

The Role of Online Mass in Catholic Worship: Digital Media as a Temporary Liturgical Adaptation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of Online Mass, broadcast through the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung, in sustaining Catholic spiritual life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the research examines how Catholics engage with Online Mass and how digital media serves as a temporary adaptation to the disruption of in-person worship. The study uses a qualitative approach, employing content analysis of selected Online Mass videos and audience engagement metrics such as views and likes. Additionally, the research analyses the themes presented in the homilies and audience interactions in the comment sections to understand the spiritual experience of the faithful during the pandemic. The findings reveal that Online Mass was widely accepted as a legitimate and meaningful form of worship, despite the absence of physical sacramental participation. While the faithful embraced Online Mass as a temporary solution, they recognised its limitations, especially regarding the Eucharist. The study also highlights how YouTube serves as a new public religious space, enabling communal participation in worship despite physical absence, and offering an innovative way to maintain liturgical engagement in a crisis context. This research contributes to the field of digital religion by exploring how digital media mediates religious practice and community, specifically in the context of Catholic liturgy. It offers insights into how digital platforms facilitate spiritual participation and reveals the tension between digital mediation and traditional sacramental theology. The study's originality lies in its focus on digital audience engagement and the hybrid nature of religious participation in the digital age, offering new perspectives on how the Church can adapt to technological changes while maintaining theological integrity.

Keywords: Online mass; digital religion; catholic liturgy; digital public religious space; youtube.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that began at the end of 2019 has profoundly transformed social life across the globe, including the ways religious communities practice and experience faith. In Indonesia, the government implemented large-scale social restrictions through Government Regulation No. 21 (2020), which significantly limited public gatherings and face-to-face religious activities. As a result, worship services in various religious traditions, including

Catholic liturgical celebrations, were temporarily suspended or strictly regulated. According to data from the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), during the early phase of the pandemic, most dioceses across Indonesia halted public Masses and shifted to alternative forms of pastoral ministry to prevent the spread of the virus. This unprecedented situation compelled religious institutions to rapidly reconfigure their modes of worship and community engagement in response to public health imperatives (Mashabi & Gatra, 2020).

In this context, digital technology emerged as a crucial medium for sustaining religious life. Online worship practices expanded rapidly, with platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram Live becoming central spaces for religious communication. Reports from Google and YouTube Analytics indicate a significant increase in the consumption of religious live-streamed content in Indonesia during 2020–2021, particularly during major religious seasons (Sulfikar, Tanis, & Kerkhof, 2025). Within the Catholic Church, Online Mass—defined as the celebration of the Eucharist conducted by a priest in a church and broadcast live via digital platforms—became one of the most prominent pastoral adaptations. While this practice enabled continued access to liturgical celebrations, it also transformed the spatial, temporal, and experiential dimensions of Catholic worship, raising questions about presence, participation, and sacramental meaning in digitally mediated religious practices.

Beyond its technical function, Online Mass has generated diverse responses among Catholics. On one hand, it has been perceived as a pastoral solution that helps believers remain spiritually connected during periods of isolation and uncertainty. On the other hand, many Catholics express a strong longing for offline Mass, which is associated with bodily presence, communal atmosphere, and the direct reception of the Eucharist as a central sacrament of Catholic faith. This tension suggests that Online Mass is not merely a substitute for offline worship but constitutes a complex socio-religious phenomenon that reshapes how faith is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated under crisis conditions (Artiyono, 2020). Consequently, Online Mass during the COVID-19 pandemic represents an important site for examining broader transformations in contemporary religious life, particularly in relation to digital mediation and lived religious experience.

Previous studies on Online Mass and digital religious practices during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal several dominant research tendencies. The first group of studies conceptualizes digital media as an alternative or complementary space for worship. Research by Anggriawan et al. (2022), for example, demonstrates that platforms such as YouTube function as effective tools for maintaining congregational participation and religious continuity during social restrictions. These studies emphasize the capacity of digital media to extend religious practices beyond physical spaces and highlight increased engagement,

particularly among younger audiences. However, this body of research largely focuses on media utilization and institutional effectiveness, offering limited insight into how believers subjectively experience Online Mass as a form of personal and communal religious practice.

A second stream of research concentrates on institutional adaptation and pastoral policies within the Catholic Church. Studies by Nirmala and Budiawan (2023) analyze Online Mass as part of a broader process of religious mediation, in which liturgical practices are reconfigured according to the logic of digital media. This approach foregrounds ecclesiastical authority, liturgical legitimacy, and pastoral decision-making in times of crisis. While such studies provide valuable institutional perspectives, they tend to position congregations as passive recipients of policy rather than active agents who interpret and negotiate religious meaning through their own experiences and expressions.

A third line of research explores Catholics' perceptions and experiences of Online Mass. Empirical work by Rumat (2024) reveals diverse responses among believers, ranging from feelings of spiritual fulfillment and solemnity to dissatisfaction due to perceived sacramental limitations. Similarly, theological reflections by Bewoli and Senang (2022) emphasize that Online Mass serves as a form of pastoral accompaniment during emergency situations, while simultaneously acknowledging its inability to fully replace the sacramental completeness of offline Mass. Although these studies address believers' experiences, they primarily focus on individual perceptions and theological evaluations, without sufficiently examining how these views are articulated, negotiated, and publicly expressed through digital interactions on social media platforms.

Based on this review, a clear research gap can be identified. Existing studies tend to examine digital media, ecclesiastical institutions, and individual perceptions as separate analytical domains. There remains limited research that integrates believers' spiritual experiences with their digital expressions in public online spaces, particularly through interactive features such as comment sections on live-streamed worship services. Moreover, few studies have explored this phenomenon within a specific diocesan context, where local religious culture and institutional practices intersect with global digital platforms. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding how religious meaning is collectively constructed and contested in digitally mediated worship environments.

In response to this gap, this study aims to analyze Catholic views on Online Mass during the COVID-19 pandemic through the YouTube platform, using a case study of the @Komisi Komsos Keuskupan Bandung channel. This research focuses on how Catholics interpret Online Mass through comments, responses, and other forms of digital interaction that emerge around online liturgical content. Employing a qualitative phenomenological case study approach

combined with social media content analysis, this study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on religion and digital media by foregrounding believers' lived experiences and expressive practices within digital religious spaces.

This study is grounded in the argument that YouTube functions not only as a medium for broadcasting Online Mass but also as a socio-religious public sphere where Catholics articulate, negotiate, and share their spiritual experiences. The central argument advanced here is that Online Mass simultaneously expands and constrains Catholic religious experience. While digital mediation enhances accessibility and fosters new forms of participation, it also exposes persistent tensions related to embodiment, sacramentality, and communal presence. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that Catholics' views on Online Mass are fundamentally ambivalent: Online Mass is perceived as spiritually supportive during the pandemic, yet it is not regarded as a full replacement for offline Mass, particularly with respect to the embodied and sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist. Through this analysis, the study aims to enrich theoretical discussions on digital religion by demonstrating how religious experience is both enabled and limited by digital technology in times of crisis.

Methods

This study examines digital religious practices through Online Mass content published on the YouTube channel @Komisi Komsos Keuskupan Bandung during the COVID-19 pandemic. The unit of analysis consists of two main elements. First, audiovisual Online Mass content, including liturgical celebrations and homilies, which represent the form and message of digitally mediated Catholic worship. Second, audience interactions associated with the videos, particularly user comments, which reflect Catholics' views, interpretations, and spiritual experiences expressed in the digital space. Engagement indicators such as likes and shares are treated as supporting units to illustrate patterns of participation in Online Mass content.

This research adopts a qualitative research design because it seeks to explore meanings, experiences, and interpretations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Moleong, 2021). A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how Catholics experience and interpret Online Mass during the pandemic. The study combines qualitative content analysis and netnography as its main methodological approaches (Sugiyono, 2018). Content analysis is employed to examine religious messages, narratives, and themes embedded in Online Mass videos, while netnography is used to understand patterns of interaction and meaning-making among believers within the YouTube comment sections. This combination is considered appropriate because Online Mass functions simultaneously as religious content and as a

digital community practice.

The primary data sources of this study are Online Mass videos uploaded by the YouTube channel @Komisi Komsos Keuskupan Bandung during the COVID-19 pandemic period. These videos constitute audiovisual data that represent digitally mediated Catholic worship practices. Secondary data consist of user-generated comments posted on the videos, which provide textual data reflecting viewers' spiritual responses, interpretations, and interactions with other users. In addition, engagement data such as the number of likes and shares are used as supplementary information to contextualize audience involvement in Online Mass practices.

Data collection was conducted through several stages. First, relevant Online Mass videos were identified and selected based on their publication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the researchers carried out non-participatory digital observations of the selected videos to document visual elements, liturgical structures, and religious messages. Third, user comments associated with each video were systematically collected and documented as textual data. Engagement metrics, including likes and shares, were also recorded to provide an overview of participation levels. All data were collected from publicly accessible content without direct interaction with content creators or users.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The analytical process began with initial coding of video content and user comments to identify meaningful units related to religious experience and interpretation. These codes were then organized into broader categories and themes, such as expressions of faith strengthening, gratitude, togetherness, spiritual support, and longing for offline Mass. Content analysis was used to interpret the dominant religious messages conveyed in the videos, while netnographic analysis focused on interaction patterns and shared meanings within the digital community. Through these analytical stages, the study seeks to capture how Online Mass both shapes and reflects Catholic religious experience during the pandemic.

Results and Discussion

1. Catholic Interpretations of Online Mass as a Pastoral Practice

The analysis of Online Mass content uploaded by the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that Online Mass is consistently framed as a pastoral response to restrictions on face-to-face worship. Observations of both Daily Mass and Sunday Mass videos show that liturgical celebrations continue to be conducted inside church buildings, rather than in informal or domestic settings. This choice of location is significant, as it preserves the symbolic and institutional setting of Catholic worship despite the absence of a physically present congregation. The altar

arrangement, liturgical vestments, and homiletic delivery remain consistent with standard Catholic liturgical practice, suggesting an intentional effort to maintain ritual continuity in a digitally mediated context.

In addition to the physical setting, visual elements within the videos further reflect the specific conditions of the pandemic. Priests are observed wearing face masks during the celebration of the Mass, indicating compliance with public health protocols. These visual markers function as contextual cues that situate Online Mass within an emergency situation, while simultaneously reinforcing the Church's responsibility toward public safety. The coexistence of full liturgical form and pandemic-related adaptations demonstrates how Online Mass is presented not as a simplified or reduced ritual, but as a legitimate and responsible form of worship under extraordinary circumstances.

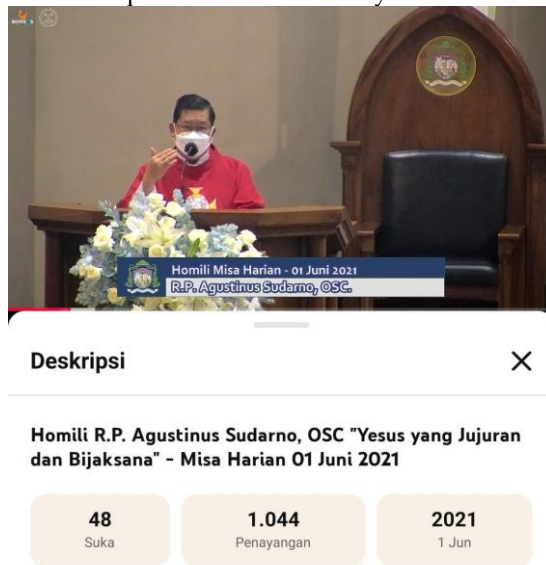


Figure 1: Daily Mass

Source: YouTube account @Komisi Komsos Keuskupan Bandung

To illustrate this pattern, two representative Online Mass videos were analyzed. The *Figure 1*, "Homily by R.P. Agustinus Sudarno, OSC 'Jesus, the Honest and Wise' – Daily Mass (June 1, 2021)", depicts a Daily Mass celebrated inside a church with a complete liturgical structure. Although no congregation is physically present, the priest conducts the Mass at the altar, delivers the homily, and follows the prescribed liturgical sequence. The use of a face mask by the celebrant visibly marks the pandemic context, while the continuity of ritual elements reinforces the seriousness and sacredness of the celebration (Sudarno, 2021).



Figure 2: Sunday Mass

Source: YouTube account @Komisi Komsos Keuskupan Bandung

The Figure 2, *"Homily by R.P. Barnabas Nono Juarno, OSC 'Seeds in the Field' – Ordinary Sunday Mass XI (June 13, 2021)"*, presents a Sunday Mass with similar liturgical completeness. The use of green vestments corresponding to Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar demonstrates adherence to ecclesial norms, even in an online format (Juarno, 2021). Despite the lack of a physically gathered assembly, the Mass maintains its ritual integrity through established symbols, gestures, and homiletic content that directly addresses the lived situation of the faithful during the pandemic.

Both consistently display a full liturgical setting while being mediated through digital technology. The absence of a physical congregation does not lead to a reduction in ritual form; instead, the Mass is visually and structurally presented as a proper ecclesial celebration adapted to emergency conditions. These findings indicate that Online Mass, as represented on the @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung YouTube channel, is interpreted and communicated as a legitimate pastoral practice that seeks to preserve liturgical continuity, institutional authority, and spiritual seriousness amid the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data reveals that Online Masses streamed through the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung are presented as a legitimate pastoral response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the absence of a physically present congregation, the Masses continue to be celebrated within church buildings, maintaining a complete liturgical structure with the use of appropriate vestments, altar settings, and homilies in line with Catholic tradition. The visible presence of priests wearing face masks underscores the pandemic context and

the Church's commitment to public health protocols. This demonstrates that Online Mass is not a simplified or reduced ritual but rather a responsible and meaningful form of worship, adapted to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. Even though these Masses are digital, they preserve the integrity of the liturgy, with adherence to liturgical norms such as the use of vestment colours. The findings indicate that Online Mass is a valid and serious means of maintaining Catholic faith and liturgical practices during the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the data presented above, several recurring patterns can be identified in how Online Mass is framed and communicated as a pastoral practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first pattern is the consistent preservation of liturgical continuity. Despite being mediated through digital platforms, Online Masses are conducted within church buildings and follow established Catholic liturgical norms, including the use of proper vestments, altar arrangements, and structured homilies. This pattern indicates that the Church intentionally avoids informal or domestic settings in order to maintain the symbolic authority and sacred character of the Mass, even when physical participation by the congregation is not possible.

A second pattern concerns the integration of pandemic-related adaptations within the liturgical framework. The visible use of face masks by priests functions as a clear marker of the emergency context in which these Masses are celebrated. Rather than diminishing the ritual, these adaptations coexist with the full liturgical form, suggesting that health protocols are incorporated as part of a responsible pastoral response without compromising the essential elements of worship.

The third pattern relates to the framing of Online Mass as a legitimate and temporary pastoral solution. The consistent presentation of Online Mass as a complete ecclesial celebration, rather than a simplified substitute, reflects an understanding of digital worship as an extraordinary measure adopted under crisis conditions. This framing reinforces the perception that Online Mass serves to sustain faith life during restrictions, while implicitly acknowledging that it does not replace the normative practice of physical participation in the Eucharist.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that Online Mass is communicated as a theologically grounded and pastorally responsible practice that seeks to balance liturgical integrity, institutional authority, and public health considerations. As a provisional conclusion, the data indicate that the Church's use of digital media during the pandemic reflects an adaptive strategy aimed at preserving the continuity and seriousness of Catholic worship under exceptional circumstances.

2. Catholic Spiritual Experience and Perceived Limitations of Online Mass

Observations of Online Mass content and thematic analysis of the homilies indicate that Online Mass enables Catholics to remain spiritually engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through Online Mass, the faithful continue to participate in core elements of Catholic worship, particularly listening to the Word of God, joining common prayers, and receiving spiritual encouragement through the homily. These elements function as the primary channels through which spiritual experience is mediated in the absence of physical participation. At the same time, the data consistently reveal an awareness of the limitations of Online Mass, especially concerning the inability to physically receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is central to Catholic liturgical life.

This spiritual dynamic is clearly reflected in the themes and messages conveyed through the homilies delivered during Online Mass. In the Daily Mass video *“Jesus, the Honest and Wise”* (2021), the homilist explicitly connects the Gospel message to the lived reality of the pandemic, encouraging the faithful to respond with integrity and trust. As stated in the homily, *“In a difficult time like this, we are invited to remain honest and wise, trusting that God continues to accompany us even in uncertainty.”* This statement illustrates how Online Mass functions as a space for moral reflection and spiritual reassurance, addressing the emotional and ethical challenges faced by believers during the crisis.

Similarly, in the Sunday Mass homily *“Seeds in the Field”* (2021), the pandemic is interpreted through a theological lens that emphasises hope and gradual growth. The homilist explains that *“the seed grows quietly and patiently, just as faith grows in us even when circumstances are difficult and unseen.”* This imagery frames the pandemic not merely as a disruption, but as a spiritual process in which faith continues to develop despite physical separation from the church community. Through such homiletic messages, Online Mass conveys spiritual meaning by linking biblical narratives to the concrete experiences of the faithful.

Together, these homiletic excerpts demonstrate how spiritual experience in Online Mass is primarily mediated through reflection on Scripture and contextual interpretation of crisis. While the faithful are unable to participate fully in the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist, the homilies provide spiritual nourishment by fostering inner reflection, perseverance, and hope. The inclusion of these themes highlights that Online Mass supports spiritual continuity, even as it simultaneously reveals its limitations in fulfilling the complete sacramental experience of Catholic worship.

Based on the data presented, it can be understood that Online Mass helps Catholics to remain spiritually connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through Online Mass, the faithful are still able to listen to the Word of God,

participate in liturgical prayers, and receive spiritual encouragement through homilies that relate directly to the crisis situation. The themes of honesty, wisdom, patience, and hope conveyed in the homilies show that Online Mass functions as a space for spiritual reflection, helping believers to interpret the pandemic within the framework of their faith. At the same time, the data clearly indicate an awareness among the faithful of the limitations of Online Mass. In particular, Online Mass does not allow for the physical reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is central to Catholic worship. As a result, participation in Online Mass places greater emphasis on personal prayer, inner disposition, and spiritual communion. Overall, Online Mass is understood as an important means of spiritual support during an emergency situation, while not being regarded as a full replacement for the sacramental experience of attending Mass in person.

From the data presented above, several recurring patterns can be identified in how Catholics experience Online Mass spiritually and perceive its limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first pattern is the central role of the homily as the main source of spiritual engagement in Online Mass. In the absence of physical participation and sacramental reception, the homily becomes the primary medium through which spiritual meaning, encouragement, and moral guidance are conveyed. Themes such as honesty, wisdom, patience, and hope are repeatedly emphasised, indicating that the spiritual experience of Online Mass is largely mediated through reflection on the Word of God rather than through embodied ritual participation.

A second pattern concerns the conscious acceptance of sacramental limitations among the faithful. The data consistently show an awareness that Online Mass does not allow for the physical reception of the Eucharist, which is a core element of Catholic worship. Rather than denying this limitation, the homilies and overall structure of Online Mass implicitly encourage the faithful to shift their focus towards spiritual communion, personal prayer, and inner disposition, highlighting an adaptive form of participation shaped by extraordinary circumstances.

The third pattern relates to the interpretation of the pandemic as a spiritual process rather than merely a disruption. Through homiletic imagery such as growth, perseverance, and unseen development of faith, the crisis is framed as a period in which faith continues to mature despite physical separation from the church community. This pattern suggests that Online Mass functions as a space for theological reflection that helps believers make sense of crisis within a broader narrative of faith and hope.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that the spiritual experience of Online Mass is characterised by both continuity and constraint. As a provisional conclusion, the data suggest that Online Mass provides meaningful spiritual

support through Scripture-based reflection and prayer, while simultaneously reinforcing awareness of its sacramental limitations. This dual experience reflects an adaptive form of Catholic spirituality that sustains faith during crisis without redefining Online Mass as a full replacement for in-person Eucharistic worship.

3. Audience Engagement and Digital Participation in Online Mass

Audience engagement with Online Mass videos was identified through quantitative indicators such as the number of views and likes, alongside qualitative interpretation of participation patterns. These indicators provide insight into how Catholics respond to digitally mediated worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. To examine variations in engagement, two representative videos were selected from the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung, namely a Daily Mass and a Sunday Mass, which differ in terms of theological obligation and communal significance.

The analysis shows that the Daily Mass video attracted more than one thousand views, indicating a considerable level of participation even though attendance at Daily Mass is not obligatory in Catholic practice. In contrast, the Sunday Mass video demonstrated a higher level of engagement, reflecting the central importance of Sunday Mass as a religious obligation and a marker of collective Catholic identity. These differences suggest that audience participation in Online Mass is shaped by both personal spiritual motivation and institutional religious norms.

The patterns of audience engagement identified above are summarised in Table 1, which presents a comparison between the Daily Mass and Sunday Mass videos analysed in this study.

Table 1. Audience Response to Online Mass Videos

No	Video Title	Type of Mass	Upload Date	Audience Response
1	“Jesus, the Honest and Wise”	Daily Mass	June 1, 2021	High view count indicates personal spiritual motivation despite the non-obligatory nature of Daily Mass
2	“Seeds in the Field” – Ordinary Sunday Mass XI	Sunday Mass	June 13, 2021	Higher engagement reflects religious obligation and collective identity among the faithful

The table highlights a clear distinction in audience engagement between the two types of liturgical celebrations. While both videos received positive responses, the Daily Mass appears to attract viewers primarily motivated by

individual spiritual needs, whereas the Sunday Mass draws stronger engagement linked to religious duty and communal belonging. This visual comparison supports the observation that digital participation in Online Mass reflects different dimensions of Catholic religious life during the pandemic.

Based on the data presented, it is evident that Catholics actively engage with Online Mass through digital platforms such as YouTube. Audience participation can be observed through indicators such as views and likes, which show that Online Mass is widely accessed and positively received. The Daily Mass video attracted a substantial number of viewers, indicating that many Catholics participate in Online Mass not only out of obligation, but also due to personal spiritual motivation. In contrast, the higher level of engagement observed in the Sunday Mass video reflects the importance of Sunday Mass as a central religious obligation in Catholic practice. This suggests that digital participation in Online Mass is influenced by both individual spiritual needs and institutional religious expectations. Overall, the data show that Online Mass functions as an effective means of maintaining religious participation during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing the faithful to remain connected to their faith and the Church despite restrictions on physical gatherings.

From the data presented above, several patterns can be identified in how Catholics engage with and participate in Online Mass through digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first pattern is the high level of acceptance of Online Mass as a form of religious participation. The substantial number of views and likes on both Daily Mass and Sunday Mass videos indicates that Online Mass is widely accessed and positively received by the faithful. This pattern suggests that digital platforms such as YouTube are effectively used by Catholics to remain connected to liturgical celebrations when physical attendance is restricted.

A second pattern concerns the difference in motivation between participation in Daily Mass and Sunday Mass. The Daily Mass video attracted a considerable number of viewers despite its non-obligatory nature, indicating that participation is largely driven by personal spiritual needs and individual devotion. This suggests that Online Mass provides a flexible form of worship that supports personal faith practices beyond formal religious obligations.

The third pattern relates to the stronger engagement observed in the Sunday Mass video. Higher levels of audience interaction reflect the central role of Sunday Mass as a religious obligation and a marker of collective Catholic identity. This pattern shows that institutional norms and communal expectations continue to influence participation, even when worship is mediated through digital technology.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that digital participation in Online Mass is shaped by both personal spirituality and institutional religious

structures. As a provisional conclusion, the data suggest that Online Mass successfully sustains religious engagement during the pandemic by accommodating individual spiritual motivations while also preserving the significance of communal and obligatory aspects of Catholic worship.

Discussion

This study examined how Catholics interpret, experience, and engage with Online Mass broadcast through the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrate that Online Mass was widely accepted as a pastoral response to restrictions on face-to-face worship. Online Mass enabled the faithful to remain spiritually connected through participation in liturgical prayers, reflection on the Word of God, and engagement with homilies, while audience interaction data (views and likes) indicate sustained levels of digital participation, particularly for Sunday Mass. At the same time, the results reveal a clear awareness among the faithful of the limitations of Online Mass, especially regarding the physical reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The acceptance of Online Mass can be explained by several interrelated factors. First, the pandemic created a situation of rupture in ordinary religious practice, in which physical gatherings were no longer possible, making digital mediation a necessary alternative rather than a voluntary choice. Second, the institutional legitimacy of the Diocese of Bandung's official YouTube channel played a crucial role in fostering trust among the faithful, as Online Masses were perceived as pastorally valid and ecclesially authorised. Third, the accessibility and familiarity of YouTube as a digital platform allowed the faithful to integrate Online Mass into their daily routines, enabling continued participation despite spatial and temporal constraints. Together, these factors explain why Online Mass was both widely accepted and actively engaged with during the pandemic.

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with previous research which highlights the role of Online Mass in sustaining religious life during the COVID-19 crisis. Earlier studies have emphasised digital media as an alternative space for worship and pastoral communication, as well as the Church's institutional adaptation to emergency conditions (Artiyono, 2020). However, this study extends existing literature by focusing specifically on how Catholics express their views and spiritual experiences through digital interaction on YouTube (Anggriawan et al., 2022). By analysing audience engagement and participation patterns, this research demonstrates that Online Mass is not merely a passive viewing experience, but also a space where the faithful publicly articulate prayer, gratitude, and reflection (Nirmala G & Budiawan, 2023). This emphasis on digital interaction constitutes the main novelty of the study, as it integrates institutional practice, spiritual experience, and public digital

expression within a single analytical framework.

To deepen the analysis, the findings are interpreted through historical, social, and ideological lenses, revealing how Online Mass functions not only as a pastoral response to crisis but also as a site of transformation in Catholic liturgical practice, digital religious participation, and sacramental understanding.

From a historical perspective, the findings position Online Mass as a temporary yet significant moment in the development of Catholic liturgical practice. Rather than signalling a permanent transformation of worship, Online Mass reflects an extraordinary adaptation within a specific crisis context. This aligns with the concept of temporary liturgical adaptation, which refers to the adjustments made in response to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that disrupt regular worship. During this period, the shift to virtual services created new sacred spaces, blurring the lines between home and church, demonstrating the Church's resilience in maintaining worship continuity despite unprecedented challenges (Bryson, Andres, & Davies, 2020). The transition to Online Mass was not just a temporary solution but also an opportunity for innovation in religious practices, akin to how temporary liturgical spaces were created after seismic disasters, such as the use of temporary churches post-earthquake to maintain liturgical integrity (Manenti, 2017). These adaptations underscore the flexibility of religious practices, ensuring that worship continues even in the face of disruption, while also reflecting a dynamic, evolving tradition in response to both historical and social contexts (Tiatco, 2022).

Socially, the use of YouTube as a platform for Online Mass illustrates how digital media functions as a new public religious space, enabling communal participation even in the absence of physical co-presence. This finding aligns with scholarship on digital public religious space, which conceptualises digital religion as a hybrid environment where online and offline religious practices intersect, creating spaces that are simultaneously public and private, institutional and individual (Campbell & Cheong, 2022; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Through Online Mass, YouTube operates as a networked religious space that facilitates collective worship, shared reflection, and visible forms of participation such as simultaneous viewing, commenting, and symbolic engagement, reflecting what Helland (2016) describes as *networked religion*. Such digital participation does not merely replicate offline worship but produces a form of communal religiosity mediated through digital infrastructures, blurring traditional boundaries between sacred and secular spaces (Echchaibi & Hoover, 2023). In this sense, Online Mass exemplifies how religious life increasingly inhabits digital public spheres, where faith is not only practiced privately but also expressed, negotiated, and shared within a broader online community (Neumaier, 2016; Zafar & Blackmer, 2025).

Ideologically, the results reveal an ongoing tension between the centrality of sacramental embodiment in Catholic theology and the expanding role of digital mediation. Online Mass simultaneously affirms the importance of institutional authority and exposes the limits of virtual participation in sacramental life. This aligns with the concept of digital public religious space, where digital technologies and religious practices intersect, creating hybrid spaces that blend both traditional and modern forms of worship (Campbell & Cheong, 2022). In the case of Online Mass, YouTube functions as a platform that allows the faithful to maintain communal participation, even in the absence of physical presence in church, highlighting the networked nature of religion (Helland, 2016). While these digital spaces provide access to worship and faith community engagement, they also blur the lines between private and public participation in religious practices, presenting both opportunities for inclusivity and challenges regarding the authenticity of spiritual experiences (Neumaier, 2016). Thus, the digital mediation of worship creates a dynamic where the sacred is both preserved and reshaped, offering new ways for the faithful to connect with their faith while revealing the limitations of online spiritual engagement (Zafar & Blackmer, 2025).

Reflecting on the functions and dysfunctions of Online Mass, the study identifies several key implications. On the functional side, Online Mass enhances accessibility, maintains continuity of faith practices, and extends the Church's pastoral reach during crisis situations. It also supports individual spiritual resilience by providing regular opportunities for prayer and reflection. However, the study also reveals notable dysfunctions. These include the risk of reducing communal worship to individualised consumption, the potential weakening of embodied sacramental experience, and the possibility that prolonged reliance on digital worship could normalise physical absence from the liturgical assembly. This tendency reflects the broader phenomenon of the *individualisation of worship*, in which religious practice becomes increasingly centred on personal experience rather than collective or institutional structures. Individualisation has roots in Christian theology, particularly in Augustinian emphases on inwardness and self-awareness (Gräb, 2016), and later developments in the late Middle Ages that privileged personal devotion over ecclesial mediation (Mieth, 2017). In contemporary contexts, digital mediation further accelerates this process, as online platforms enable believers to engage with religious content independently of direct institutional oversight, fostering what Kołodziejaska and Neumaier (2017) describe as transformed religious authority in digital environments. While such mediation expands accessibility and personal spiritual autonomy, it may also weaken the communal and embodied dimensions central to Catholic sacramental theology. These tensions highlight the need for careful theological and pastoral discernment in navigating digital worship, ensuring that technological innovation strengthens rather than fragments ecclesial

communion.

Based on these findings, several action-oriented implications can be proposed. First, the Church should clearly position Online Mass as a complementary pastoral practice rather than a substitute for in-person worship, particularly in post-pandemic contexts. Second, pastoral guidelines should be developed to help the faithful engage more intentionally with Online Mass, emphasising spiritual preparation, active participation, and the meaning of spiritual communion. Third, digital platforms such as YouTube should continue to be used strategically for evangelisation, catechesis, and pastoral communication, while reinforcing the irreplaceable value of embodied liturgical participation. By addressing the identified dysfunctions, these actions can help ensure that digital media strengthens rather than diminishes the integrity of Catholic worship and communal faith life in the future.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Online Mass broadcast through the YouTube channel @KomisiKomsosKeuskupanBandung functioned as an effective pastoral response during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling Catholics to sustain their spiritual life amid restrictions on face-to-face worship. The findings show that Online Mass was widely accepted as a temporary yet meaningful form of participation, allowing the faithful to engage in prayer, listen to the Word of God, and maintain a sense of communal belonging through digital interaction. At the same time, the study reveals a clear awareness among the faithful of the limitations of Online Mass, particularly regarding the absence of physical sacramental participation, which underscores the irreplaceable role of embodied liturgical practice in Catholic theology.

The main scientific contribution of this research lies in its integration of liturgical practice, digital media, and audience interaction within a single analytical framework. By focusing on digital engagement and expressions of faith in the YouTube public sphere, this study extends existing scholarship on online worship by highlighting how religious meaning is constructed, expressed, and negotiated through digital participation. The findings contribute to broader discussions on digital religion by demonstrating how Online Mass operates simultaneously as a form of temporary liturgical adaptation, a digital public religious space, and a site of ideological tension between sacramental embodiment and digital mediation.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a limited number of Online Mass videos from a single diocesan YouTube channel, which restricts the generalisability of the findings across different ecclesial and cultural contexts. In addition, audience engagement was examined primarily through observable digital indicators and content analysis, without direct input from participants through interviews or surveys. Future

research could expand the scope by comparing multiple dioceses, incorporating ethnographic interviews with clergy and lay participants, or examining the long-term impact of Online Mass on post-pandemic worship practices. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital media continues to shape Catholic liturgical life beyond crisis conditions.

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