

## Digital Resources, Covid-19 and Spiritual Growth in Indonesia



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The COVID-19 pandemic has limited Christians' access to face-to-face spiritual nourishment provided by their own church, whether through Sunday worship, Wednesday Bible studies, cell group and discipleship gatherings or other church activities. Pastors were anxious and concerned whether online church programs, such as streaming Sunday worship and Zoom Bible study sessions, would be adequate to replace the spiritual nourish-

ment they provided before the pandemic. In a recent (spring 2021) National Survey on Spirituality, the Bilangan Research Center (BRC) of Jakarta noted that 10 months into the pandemic, as compared to the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, there was a very slim increase in the number of Christians in urban Indonesia who were actively accessing digital platforms (such as YouTube videos, podcasts, and digital articles) for the purpose of spiritual nourishment and growth (3 percent).

### IN THIS ISSUE

Digital Resources, Covid 19 and Spiritual Growth in Indonesia

1

Churches Adapting to the Digital Age

6

Is God Against A Data Driven Church ?

11

An Introduction to the AEA Digital and Media Commission

13

A Report from Women Commission

16

A report from Youth Commission : Intergenerational Leadership

18

Mission Commission Report

20

Announcement from Children Commission

20

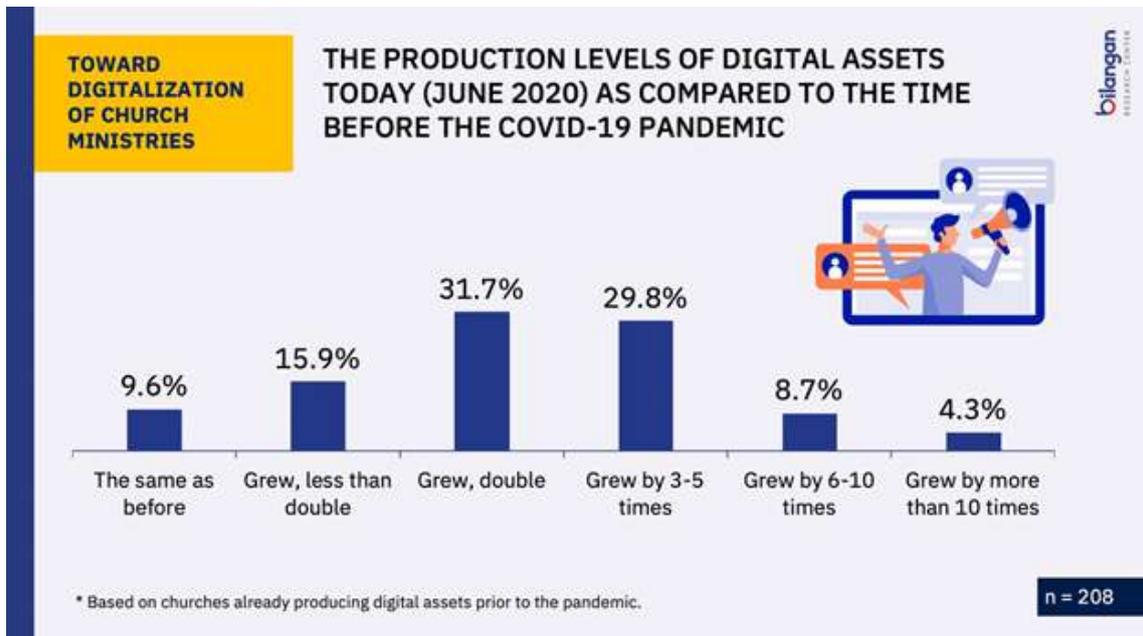
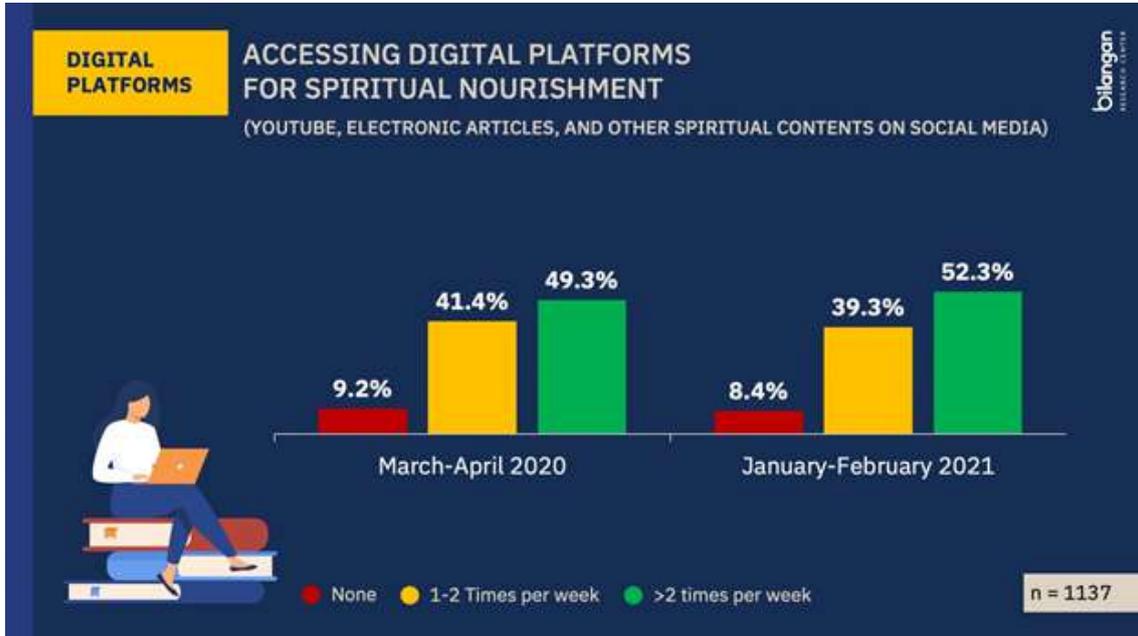
AEA Christmas Greetings

21

Announcement : Generations

23

This is a surprise, considering that in the first three months of COVID-19, 74.5 percent of urban churches in Indonesia had at least doubled the production of their digital assets (BRC, June 2020).



A breakdown of the analysis by age group revealed that the change in accessing digital platforms for spiritual growth was not equally distributed. At the beginning of the pandemic in March-April 2020, church members age 60 and above were almost twice as likely to be actively accessing digital assets as the 15–24 age group, by 69.2 to 36.0 percent. Ten months later, in January-February 2021, the gap was even greater, with an increase of 6.2 percent among the older generation and a slight decline among the younger generation.

Similarly, at the beginning of the pandemic Christians who claimed to have an intimate relationship with God were more than twice as likely to be actively accessing digital assets as those who claimed to feel distanced from God (59.0 percent versus 24.1 percent). Ten months later, this gap had widened as well, with an increase of 4.6 percent among those who claimed intimacy with God and a 42.8 percent decrease among those who felt distanced from God.

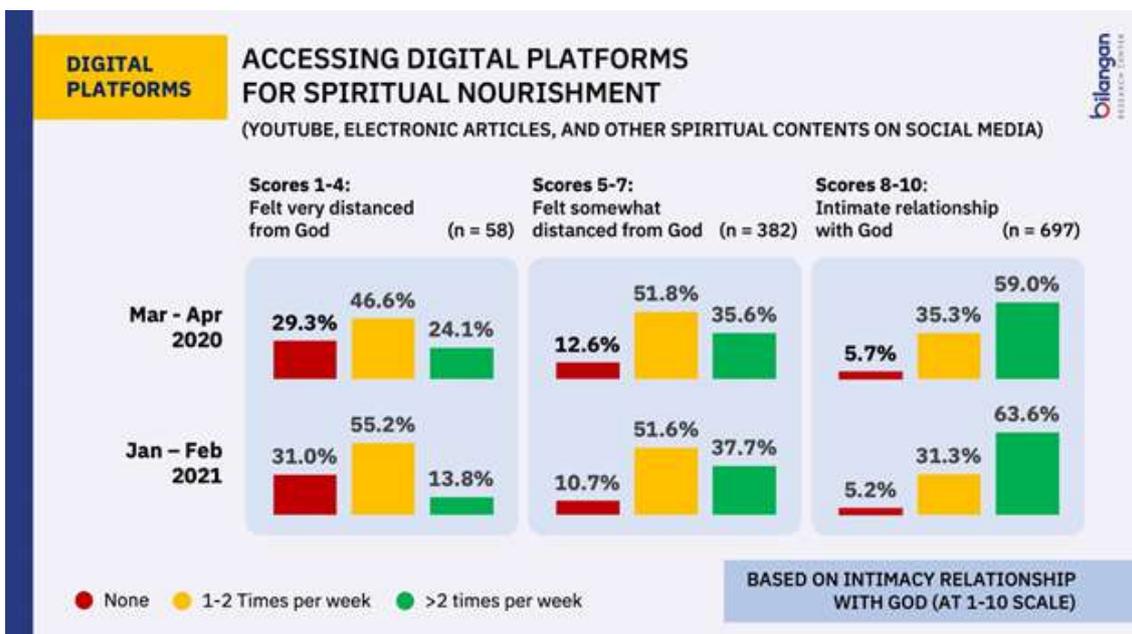
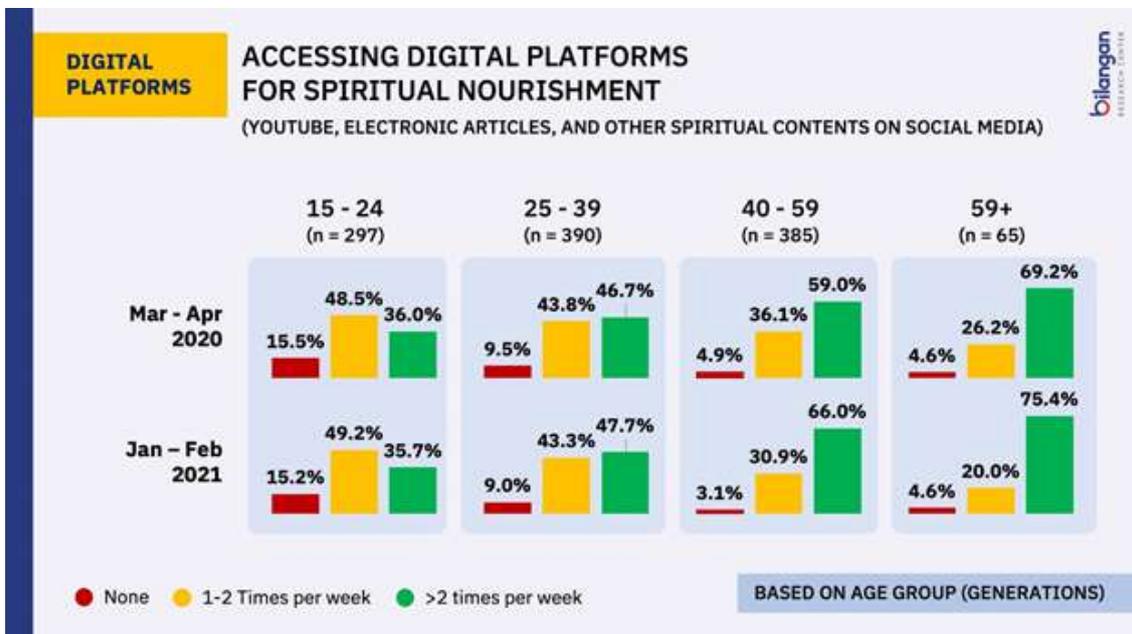
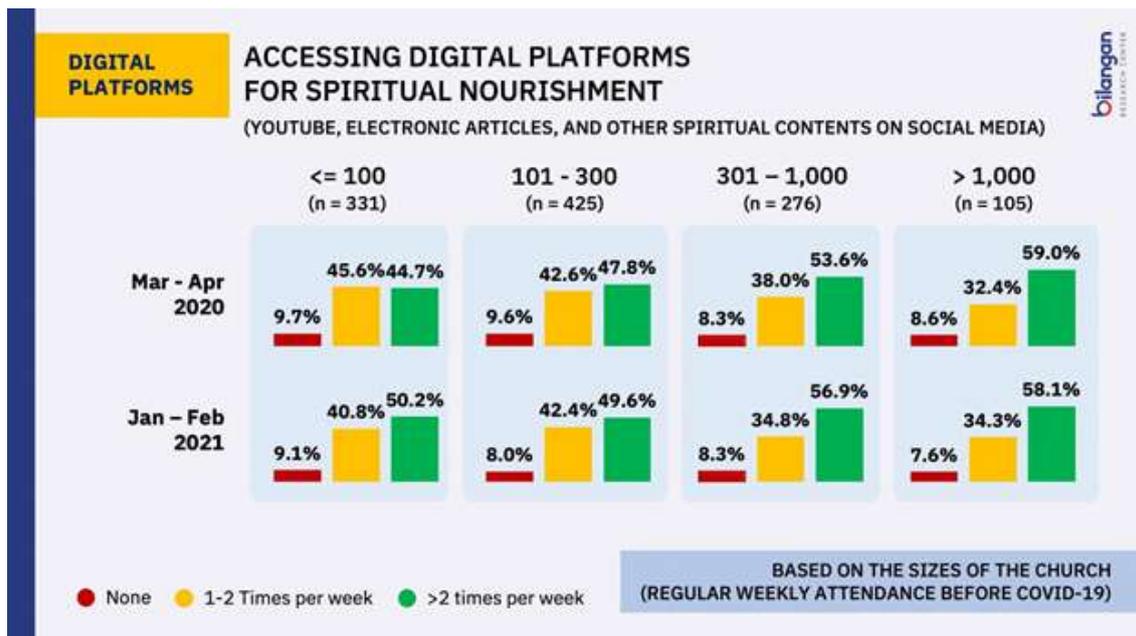


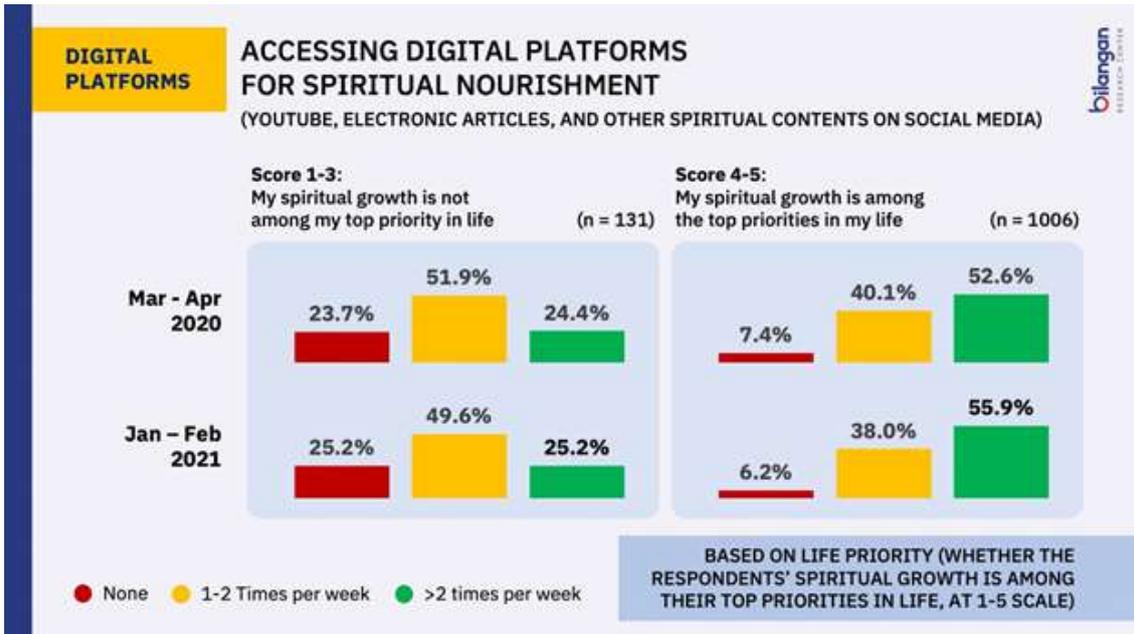


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In terms of church sizes, the research found that 10 months into the pandemic, Christians who worshipped in smaller churches (100 weekly attenders or fewer) registered the highest increase in actively accessing digital platforms for spiritual nourishment (5.5 percent).



We classified those respondents who maintained that their spiritual growth was among their top priorities in life as “spiritually mature.” Presumably, they would tend, more than others, to proactively seek ways to maintain their spiritual growth. This study indicated that 10 months into the pandemic, the number of spiritually mature believers who actively accessed digital platforms for their spiritual growth had increased by 3.3 percent. Overall, they were more than twice as likely to do so as Christians who did not place spiritual growth among their top priorities.



## SUMMARY

- 1 There seems to have been a huge gap between the significant increase in the investment and production of digital assets and their utilization. Perhaps the content and presentation of these digital assets was unintentionally targeted toward older generations.
- 2 The lower percentage of younger church members actively accessing digital platforms for their spiritual growth begs a question for further research. Was this result due to the perceived relevance of the content, or were younger generations seeking their spiritual nourishment through other means or platforms?
- 3 As expected, spiritually more mature and healthier Christians were proactively accessing digital platforms for their spiritual growth at a much higher rate.
- 4 This research has validated the concerns expressed by many pastors with regard to the adequacy of spiritual nourishment their church members were receiving during the pandemic. Most of those who are spiritually less mature and less healthy (as indicated by feeling distanced from God) did not actively access digital platforms for their spiritual growth. Thus, their spiritual strength appears to have declined further during the pandemic. ■