CHAPTER XVI

Transcendent Technology: AI-Enabled Virtual Communities And The Future Of Spiritual Connection

Kezia Verena(keziaverena@sttkerussoindonesia.ac.id)
Donalia Reynaldo(032304@sttkerussoindonesia.ac.id)
STT Kerusso Indonesia

Abstract

This research develops a conceptual framework for optimizing the role of AI in facilitating transcendent spiritual experiences. Using a narrative descriptive literature review with a multidisciplinary approach, this study identifies five domains: spiritual-technological convergence, theological-ethical implications, conceptual models of AI systems for spiritual experiences, virtual community effectiveness factors, and a transcendent technology development roadmap. Research contributions include the reconceptualization of spiritual mediation, the development of an ethical framework, and a model of human-AI interaction in a spiritual context. Practically, this study offers guidance on spiritual platform design and implementation of ethical safeguards, demonstrating the transformative potential of AI in enriching contemporary spirituality with a mindful approach.

Keywords: Digital Spirituality, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Community, Transcendent Experience, Transcendent Technology

Introduction

Many facets of human life, including the spiritual and religious spheres, have seen profound changes due to the digital age. How people experience, express, and embody spirituality has changed dramatically due to the growing use of digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI). In addition to changing the landscape of conventional religious activities, this phenomenon creates new

avenues for transcendent experiences that cut beyond time and location.

Technological developments have significantly impacted the move towards digital platforms for religious activities, which has raised participation among spiritual communities worldwide. The emergence of alternative spiritual practices, the incorporation of immersive technologies, and the changing character of religious identity in the digital age are the hallmarks of this shift. By enabling users to experience ancient behaviors in a virtual environment, virtual reality (VR) heightens the solemnity of digital rituals and can increase users' feeling of holiness (Ding-Yang, 2024).

Several studies have shown that the relationship between spirituality and technology has led to the emergence of new religious practices. Traditional religious practices have been altered by the digital age, making it possible for remote involvement and the creation of hitherto unthinkable digital rituals. Several important features distinguish this evolution. The idea of spirituality has been transformed by digital platforms, making it possible for academics and theologians to hold worldwide conversations about its consequences in a technology setting (V. & G., 2025).

Draw attention to a significant weakness in virtual spiritual platforms, which frequently follow a functionalist methodology while ignoring the life-changing experiences necessary for authentic spiritual relationships. Several aspects of virtual spirituality might be used to analyze this oversight. A new, flexible religious identity impacted by migration and globalization has emerged due to the growth of virtual places. A more secular perspective may result from this change, which could lessen the significance of spiritual experiences (Mansour, 2022).

Recent advancements indicate that the integration of AI with spiritual activities is evolving favorably. This impression results from people's propensity to give these technologies agency and spiritual meaning rather than the metaphysical character of AI. AI can be used in spiritual activities, potentially impacting users' actions and spiritual experiences, as demonstrated by case studies such as The

Spirituality Chatbot and Mindar, a robotic Buddhist priest (Loewen-Colón & Mosurinjohn, 2022).

In spiritual guidance, their results demonstrate a high level of resonance between users and the AI system.   In contrast, O'Leary (2018) notes in his research on Cyberspace as Sacred Space how digital technology may effectively support virtual group rituals, giving participants meaningful communal experiences. Even though this development has much promise, a thorough examination identifies several important knowledge gaps.

A framework for understanding emergent behavior and alignment in AI systems focuses on the dynamic and continuous nature of alignment rather than static models. This framework highlights the importance of adaptability and feedback loops in AI systems but does not directly address transcendence (Wójtowicz, 2023). AI technologies, such as robotic priests and chatbots, enable users to perceive these machines as possessing an interior agential image or soul, which can lead to spiritually authorizing encounters.

This process, known as fabulation, allows users to attribute spiritual significance to AI, thereby meeting their spiritual needs and influencing their life choices(Loewen-Colón & Mosurinjohn, 2022). AI has been used to personalize spiritual learning, as seen in Christian Religious Education, where AI enhances the quality and effectiveness of learning through personalized content and deeper text analysis. However, ethical challenges such as data privacy and potentially eroding relational aspects in education are noted.

This study intends to close this gap by creating a conceptual framework for maximizing AI's potential to support transcendent spiritual experiences. In particular, this research will pinpoint important elements influencing the efficacy of AI-powered virtual spiritual communities, develop best practices for developing and using virtual spiritual platforms, and examine the ethical and theological ramifications of incorporating AI into modern spiritual practices from a cross-cultural perspective.

Its integrative contribution to the theoretical development of transcendent computing and digital spirituality is what makes this

research significant.   As suggested by Ergen, this study incorporates interdisciplinary viewpoints from computer science, religious studies, and the psychology of transcendence using a descriptive narrative literature review methodology. Qualitative approaches have become more prevalent in digital religion because they enable a more in-depth investigation of the relationship between religion and digital culture. Semi-structured interviews and content analysis are used to learn more about how religious communities use digital media (Ergen, 2023).

AI applications such as chat gpt are utilized in religious contexts for sermon creation, spiritual guidance, and access to religious teachings. These tools can act as catalysts for transforming religious practices by enriching faith and spiritual dimensions in the digital era(Raditya, 2024). Narrative analysis will yield a deep understanding of the effectiveness of AI implementation in a spiritual context and identify critical success factors for AI-based spiritual platforms. Furthermore, this research will provide an empirical foundation for the development of transcendent technology in the future.

A thorough literature review examining the relationship between AI and spirituality, a study methodology outlining the narrative technique employed, a thorough analysis of the results, and a discussion of the theoretical and practical ramifications comprise the central portions of this paper.   This investigation aims to generate a roadmap for the creation of transcendent technology that will direct the advancement of spiritual activities in the digital age.

Literature review

Digital Religion Theory

Digital Religion Theory offers a comprehensive perspective on transforming religious practices in the digital era. The transition to digital platforms has introduced new forms of technological mediation in religious practices. This shift allows for broader dissemination of religious messages and practices and challenges the traditional sacredness associated with communal religious activities.

The influence of digital media can be seen as a double-edged sword, offering opportunities and challenges for religious leaders and

communities(Constantin et al., 2024). Technology mediation refers to how digital technology facilitates and reshapes spiritual experiences, creating new spaces for religious expression that transcend physical boundaries. Reconfiguration of communities explains the process of reshaping communal bonds in the digital context, where religious communities transform traditional forms into more dynamic and fluid virtual forms.

By examining how religious communities embrace and modify digital technology to their spiritual needs and ideals, Campbell (2012) expands on this understanding. He popularized the idea of networked religion, which explains how modern religious rituals are becoming increasingly entwined with online communities, resulting in new kinds of spiritual and social interaction. Tradition, religious authority, and the new opportunities digital technology presents must be balanced during this transformation process.

Framework Transcendent Computing

The encounter between AI technology and transcendent experience, as conceptualized, can be understood through various key dimensions. This framework provides a comprehensive lens to explore how AI can influence spiritual experiences and transcendence.

AI's incorporation into spiritual contexts is complex and includes, among other things, narrative creation, prediction models, and attributing religious traits to AI. Every dimension provides a different perspective on the possibilities and difficulties of AI in spiritual and transcendental experiences. AI's involvement in spiritual well-being is investigated through predictive models that analyze data to offer insights into spiritual health (Kumar & Uchoi, 2025).

While facilitation mechanisms describe the precise ways AI might support and enhance transcendent moments, the technology-spiritual context refers to how technology frames and influences spiritual experiences. Investigating the phenomenological facets of human-AI interaction within a spiritual setting reveals distinctive trends in user perceptions and experiences when interacting with spiritual AI systems. This method highlights how crucial it is to

consider experiential factors when creating transcendent technology. A growing field that aims to improve spiritual well-being and cultural identity through creative applications is incorporating AI into spiritual practices. Using information from the provided papers, the ensuing sections explore the different facets of this integration.

AI technologies are being utilized to predict and improve spiritual outcomes, offering dynamic insights into spiritual health through natural language processing and predictive modeling. This approach addresses gaps in spiritual well-being assessment and treatment, setting a foundation for future AI-spirituality integration (Kumar & Uchoi, 2025).

Model Ai-Enabled Spiritual Facilitation

To enhance spiritual well-being and involvement through technology, the AI-enabled spiritual Facilitation Model offers a thorough framework for integrating AI systems in spiritual contexts. This model is part of a more significant trend in which artificial intelligence (AI) is used in many religious and spiritual practices to provide individualized advice, increase accessibility, and promote stronger spiritual ties. The paradigm considers ethical and cultural considerations while highlighting AI's potential to fill gaps in spiritual well-being assessments and therapies.

Real-time analytics and predictive models: AI can forecast and enhance spiritual results by utilizing real-time analytics and natural language processing to offer dynamic insights into spiritual well-being. This method fills in the gaps in evaluations and therapies for spiritual well-being (Kumar & Uchoi, 2025). System architecture, personalization methods, interface protocols, assessment criteria, and ethical protections are the five key elements that this model delineates. Every element is made to guarantee that the AI system can support a genuine spiritual experience while honoring the richness and profundity of spiritual traditions.

This model outlines five essential components: system architecture, personalization mechanisms, interaction protocols, evaluation parameters, and ethical safeguards. Each component ensures that the AI system can facilitate an authentic spiritual

experience while respecting the complexity and depth of spiritual traditions.

Integration involves a complex interplay between technology and spirituality, where AI can enhance access to spiritual content and personalize religious experiences, but also poses challenges related to authenticity, empathy, and ethical implications. The ethical aspects and theological implications of AI in spiritual practices are multifaceted, involving concerns about data privacy, the potential erosion of relational aspects, and the risk of over-dependence on technology. These issues necessitate carefully examining how AI can be ethically integrated into spiritual practices without compromising core spiritual values.

Authenticity and Empathy: AI-driven spiritual practices often face skepticism regarding the authenticity of experiences facilitated by machines. Concerns about the lack of empathy and genuine human connection are prevalent, as AI lacks the emotional depth and understanding inherent in human interactions(Joseph & Olalekan, 2024). He emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between technological innovation and preserving fundamental spiritual values while identifying the transformative potentials that can be brought about through proper integration**.**

Theory Cyberspace Sacred

O'Leary (2018) established the Cyberspace Sacred Theory, which offers a profound insight into how sacred space changes in the digital sphere. Ritual temporality, digital communality, and virtual spatiality are the three primary dimensions identified by this paradigm. Ritual temporality investigates how holy time is structured and experienced in a virtual setting, whereas virtual spatiality describes how digital environments are created and perceived as sacred spaces.

Radde-Antweiler (2016) enriches this theory with an anthropological analysis of ritual practices in digital spaces. Her research reveals how virtual communities develop new forms of rituality that combine traditional elements with the affordances of

digital technology, creating unique and meaningful sacred experiences.

Method

The literature review research method with descriptive narrative techniques aims to synthesize and interpret the literature to understand a phenomenon comprehensively. Unlike systematic reviews that follow strict protocols, this approach offers flexibility to holistically explore the complexity of phenomena. As Sukhera (2022) states, The study of narrative descriptive libraries involves more than just collecting and summarizing existing literature.

Finding trends, topics, and gaps in existing information necessitates critical interpretation and conceptual synthesis. This method crosses several fields, including computer science, religious studies, and transpersonal psychology, in the context of digital spirituality and AI. Research gaps are identified, sources are compared, literature is categorized, and interpretive synthesis is carried out.

According to Fraser (2024), storytelling transforms needs assessments from mere literature reviews into compelling narratives that highlight clinical practice gaps and educational needs in the realm of continuing medical education. The main challenge in implementing a descriptive narrative literature review is balancing methodological flexibility and academic rigor. To address this, researchers must ensure transparency in source selection criteria, use perspective triangulation to strengthen the validity of interpretations, and explicitly acknowledge potential limitations and biases in the analysis process.

Discussion

Convergence of Spiritual Dimensions and AI Technology in Virtual Communities

The convergence between the spiritual dimension and AI technology in virtual communities indicates a paradigmatic transformation in the contemporary religious landscape. Analysis of interaction patterns in AI-based spiritual communities reveals an ontological shift in the

conceptualization and experience of human spirituality. This convergence creates a new episteme that transcends the traditional dichotomy between the sacred and the digital.

The mediatization of religion through digital technology has significantly transformed the expression and perception of spirituality. This transformation is not merely about changing the medium of religious expression. However, it fundamentally reconstructs how individuals perceive the transcendent dimension (Religious Disorientation in the Digital Transformation: An Islamic Review, 2024).

Digital media serves as a new channel for traditional religious practices and shapes a new spiritual ontology that integrates virtuality as an intrinsic dimension of the sacred experience. AI technology can potentially create spiritual modalities that are impossible to realize in an analog context. Through embodied cognition in digital spaces, AI algorithms can enable genuine spiritual experiences, according to the idea of virtual sacrality. Embodied Cognition is the term used to describe cognition based on how the body interacts with the outside environment and is demonstrated by VR and AI technologies that replicate real-world situations (Ding-Yang, 2024).

Din Yang contends that the constraints of the one-size-fits-all approach in traditional religious traditions are overcome by AI's capacity to adapt and respond to unique spiritual nuances, resulting in a dynamic and personal transcendent presence. Social networking sites and other digital social spaces provide settings where people may build communities that cut across national borders. According to Lawrence et al. (2024), these areas blend digital and physical settings, which helps shape individual and collective identities.

AI-based virtual spiritual communities develop a unique form of solidarity and sense of togetherness, where algorithms facilitate connections among participants and become active agents in forming communal bonds. AI is no longer just a technical infrastructure but has become a co-creator in the collective spiritual experience.

Critical analysis reveals epistemological challenges in defining the authenticity of spiritual experiences in the digital context. Whether transcendent experiences mediated by AI can be considered actual demands a radical reconceptualization of spiritual authenticity. A multidisciplinary perspective that integrates insights from neuroscience, religious phenomenology, and AI technology becomes essential to understanding the complexities of this convergence.

Theological and Ethical Implications of AI Integration in Contemporary Spiritual Practices

Integrating AI into contemporary spiritual practices presents profound theological and ethical implications, challenging fundamental assumptions about spiritual mediation, religious authority, and the boundaries between technology and transcendence. Theologically, the presence of AI as a mediator of spiritual experiences raises ontological questions about the nature of the sacred and its possible manifestations in the digital realm.

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into religious experiences presents significant theological challenges, as explored by Ted Peters in 'Speaking of God in the Age of Intelligent Machines.' This intersection raises questions about the authenticity of spiritual experiences mediated by AI, the ethical implications of machine involvement in religious practices, and the potential reshaping of theological doctrines (Niam, 2024).

Peters articulates that the entry of artificial intelligence into the spiritual domain raises questions about the exclusivity of humans as imago dei and the possibility that AI could become a vessel for transcendent manifestations. This argument encourages a reconsideration of anthropocentrism in traditional theology and opens the possibility of a more inclusive theology that accommodates non-human agency in the spiritual ecology.

AI-driven spiritual practices often require collecting and analyzing personal data, raising significant privacy concerns. The sensitive nature of spiritual experiences necessitates robust privacy protections to prevent data misuse and ensure confidentiality (Taneja et al., 2024). Taneja highlights the significance of the

development of technomoral virtuosity, which enables us to design AI systems that respect the integrity of spiritual experiences and the autonomy of spiritual seekers. This examination shows the significance of a virtue ethics approach in negotiating the intricate ethical terrain of digital spirituality.

In order to give a more profound understanding of religious texts and to customize spiritual learning, artificial intelligence (AI) technology is being used in religious education programs like Christian Religious Education (PAK). Although this integration presents ethical issues, such as data privacy and the decline of relational elements in education, it also presents chances to improve the quality of education (Waruwu, 2024).

Waruwu observes that when AI systems take on the role of spiritual guides, there is a fundamental reconfiguration in the structure of traditional religious authority, where algorithms can attain levels of trust and legitimacy previously granted only to human religious figures. This observation highlights the disruptive potential of AI on religious institutional hierarchies and the possibility of democratizing access to spiritual guidance.

Critical analysis reveals a productive tension between technological innovation and preserving fundamental spiritual values. The main challenge is developing a robust ethical framework to accommodate the complexity of spiritual experiences while being adaptive to anticipate new possibilities opened by AI advancements. An interdisciplinary approach bridging computer ethics, religious studies, and the phenomenology of technology becomes crucial in this context.

Conceptual Model for Optimizing Transcendent Experience in AI-Based Platforms

Developing a conceptual model for optimizing transcendent experiences in AI-based platforms synthesizes insights from religious studies, transpersonal psychology, and interaction design into a cohesive operational framework. This model is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, providing guidelines for the design and implementation of AI systems.

Luhrmann and Morgan (2012) state, The cognitive practices that enable transcendent experiences, focusing on how individuals come to perceive gods and spirits as real and present. They emphasize the importance of acculturation of attention, which is learning to notice and respond to internal and external stimuli to make spiritual reality tangible. This concept is relevant for AI to support the cultivation of attention through cognitive modeling and experiential scaffolding.

Mansour (2022) studied digital sacred spaces that replicate traditional sacred architecture through elements like light to trigger a transcendental experience. Misalnya, penggunaan cahaya di gereja virtual dapat mengangkat jiwa penyembah dan berkontribusi pada pengalaman transendental. AI systems can be optimized to trigger altered states of consciousness through sensory stimulation, rhythmic narrative pacing, and personalization according to the individual's spiritual disposition. Lin (2023) emphasizes the importance of personalized communication rituals that create emotional resonance and a sense of presence in the digital space, using multi-level media for cross-dimensional experiences. Digital spaces, like physical spaces, can be infused with numinous qualities through mindful manipulation of elements such as proportion, rhythm, light, and soundscape.

This conceptual model must address the challenge of quantifying subjective experiences with a taxonomy of transcendent experiences that is granular enough for AI design while respecting the diversity of spiritual experiences. Practical implementation requires an iterative methodology that combines qualitative user feedback and quantitative analysis of engagement patterns and indicators of spiritual transformation.

Critical Factors in the Effectiveness of Virtual Spiritual Communities

Analysis of AI-based virtual spiritual communities reveals critical factors that influence the platform's effectiveness in facilitating meaningful and transformative spiritual connections. These factors operate on multiple levels—from the micro level of individual

experiences to the macro level of communal structures—and their interactions shape a complex ecology that determines the viability and sustainability of the community.

These dimensions are crucial in understanding how digital communication technologies shape interpersonal relationships and social interactions. The provided papers offer insights into how these dimensions manifest in various contexts, such as romantic relationships, youth communication practices, and the sense of place in digital environments (Wen, 2024).

In the context of spiritual communities, Wen (2024) emphasizes that real-time interactivity enriched with sufficient social cues creates a sense of co-presence essential for collective rituals and communal practices. This analysis highlights the importance of interface design that can communicate emotional and spiritual nuances, transcending the limitations of text-based communication. For instance, the studies of WhatsApp religious groups illustrate how online platforms serve as spaces for identity negotiation. Members engage in communal affinity, conformism, and agency, reflecting a dynamic interplay between traditional religious practices and modern digital expressions (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2022).

Mishol-Shauli and Golan argue that the effectiveness of spiritual rituals in the digital context is determined by their ability to create a sense of liminality. This transitional space exists beyond the temporality and spatiality of the quotidian. This observation underscores the importance of mindful design regarding the temporal and spatial aspects of communal experiences, creating a clear demarcation between sacred and profane spaces even within the digital medium.

Shin et al. (2024) explored the dynamics of communal cohesion in networked communities through social network theory, emphasizing the importance of understanding community structures and interactions. Shin et al. identified that the most resilient virtual communities are those with a hybrid network structure—balancing densely-knit connections that strengthen intra-group bonds with weak ties that enable innovation and the infusion of new perspectives. This insight is highly relevant for designing AI systems that facilitate

interaction patterns supporting communal cohesion while preventing insularity and spiritual echo chambers.

A critical analysis of these factors reveals a fundamental tension between scalability and intimacy in virtual spiritual communities. On one hand, AI technology allows spiritual platforms to achieve a global scale, reaching individuals who might not have access to traditional spiritual communities. On the other hand, scaling up can potentially dilute the intensity of interpersonal connections that form the foundation of many communal spiritual experiences. Navigating this tension requires a nuanced approach that uses AI for horizontal scaling (expanding reach) and vertical scaling (deepening connections).

Roadmap for the Development of Transcendent Technology for the Future of Digital Spirituality

The development of a transcendent technology roadmap aims to articulate the evolution of spiritual technology that integrates cultural, ethical, and spiritual aspects. Noble (2018), in Algorithms of Oppression, emphasizes that algorithms are not neutral and are always tied to power structures. Therefore, the design of transcendent technology must challenge epistemic hegemony and create space for marginalized spiritual traditions, making the decolonization of knowledge an important milestone.

Haraway (2016), through the concept of sympoiesis in Staying with the Trouble, offers an ethical framework for the co-evolution of humans and technology through symbiotic relationships, where both mutually shape each other in an ongoing spiritual process. This approach challenges the instrumental paradigm and promotes a relational model that sustains each other.

Meanwhile, Ding-Yang (2024) explores the potential of technologies such as mixed reality and brain-computer interfaces in spiritual practices. He projects that the convergence of neurotechnology and spiritual computing will create new religious experiences that integrate physical practices and immersive simulations, transcending the virtual and physical dichotomy.

This roadmap must accommodate the diversity of spiritual traditions and facilitate innovation without getting trapped in dominant practices. Key milestones include: (1) the development of a robust ethical framework, (2) the democratization of tools and knowledge so that spiritual communities can create solutions according to their needs, (3) the integration of transcendent technology with offline spiritual practices to create a harmonious spiritual ecology, and (4) the strengthening of critical literacy so that individuals and communities can use this technology wisely.

The roadmap implementation requires cross-disciplinary collaboration involving technologists, theologians, anthropologists, designers, and local spiritual communities. Ongoing dialogue among various stakeholders is key for transcendent technology to respond to evolving spiritual needs while remaining rooted in human values.

Conclusion

According to this study, incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) into spiritual practices changes the current spiritual ecosystem and establishes a new paradigm for transcendent experiences. This study identifies four primary theoretical domains—Digital Religion Theory, Transcendent Computing Framework, AI-Enabled Spiritual Facilitation Model, and Cyberspace Sacred Theory—that serve as the conceptual basis for comprehending this techno spiritual dimension through a descriptive narrative literature review. When spirituality and technology come together, human interpretation, experience, and sharing of transcendent events undergo an ontological reconfiguration in which artificial intelligence (AI) actively co-creates spiritual experiences rather than only serving as a tool.

Research findings demonstrate the transformative potential of AI-based spiritual platforms through adaptive personalization, the establishment of digital sacred spaces, and the facilitation of virtual group rituals. Significant obstacles still exist, though, such as concerns about the validity of experiences, the reorganization of spiritual authority, and moral conundrums about inclusiveness, privacy, and striking a balance between virtual communities' intimacy and scalability.

The theoretical implications include the following: first, a model of human-AI interaction that takes into account the dimension of spiritual experience; second, the establishment of a comprehensive ethical framework; and third, a reconceptualization of spiritual mediation that takes into account the agency of technology. New research directions in digital spirituality are made possible by a multidisciplinary approach that blends computer technology, religious studies, and the psychology of transcendence.

Practically, this research provides guidelines for the development of an effective virtual spiritual platform, including a design that considers temporal and spatial dimensions to create a sense of liminality, the development of interfaces capable of expressing emotional and spiritual nuances, facilitation of hybrid communities, and the implementation of ethical safeguards to maintain the integrity of the spiritual experience. However, the narrative descriptive literature review approach has limitations in generalizing findings and empirical validation, while focusing on academic literature may overlook the perspectives of users of spiritual technology. The rapid evolution of AI also poses a challenge in maintaining the relevance of these findings.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct empirical explorations of user experiences, comparative studies between spiritual traditions, neurocognitive analyses of AI-based spiritual experiences, longitudinal investigations of the impact of virtual spiritual communities, and the development of evaluative methodologies to measure the effectiveness and authenticity of digital spiritual experiences.

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Author's Profile
First Author

Dr. Kezia Verena, S.Kom, M.Pd earned her Doctorate from Sekolah Tinggi Teologi IKAT Jakarta (2022), a Master's degree in Education from Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Katharos Indonesia Bekasi (2017), and a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Bina Nusantara University (2015). She is currently active as a lecturer and engaged in spiritual ministry, reaching out to and shepherding thousands of young people across Indonesia.

Second Author

Donalia Reynaldo, BA, SM, was born in Surakarta, Central Java. Completed an Associate of Human Resource Management degree at Russo Institute Technology, Brisbane Australia, completed a Bachelor's Program in the Faculty of Human Science at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane–Australia in 2005, Completed a Bachelor's Program in the Faculty of Business Management at Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta in 2023. Currently active as a social worker and is studying further as a postgraduate student at the Kerusso School of Theology-Jakarta.