowship is crucial. Fellowship, for instance, is not merely a feeling of similarity but a unity of heart in God that fosters shared values (Pakpahan 2022). In the context of the visible church or local church, fellowship is a community of baptised believers characterised by preaching the Word, confessing faith, implementing the sacraments, testimony and pastoral care. These elements, along with cultural, linguistic and historical bonds, form the basis of the local church as a fellowship. In this context, the binding factor is crucial in meeting spiritual needs.

Spiritual needs can be obtained in worship. What about worship in the digital space? The difference between worship in digital space and church space is that in church space, someone must go to the church space at a specific time, be physical with other members of the fellowship, and follow the worship until it is finished. Meanwhile, those who follow worship online have a different attachment. How do we ensure the congregation's participation in worship so that they are not spectators but part of the worship itself? Pakpahan suggests that worship is not just about presence. In digital space ministry, the church must be able to ensure active participation in worship, which is a sign of fellowship. Alan Rathe and F. Gerrit Immink (Immink 2014; Rathe 2014) use three components of worship, namely (1) in, (2) together and (3) by means. The fellowship can ask the following indicator questions: Firstly, the 'in' component. Does the fellowship worship in the name of the Triune God? Fellowship differs from the community when an event is opened in the name of God.

From where is the worship carried out? Location is a matter of the 'in' criteria in the active participation indicator that arises from familiarity with the altar and pulpit. This question is irrelevant for churches that do not consider it necessary to

have a special place for the altar and pulpit as a place for worship (Pakpahan 2022:51). Secondly, the 'together' component. This relates to the question: When is the service held? The timeline of the service relates to the question of 'together'. When the congregation attends the service at the same time as the church, there is togetherness in the time of attending the service. Does the service allow the congregation to be aware of the presence of others? The digital media used by the church in conducting worship will determine the answer to this question; for example, the congregation can see and hear each other (via video conference) or cannot (*YouTube*, video recordings via *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*).

Another thing to consider is whether the interaction between congregations from different locations is possible after the service is over (Pakpahan 2022:52). Thirdly, the 'in a way' component. Does the service follow the same worship order, and does the congregation participate in the worship order? Does the service feature songs and provide opportunities for the congregation to sing along? These three components will be indicators of whether a service held by the church in an online space allows for active participation from the congregation (Pakpahan 2022:52). As explained above, paying attention to the three components will help in further research on worship carried out in digital spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the understanding, the research design 8-'I' questions in validating the reception of online worship and fellowship in the forms of: (1) can follow worship with full concentration; (2) can focus more on the sermon; (3) can sing and pray together; (4) can see, hear and strengthen other congregation members; (5) find a sense of family and mutual belonging; (6) can work together in serving others; (7) can prepare testimonies or mission work in various digital formats; (8) can grow in faith and knowledge about God's Word. Questions 1, 2, 3 and 8 are about personal growth, and questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 are in relation to another person.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the form of a questionnaire in the District DKI Jakarta HKBP. The official digital ministry period analysed is conducted from April 2020 to December 2021. The time frame marked is chosen because of Indonesia's government's social distancing regulations. Data collection was carried out between 11 January 2022 and 12 April 2023.

As mentioned earlier, the population sample is 147 660. Based on this number, the research sample was determined using the sample size calculator formula from the Raosoft sample size calculator, with the following results: The Raosoft sample calculator¹ determines that 384 participants must participate to reach a confidence level of 95% and a 5% error margin.

1. <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>. The Raosoft sample size calculator is based on the principles of statistical theory, particularly those related to the estimation of proportions in a population. the following formula to determine the sample size for a survey:

$$n = \frac{N Z^2 p (1-p)}{e^2 (N-p) + Z^2 p (1-p)}$$

According to the calculation results with the formula above, this study has 421 respondents.

The data source for this study was a questionnaire, a meticulously designed tool distributed in the form of a Google form. This method of data collection was chosen because of its suitability for large-scale studies with respondents spread over a wide area (Jasin & Glenwick 2016; Jensen 2021). The primary data for this study was obtained from the answers received from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was developed after determining the working definitions of encounter, fellowship, worship and the preferability of the respondents towards future digital ministry. The questions are close-ended. In Table 1, the questions determine the respondents' participation level in the online ministry and the platforms used. The second part on the satisfactory level in online worship and fellowship participation uses a 5-point Likert scale. The third part on the difference between online and onsite worship and fellowship uses a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire also asks respondents to choose their preferred mode of worship and fellowship post-pandemic: onsite, hybrid or online. As much as 62.7% of respondents (264 of 421) decide to return to the onsite mode of worship and fellowship, 32.8% (138) choose to continue a hybrid mode and 4.5% (19) choose only online.

The filtered group (now 157 respondents) who decided on hybrid and online were then asked to respond to the advantages of digital mode on a 5-point Likert scale. The group is also asked about their attitude towards joining digital modes of worship and fellowship in the form of a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire is spread through *WhatsApp* group messaging in three levels. Firstly, the pastors' *WhatsApp* group messaging, then the pastors will forward the message to their respective elder groups. Secondly, the elder groups in each church will forward the message to the whole congregation in their area. Lastly, each participant registered their email address to begin filling in the questionnaire and ensure that everyone belongs to one of the congregations in the sampling area.

This study analysed the data using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. The analysis included assessing the sampling adequacy using the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy) method, as well as evaluating the validity and reliability of the data from two groups of respondents: the 421 and the 158.

Research presentations

Demographics

All of the 421 respondents (100%) gave their consent and answered all the questions in the questionnaire until they

were separated on the question of their preferred mode of worship and fellowship. The question resulted in 158 respondents answering the remaining questions.

Before the pandemic, the attendance of the participants in Sunday worship was high. The result was: always (82.7%), often (11.6%), occasionally (3.3%) and rarely (2.4%). During the pandemic, the attendance of the respondents in online worship on Sundays (during the COVID-19 Pandemic: April 2020–December 2021) declined. They were always (60.8%), often (19%), occasionally (11.9%) and rarely (8.3%).

When compared to the period before the pandemic, there was a decrease in the attendance frequency especially for those who always attend from 82.7% to 60.8%. The decrease in frequency is accompanied by an increase in those who only worship during the big holidays such as Christmas and Easter from 2.4% to 8.3%. The data obtained clearly

illustrate the negative impact of the pandemic on fellowship in worship and is a challenge for the church to answer the needs of congregation members in church services.

Before the pandemic, the highest number often attended (43.5%), followed by respondents who always attended (27.3%), rarely attended (21.4%) and never attended (7.8%). During the pandemic, there has been a decrease in attendance. The largest percentage of attendance is often attended (28%), always attended (21.4%), rarely attended (34%) and never attended (16.6%). As seen in Table 2, there is a noticeable decrease in attendance at fellowship activities among the respondents. Those who were often and always attended moved to occasional and never.

The majority of respondents (74.3%) feel that their online presence is part of the fellowship. The other answer is sometimes (20.4%) and no (5.2%). From these data, it can be said that most respondents (church members) can feel actively involved in online fellowship, and that is one way to answer the needs of church members in service in the digital space.

Table 2 presented the questions asked on the satisfaction of worshipping and joining fellowship in the digital space, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 not satisfied, 2 less satisfied, 3 neutral or somewhat satisfied, 4 satisfied and 5 very satisfied).

The data demonstrate the questionnaire's reliability and validity. This underscores that the underlying constructs measured by the questionnaire items are well-defined, and the sample is more than sufficient for conducting more advanced statistical analyses. From the results Table 2 regarding personal satisfaction with the services provided in the digital space, several findings can be drawn:

1. The number of responses to questions 1, 2, 3 and 8 on the scale 5 and 4 on the Likert scale are above 50% of respondents. This means that participants are more satisfied with their personal needs. The ministry in the digital space is satisfactory for personal growth.

TABLE 1: Demographic variables and characteristics of participants.

Variables	%	Number	Total
Gender			
Men	55.3	233	-
Women	44.7	188	-
Total	100	421	-
Age (in years)			
12–16	10.7	-	45
17–25	22.6	-	95
26–35	15.4	-	65
36–45	16.9	-	71
46–55	20	-	84
56–65	12.4	-	52
> 66	2	-	9
Total	100	-	421
Last education			
Primary School	0	-	0
Junior High	2.6	-	11
High School	29.7	-	125
Diploma 1, 2, 3	9.7	-	41
Bachelor	42.8	-	180
Master	13.3	-	56
Doctoral	1.9	-	8
Total	100	-	421

TABLE 2: Ministry in digital space's satisfaction level.

Item	Mean	Median	Cronbach's alpha	KMO measure	Bartlett's test		
					Chi-square	df	p
1. I can follow worship and fellowships with full concentration	3.54	4	0.80	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
2. I can focus more on listening to the sermon	3.57	4	0.78	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
3. I can sing and pray together	3.51	4	0.84	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
4. I can see, hear, and strengthen other congregation members	3.27	3	0.85	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
5. I find a sense of family and belonging with each other	3.43	3	0.83	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
6. I can work together in serving others	3.49	3	0.88	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
7. I can prepare testimonies that introduce Christ's work in various digital formats	3.43	3	0.84	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000
8. I can grow in faith and knowledge about God's Word	3.74	4	0.86	0.93	2650.38	28	0.000

KMO, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin.

TABLE 3: Difference factors of online and onsite services.

Item	Mean	Median	Cronbach's alpha	KMO measure	Bartlett's test		
					Chi-square	df	p
9. Gathering with the congregation	3.77	4	0.85	0.88	1150.39	10	0.000
10. Singing and worshipping in the church room	3.71	4	0.89	0.88	1150.39	10	0.000
11. Participating in the sacraments	3.73	4	0.82	0.88	1150.39	10	0.000
12. Efficiency of time and place	3.61	4	0.79	0.88	1150.39	10	0.000
13. A sense of family and mutual belonging	3.49	3	0.83	0.88	1150.39	10	0.000

KMO, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin.

TABLE 4: Advantages of online mode of worship and fellowship (filtered group).

Item	Mean	Median	Cronbach's alpha	KMO measure	Bartlett's test		
					Chi-square	df	p
1. Efficient use of time (punctuality and reduced travel time because of traffic)	3.96	4	0.79	0.77	179.89	6	0.000
2. Can follow fellowship from anywhere	4.14	4	0.85	0.77	179.89	6	0.000
3. Having more options for worship and fellowship	3.91	4	0.83	0.77	179.89	6	0.000
4. Allows me to stay connected with other fellowship members without being limited by distance	3.99	4	0.81	0.77	179.89	6	0.000
5. Helps me to build faith and spirituality	3.97	4	0.77	0.77	179.89	6	0.000

KMO, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin.

2. There is a persistent figure between 30% and 40% of neutral and somewhat satisfied satisfaction levels. Only once did the figure at this satisfaction level drop to 27.8%, namely in question (8); I can grow in faith and knowledge of the Word of God. Therefore, it is necessary to explore who is in this 30%–40% group and whether they have anything in common.

The third part on the difference between online and onsite worship and fellowship uses a 5-point Likert scale.

The conclusion that can be drawn from Table 3 is that more than 60% of respondents feel above 60% difference between online and onsite worship and fellowship, especially on items 1–4.

Responses were then obtained regarding the preferences towards church worship and fellowship activities after the pandemic.

Even when the satisfactory level 62.7% of respondents (church members) can mostly feel a reasonably high level of satisfaction in fellowship in digital space (as previously submitted data), they prefer to attend a fellowship in the church after the pandemic ends. This is possible because of the longing to gather communally in physical fellowship in the church.

Respondents who want fellowship activities to return to church buildings after the pandemic ends are in the most significant number, namely 62.7% or 264 out of 421 people. In the following order are respondents who want a combination (hybrid) of physical fellowship (onsite) and fellowship in digital space (online) consisting of 32.8% or 138 out of 421 people. Meanwhile, respondents who want fellowships to be

carried out only in digital space (online) are in the range of 4.5%, or 19 people.

After the questions of preferences for mode of worship or fellowship after the pandemic (onsite or hybrid or online), the ones who opted for hybrid and online were filtered to be the second group of 157 people and were asked to state the advantages of online worship and fellowship (Table 4).

Data show that the practical advantage of online worship and fellowship is favourable among the filtered group. Most respondents strongly agree that fellowship in digital space can be followed from anywhere. The availability of Internet networks in urban areas such as Jakarta and its surroundings greatly supports access to fellowship in digital space. The response results may differ if respondents live in areas that need a better Internet connection. The advantage for respondents is that they can follow the fellowship from home or wherever they are, even on the go. Respondents are also not tied to one choice of worship or fellowship, for example, through other church *YouTube* channel services.

Correlation and coefficient

The following are the significant positive correlations.² Those who participated in online worship (during COVID-19) are correlated with individual activities, such as focussing on sermons, working together in serving others, mission work in preparing testimonies and growth in faith and knowledge.

2. The correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. It ranges from -1 to 1 with positive correlation being from 0 to 1 that indicates as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger the positive relationship. The negative correlation (-1 to 0) indicates that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to decrease. The closer the value is to -1, the stronger the negative relationship. No Correlation (0): Indicates no relationship between the two variables. Significance (Sig. 2-tailed) The significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) indicates the probability that the observed correlation occurred by chance. It is used to determine whether the correlation is statistically significant.

Meanwhile, the factor of attending various fellowship activities that use more interactive media such as video conferences (during COVID-19) correlated with singing and praying together, strengthening congregation members, finding a sense of family and mutual belonging, working together in serving others, preparation of testimonies, and growth in faith and knowledge.

Those who prefer returning to activities in the church building show a correlation with several factors. These include concentration in worship, focus on sermons, singing and praying together, strengthening congregation members, finding a sense of family and mutual belonging, working together to serve others, preparation of testimonies, and growth in faith and knowledge.

The following are the significant negative correlations. Older age and higher educational attainment were negatively associated with unity in worship and spiritual growth. Increased attendance at fellowship activities before the pandemic showed mixed correlations, with some negative implications for unity and spiritual growth.

These correlations suggest that engagement in online and fellowship activities during the pandemic positively impacted individuals' worship experiences and spiritual growth. However, older age and higher education may pose challenges to achieving unity and growth in faith. The older the age gets, the more we find negative correlations of the following 'I' factors: 'I can sing and pray together', 'I can see, hear, and strengthen other congregation members', 'I can prepare testimonies that introduce Christ's work in various digital formats', and 'I can grow in faith and knowledge about God's Word'. This indicates that as age increases, agreement with these statements tends to decrease. The preference for continuing fellowship activities post-pandemic indicates a desire to maintain the positive aspects experienced during the pandemic.

Key findings

Research on the shift of worship services and fellowship during the COVID-19 pandemic at HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta shows several findings. The data show that there has been a decrease in the number of congregants attending Sunday services and fellowship from onsite to online. This correlates with the survey results, which show that only 4% want whole online worship to continue. As many as 63% want the church to return to the onsite model only. Although the level of satisfaction is at a median of 3 and 4, with a mean approaching 3.5 on the Likert scale, the satisfaction rate is higher when correlated with personal spiritual needs factors compared to those related to satisfaction with feelings of fellowship.

The research findings indicate a correlation between high participation and education level, which can be attributed to the ability to engage in various online activities. The strongest correlations in the data are related to participation in online worship services during the COVID-19 pandemic and

education levels, with statistically significant positive correlations. The weakest correlations are related to gender and whether the church conducts services in digital spaces, with values very close to zero and not statistically significant.

It is important to note that this correlation needs to be further tested. Additionally, the research found that a person's age also influences their preference for worship mode, with older individuals showing a higher preference for onsite worship.

This study confirmed the theory that fellowship requires evidence of presence in relationships between subjects who see and hear each other in digital space. At the personal level, respondents felt a higher level of satisfaction than factors requiring relationships with others. However, the research might be limited to a traditional mainstream Lutheran church such as HKBP. Therefore, we encourage further research to utilise the designed questionnaire for other churches.

Challenges in digital space ministry during the pandemic arise because of limited meetings and interactions. Although digital space can provide a place for worship, the choice to hold worship and fellowship onsite shows the preferences of respondents who need fellowship with others. For respondents, worship is not only about personal spiritual growth but also about meeting with others. The data also show that respondents feel the difference between digital space ministry and fellowship in church, especially in terms of gathering together. One factor that could be a suggestion for further research is the correlation between the culture of the HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta congregation, which is more than 95% from the Batak tribe. Before the Batak people accepted Christianity in the early 19th century, the Batak culture that the people lived in had the beliefs, social structures, laws, customs and daily habits that included the community (Jan. Sihar Aritonang 1988; Schreiner 1978; Silitonga 2010; Simanjuntak 2014). Walter Lempp said that HKBP became a people's church, where Christianity and customs are believed to be the identity of the Batak Toba community (Lempp 1976:104, 222-225; Sinaga 2000). The Batak community has a culture with a close and communal kinship system, where various decisions are taken by the nuclear family and extended family. The Batak Toba culture is still deeply embedded in the Batak Toba community, where the language, clan system, kinship system (social structure), customs and philosophy of life of the Batak Toba are closely attached to the HKBP congregation, which of course also influences the life of the HKBP as a church institution.

Conclusion

The general response of HKBP District VIII DKI Jakarta congregation members towards digital ministry in the form of worship and fellowship during the pandemic in the digital space is to return to onsite meetings because they felt the difference between the digital space and the fellowship in the church, especially the need for physical encounter. The understanding of ministry in the digital space must

include cultural elements that still require community closeness. Our suggestion for further research is to develop ministry in the digital space with a particular approach from a Batak culture perspective. It will provide a better understanding of encounters in the digital space and equip fellowship in service and worship in the digital space. It is also important to compare survey findings with the existing literature on the subject.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

B.J.P., the head of the research project, contributed to themes, methodology, analysis, first draft and final draft. P.H.A., the second author, was responsible for collecting data, analysing data by using software such as SPSS and providing notes for the bibliography. A.H. was responsible for validation, data curation and supervision of the project administration.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

The questionnaire data are available at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ANbi7_-3Yz9RY-bwuh83bqwdmSIYEitI80UIGvb12SI/prefill.

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