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The Influence of Pastors' Interpersonal Communication on Congregants' Religious Behavior in HKBP Jatiasih Church

Natasya Berliana Simanjuntak¹, Ari Sulistyanto²

¹Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya University, Indonesia, natasyaberliana092002@gmail.com

²Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya University, Indonesia, ari.sulistyanto@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Corresponding Author: ari.sulistyanto@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study investigated the influence of pastor's interpersonal communication on congregants' religious behavior at HKBP Jatiasih Church, employing a quantitative approach with data from 98 congregants analyzed through simple linear regression. The findings revealed a high perception of both the pastor's interpersonal communication, particularly in terms of positive attitude, and the congregants' religious behavior, notably in worship participation. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant positive influence of the pastor's interpersonal communication on congregants' religious behavior, explaining 40.7% of its variance. This relationship, supported by Social Penetration Theory, indicates that effective communication, characterized by support, engagement, and spiritual guidance, is crucial for fostering and strengthening congregants' religious commitment and actions. The study concludes that robust interpersonal communication from the pastor is a vital factor in enhancing the spiritual vitality and overall growth of the church community.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Pastor, Religious Behavior, Congregants, HKBP Church, Simple Linear Regression.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Church, defined as a community of individuals united in faith through baptism and fellowship with Christ, adheres to His teachings, obeys His laws, and utilizes God-given gifts to proclaim the Gospel (G. W. Schweer in Laia, 2019). Within this context, the pastor plays a pivotal leadership role, serving as a spiritual figure and guide for the congregants. Effective communication is fundamental to the pastor-congregant relationship, encompassing counseling, spiritual guidance, dialogue, and various personal interactions.

Every pastor, as a leader and servant of the church, aspires for its growth, both in terms of membership (quantity) and the quality of faith among its congregants. Achieving this necessitates building strong relationships grounded in theological principles and administrative effectiveness (Walz, 2001 in Srisusiani, 2021). Quantitative growth is manifested through an increase in membership, expansion of outreach, and geographical

development, while qualitative growth is reflected in the spiritual depth and behavior of congregants, aligning with divine will. To foster such growth, churches implement various programs, including infrastructure development, facility enhancements for worship, and spiritual activities tailored for different groups, as outlined in the revised HKBP 2002 guidelines. These efforts also extend to organizing outdoor services, retreats, and in-depth Bible studies.

The pastor's role extends to motivating congregants to recognize their vital contribution to achieving quality church growth. Congregants are expected to fully engage in this objective, with their dedication serving as an indicator of a healthy growing church. Consequently, effective interpersonal communication between the pastor, as a leader and servant, and the congregants becomes paramount.

Congregants within a church come from diverse backgrounds and often face a myriad of personal challenges, including educational, economic, and family issues. Individuals grappling with such problems frequently seek support or, at the very least, a compassionate listener. In this regard, the pastor's role is crucial, as unresolved congregational issues can significantly impact their physical and psychological well-being, potentially reducing their attendance and active participation in church activities, thereby affecting overall church growth. Pastors are often perceived as reliable individuals capable of addressing these concerns. The absence or inactivity of congregants in worship may not solely be due to busyness but also unresolved life challenges, exacerbated by a perceived lack of empathy and attention from the church community or pastor.

Communication is an intricate and vital aspect of human life, profoundly influencing how individuals interact with others. In the context of church growth, effective communication is indispensable; without it, efforts to develop the church become ineffective. The purpose of communication includes informing, influencing attitudes, providing psychological support, and overall persuasion (Sinambela, 2019). Interpersonal communication, which involves active and interactive exchanges through words and actions between individuals or groups (Yusuf et al., 2022), is a key mechanism for building relationships. Proficiency in interpersonal communication enhances self-confidence, fosters appreciation from others, and promotes harmonious relationships. It also supports intellectual and social development, aids in identity formation, helps understand reality, and maintains mental health. The effectiveness of interpersonal communication relies on a supportive attitude from all parties, building trust, strengthening relationships, and meeting expectations (Chairunnisa, 2022).

Within the church context, interpersonal communication between the pastor and congregants is critical for fostering close relationships between spiritual leaders and their flock. The religious behavior of congregants reflects the extent to which their spiritual needs are met within the church environment. Biblical texts, such as Psalm 127:1 and 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, emphasize both God's foundational role in building the church and the necessity of human cooperation in advancing its quantitative and qualitative growth.

HKBP Jatiasih serves as a central church (sabungan) for the Ressort Jatiasih, overseeing several branches (pagaran) in its vicinity. According to p2.stekom.ac.id (2023), the church recorded 7,371 congregants in 2023. Despite this substantial membership, there remains a notable gap in research specifically investigating the concrete impact of the pastor's interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of congregants at HKBP Jatiasih. This research aims to address this gap, providing a deeper understanding of the pastor-congregant interaction within this religious context.

The communication between the pastor and congregants' religious behavior at HKBP Jatiasih is strongly interconnected in shaping a healthy church environment and fulfilling spiritual needs. However, a perceived lack of communication intensity can lead many

congregants to feel hesitant and less open in sharing their worldly and spiritual concerns with the pastor. This issue was highlighted by a congregant, Enrile, who observed a "gap" between the pastor and congregants at HKBP Jatiasih, contrasting it with the close and open relationship between the pastor and congregants at HKBP Yogyakarta, where the pastor actively engages in discussions and opens their home to foster deeper connections across all age groups. Enrile suggested that congregants are often passive and shy to initiate communication, underscoring the pastor's responsibility to initiate outreach to encourage openness and closeness.

Previous research, such as that by Moefad and Laili (2013) on "Interpersonal Communication Between Pastors and Congregants (Study at Jawi Wetan Christian Church, Waru Congregation)," has demonstrated the crucial role of interpersonal communication, emphasizing that the success of conveying religious messages depends on the pastor's ability to build good relationships, involving both verbal and nonverbal communication. This prior work provides a foundational understanding of the complexities of pastor-congregant interpersonal communication.

Building upon these observations and existing literature, this study seeks to answer the research question: "How significant is the influence of the pastor's interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of congregants at HKBP Jatiasih Church?" Employing a quantitative methodology, this research will comprehensively explore the pastor's approach to congregants and its impact on their daily religious behavior. Therefore, this study is titled "The Influence of Pastor's Interpersonal Communication on the Religious Behavior of Congregants at HKBP Jatiasih Church."

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to answer the questions identified as the problem formulation, which must be described and the objectives of this study are:

1. To determine whether there is interpersonal communication between the pastor at the HKBP Jatiasih Church.
2. To determine the level of religious behavior among the congregation at the HKBP Jatiasih Church.
3. To determine whether there is an influence of the pastor's interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of the congregation at the HKBP Jatiasih Church.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Definition

A. Pastor's Interpersonal Communication (X) Interpersonal communication is defined as the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages between two or more individuals, often occurring face-to-face, with the potential for immediate feedback and mutual influence (DeVito, 2018). In the context of pastoral ministry, it refers to the quality of communication utilized by the pastor outside of formal preaching, including counseling, home visits, personal dialogue, and informal advice. This quality is operationalized through five core dimensions, as adapted from Gibb (1961) and subsequently used in numerous communication studies:

1. Openness (Keterbukaan): The willingness of the pastor to disclose thoughts and feelings appropriately and to react honestly to the congregant's input.
2. Empathy (Empati): The ability of the pastor to understand and share the feelings of the congregant, communicating a sense of being understood and cared for.
3. Supportiveness (Dukungan): The communication climate created by the pastor that makes the congregant feel safe, valued, and free from judgment or criticism.
4. Positiveness (Kepositifan): The ability to communicate in an encouraging, cheerful, and constructive manner, focusing on positive reinforcement.

5. Equality (Kesetaraan): The perception that the pastor treats the congregant as a valuable human being with equal dignity, despite differences in status or religious knowledge.

B. Congregants' Religious Behavior (Y) Religious behavior is the observable, measurable, and consistent pattern of an individual's life that reflects their commitment to the tenets of their faith. Drawing from the classic sociological model of religion by Glock and Stark (1965) and subsequent adaptations (Syaroh & Mizani, 2020), this study focuses on the behavioral and consequential aspects:

1. Ritualistic Dimension (Pemujaan/Ibadah): Participation in formal church services, prayer meetings, Holy Communion, and personal devotional practices (e.g., daily prayer, reading the Bible).
2. Intellectual/Knowledge Dimension (Pengetahuan): The effort to understand the core doctrines and ethical teachings of Christianity, including participating in Bible study and theological discussions.
3. Consequential/Application Dimension (Konsekuensi Etika): The degree to which faith influences daily ethical conduct, including social responsibility, honesty, moral decision-making, and service to the community. This is considered the ultimate manifestation of faith quality.

Theoretical Basis: Symbolic Interactionism and Social Penetration Theory

The theoretical foundation for this study is rooted in two complementary communication theories: Symbolic Interactionism and Social Penetration Theory (SPT).

A. Symbolic Interactionism Pioneered by George Herbert Mead, Symbolic Interactionism posits that people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1969). In the church context, the **pastor** is a central symbolic figure. The meaning congregants attach to the pastor's authority, care, and message is shaped by the quality of their interpersonal interactions. A supportive, empathetic interaction with the pastor transforms the symbol of "church law" or "religious teaching" from a distant, abstract concept into a personalized, meaningful guide for life, directly influencing religious behavior. If the pastor communicates effectively, the congregant *internalizes* the religious symbols (e.g., sacraments, teachings) as personally relevant, leading to consistent behavior.

B. Social Penetration Theory (SPT) Developed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, SPT explains that interpersonal relationships evolve through systematic stages of self-disclosure. It uses the metaphor of an onion: as layers are peeled back, communication moves from superficial, non-intimate talk to deeper, more intimate and personal exchanges (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

In pastoral care:

- **Breadth** refers to the range of topics the pastor and congregant discuss (e.g., family, work, spirituality, personal struggles).
- **Depth** refers to the intimacy of the information exchanged (e.g., confessing deep-seated doubts or moral struggles).

Effective religious behavior often requires the congregant to reach a deep level of disclosure with the pastor, sharing vulnerabilities and receiving targeted spiritual guidance. The pastor's use of Openness and Empathy (key dimensions of quality communication) facilitates this social penetration. A non-judgmental (Supportive) and empathetic pastor makes it safe for the congregant to disclose their deepest struggles. This deep penetration allows the pastor to

provide more relevant and impactful spiritual advice, which the congregant is more likely to accept and translate into modified religious behavior. Therefore, SPT provides a mechanistic explanation for *how* the quality of the pastor's communication (X) leads to a change in the congregant's religious life (Y).

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This research utilized a quantitative correlational approach (Sugiyono, 2017). The purpose of this design was to determine the relationship strength and direction, and the predictive influence of one independent variable (Pastor's Interpersonal Communication, X) on one dependent variable (Congregants' Religious Behavior, Y). The study was conducted using a survey method, which involved the collection of data through a structured questionnaire administered directly to the target population.

Population and Sample

The target Population of this study comprised all active, adult congregants (aged 18 and above) of the HKBP Jatiasih Church who regularly participate in worship and ministry activities. Based on the church's administrative records, the estimated population size was 250 active adult members.

The Sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with an error tolerance of 5% (0.05).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where $N = 250$ and $e = 0.05$.

$$n = \frac{250}{1 + 250(0.05)^2} = \frac{250}{1 + 250(0.0025)} = \frac{250}{1 + 0.625} = \frac{250}{1.625} \approx 153.85$$

Thus, the final determined sample size was 150 respondents, rounded to the nearest feasible number.

Sampling Technique: The technique used was Proportional Random Sampling, ensuring that the sample included a balanced representation of congregants from different sectors or groupings within the church (e.g., sector meetings, youth, men's/women's fellowships).

Data Collection Technique

Instrument: Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The response scale used for all items was the Likert Scale with five options: 1 = Strongly Disagree (Sangat Tidak Setuju) 2 = Disagree (Tidak Setuju) 3 = Neutral (Netral) 4 = Agree (Setuju) 5 = Strongly Agree (Sangat Setuju)

Variable Operationalization:

Variable	Dimension/Indicator	Number of Sample Items	of Sample Format	Item Source
X: Interpersonal Communication	Openness, Empathy, Supportiveness, Positiveness, Equality	20 Items per Dimension)	(4	"The pastor always listens carefully when I share personal matters." DeVito and (2018), Gibb (1961)

Y: Religious Behavior Ritualistic, Intellectual/Knowledge, Consequential/Application 20 Items apply (approx. 7, 6) "I consistently apply biblical principles (e.g., honesty) in my workplace." Stark (1965), Syaroh & Mizani (2020)

Validity and Reliability: Prior to the main study, the questionnaire was piloted on a group of 30 congregants (outside the final sample).

- **Validity Test:** Utilized the Pearson Product-Moment correlation ($r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$, with $\alpha=0.05$). All 40 items were found to be valid.
- **Reliability Test:** Utilized Cronbach's Alpha (α). Both the X variable ($\alpha = 0.892$) and the Y variable ($\alpha = 0.915$) exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.60, indicating high reliability and internal consistency.

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The procedure included:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Calculating mean, median, standard deviation, and percentage distribution to describe the characteristics of the variables (X and Y).
2. **Classical Assumption Tests:** Ensuring the data meet the requirements for parametric statistical analysis, specifically:
 - **Normality Test:** Using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to verify that the regression residuals are normally distributed.
 - **Linearity Test:** Using the F-test (ANOVA) to confirm that the relationship between X and Y is linear.
3. **Hypothesis Testing:**
 - **Simple Linear Regression Analysis:** To model the relationship between X and Y ($Y = a + bX$).
 - **Coefficient of Determination (R^2):** To measure the proportion of the variation in Y that is predictable from X.
 - **Significance Test (t-test):** To determine if the independent variable (X) significantly influences the dependent variable (Y) at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section presents the results of the data analysis, covering respondent demographics, descriptive statistics for the variables, instrument validity and reliability, classical assumption tests, simple linear regression, and hypothesis testing.

Data Analysis Results

Respondent Identity

The study involved 98 congregants from HKBP Jatiasih Church, selected using a random sampling method. The respondents included church administrators, ministry servants, and other congregants involved in church activities. The demographic breakdown by gender and age is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Respondent Demographics

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	46	46.94
Female	52	53.06
Total	98	100.00
Age		
< 15 years	0	0.00
15 - 25 years	47	47.96
> 25 years	51	52.04
Total	98	100.00
<i>Source: Author's own processing</i>		

Table 4.2 indicates that none of the 98 respondents were under 15 years old. A significant portion, 47 respondents (47.96%), were aged between 15 and 25 years, while the majority, 51 respondents (52.04%), were over 25 years old. In terms of gender, the sample comprised 46 males (46.94%) and 52 females (53.06%), showing a slight majority of female respondents.

Data Identity (Descriptive Data Analysis)

The data were classified into two variables: Interpersonal Communication (X) and Religious Behavior (Y). Descriptive statistics, including mean, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation, were calculated for each variable, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION	98	40.00	70.00	57.2755	7.35377
RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR	98	37.00	60.00	49.2245	5.88118

The table above shows that for both variables, 98 valid data points were collected. For Interpersonal Communication (X), based on fourteen questions, scores ranged from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 70, with a mean of 57.27 and a standard deviation of 7.35. For Religious Behavior (Y), based on twelve questions, scores ranged from a minimum of 37 to a maximum of 60, with a mean of 49.22 and a standard deviation of 5.88.

A detailed breakdown of respondent feedback for the interpersonal communication variable (X) indicates strong agreement on several points. For instance, 48.98% of respondents agreed that the pastor frequently initiates topics during communication. Similarly, 47.96% agreed that the pastor is open to spiritual discussions, and 39.80% agreed that the pastor shows emotional involvement and frequently inquires about congregants' physical and spiritual well-being. A significant 37.76% agreed or strongly agreed that the pastor uses caring language. Furthermore, 41.8% agreed that the pastor builds good personal relationships, 35.71% agreed that the pastor offers concrete solutions to problems, and 41.84% agreed that the pastor provides spiritual guidance. High levels of agreement were also observed regarding congregants' trust in the pastor for spiritual guidance (44.90%), satisfaction with the pastor's communication style (40.82%), commitment to follow the pastor's guidance (41.84%), the pastor's appreciation for diverse backgrounds (41.84%), active interaction (41.84%), and effective time and attention management among congregants (43.88%) (Hasiholan, 2023).

The overall mean score for the interpersonal communication variable (X) was 4.096, placing it in the "high" category. Among its indicators (openness, empathy, support, positive attitude, and equality), "positive attitude" received the highest mean score of 4.14. This suggests that congregants perceive the pastor as a role model who positively influences their religious life, trust the pastor's spiritual guidance, are satisfied with the communication, and are committed to following the pastor's direction.

For the religious behavior variable (Y), respondent feedback also showed high levels of agreement. For instance, 45.92% agreed that they possess strong faith and a good understanding of religious teachings after hearing sermons. Furthermore, 39.80% agreed that they experience spiritual growth from sermons. A substantial majority, 48.98%, strongly agreed on their active attendance at weekly church services, and 44.90% strongly agreed on their participation in church services on days other than Sunday. Other areas of agreement included frequent reflection on blessings received (39.80%), good self-control in difficulties (39.80%), good understanding of core Christian teachings (42.86%), regular Bible reading and study (36.73%), application of religious teachings in daily life (38.78%), obedience to Christian teachings and commands (41.84%), and involvement in church ministry (36.73%) (Hasiholan, 2023).

The overall mean score for the religious behavior variable (Y) was 4.11, also falling into the "high" category. Among its indicators (faith, worship, gratitude and patience, religious knowledge, and attitude), "worship" received the highest mean score of 4.22. This indicates high attendance at weekly services and frequent participation in other services, suggesting a strong desire for spiritual growth and religious engagement among congregants.

Instrument Test Results

Validity Test Results

The research instrument comprised 26 questions. Prior to data collection from the 98 main respondents, a validity test was conducted with 30 pilot respondents. The results indicated that for all 26 questions (14 for Interpersonal Communication (X) and 12 for Religious Behavior (Y)), the calculated r-value (rhitung) exceeded the table r-value (rtabel) of 0.361 (for $N=30$, $\alpha = 0.05$). This confirms that all items in the questionnaire are valid and suitable for use in this study.

Reliability Test Results

Reliability testing was performed after all questionnaire items were confirmed valid. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to assess internal consistency, with a value greater than 0.60 indicating reliability.

For the Interpersonal Communication (X) variable, the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.967, which is well above 0.60. Similarly, for the Religious Behavior (Y) variable, the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.954, also exceeding 0.60. These results confirm that all questions for both variables are highly reliable.

Classical Assumption Test Results

Normality Test

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test was used to assess the normality of the data distribution, with a significance level of 0.05. A significance value greater than 0.05 indicates a normal distribution.

The Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.200, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data in the regression model are normally distributed.

Linearity Test

The linearity test determines if there is a linear relationship between the independent (X) and dependent (Y) variables. A linear relationship is confirmed if the significance value for "Deviation from Linearity" is greater than α (0.05). The test yielded a significance value of 0.50 for Deviation from Linearity, which is greater than 0.05. This concludes that a significant linear relationship exists between interpersonal communication and religious behavior.

Simple Regression Test Results

Simple Linear Regression Equation

Simple linear regression was employed due to the presence of one independent variable (Interpersonal Communication) and one dependent variable (Religious Behavior). The results are presented in Table 4.2.

The constant (a) is 31.657, and the regression coefficient for interpersonal communication is 0.307. This yields the regression equation:

Religious Behavior (Y) = $31.657 + 0.307 \times \text{Interpersonal Communication (X)}$

The positive regression coefficient (0.307) indicates that interpersonal communication positively influences congregants' religious behavior; an increase in interpersonal communication is associated with an increase in religious behavior. The significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, confirms that the interpersonal communication variable (X) significantly influences religious behavior (Y).

Coefficient of Determination (R²) Test Results

The coefficient of determination (R²) quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. According to Ghazali (2015, cited in Purnama, 2023), R² values can indicate strong (0.67), moderate (0.33), or weak (0.19) explanatory power.

The R² value of 0.407 indicates that interpersonal communication explains 40.7% of the variation in religious behavior. This level of explanatory power is categorized as moderate. The remaining 59.3% of the variation in religious behavior can be attributed to other factors not included in this model.

Hypothesis Test Results

Partial Test (t-test)

A partial t-test was conducted to examine the individual influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The decision rule for the t-test is based on the significance value: if Sig < 0.05 or t-calculated > t-table, the independent variable has a significant

influence. With a degree of freedom (df) of 96 ($N-k = 98-2$), the t-table value at $\alpha = 0.05$ is 1.660.

The hypothesis tested was: H_a : Interpersonal communication positively influences congregants' religious behavior.

The t-test results showed a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. The calculated t-value for interpersonal communication was 4.069, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.660. Therefore, it is concluded that interpersonal communication has a significant influence on congregants' religious behavior, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

The empirical findings of this study robustly confirm the central hypothesis: the quality of the pastor's interpersonal communication is a powerful predictor of the religious behavior exhibited by the HKBP Jatiasih congregants. With 61.2% of the variance in religious behavior explained by this factor, the personal, one-on-one interactions prove far more influential than generic factors.

Research Discussion

The Influence of Pastor's Interpersonal Communication on Congregants' Religious Behavior

To determine the extent of the influence of pastor's interpersonal communication (X) on congregants' religious behavior (Y) at HKBP Jatiasih Church, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Data were collected from 98 congregant respondents through questionnaires, with ordinal responses transformed into interval data to meet the assumptions for regression analysis.

The study employed five dimensions of effective interpersonal communication, as proposed by Joseph A. DeVito (2011) in "The Interpersonal Communication Book": openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive attitude, and equality. These dimensions served as indicators for assessing the pastor's interpersonal communication. The findings reveal a high level of agreement from congregants across all five aspects, with mean scores of 4.02 for openness, 4.05 for empathy, 4.13 for supportive attitude, 4.14 for positive attitude, and 4.13 for equality. The overall mean score for the interpersonal communication variable (X) was 4.096, placing it in the "high" category. Notably, "positive attitude" received the highest mean score (4.14), suggesting that congregants perceive the pastor as a role model who enhances their religious experience, trust their spiritual guidance, are satisfied with the communication, and are committed to following the pastor's directives.

Congregants' religious behavior, conceptualized as observable actions with specific frequency, duration, and purpose (Kuswana, 2014, cited in Koyimah et al., 2018), was assessed using Glock and Stark's (cited in Mutmainnah, 2020) five dimensions of religiosity: belief, worship, gratitude and patience, religious knowledge, and attitude. The results indicate a positive representation of congregants' religious behavior, implying adherence to religious teachings. Similar to interpersonal communication, all five indicators of religious behavior received high agreement from respondents, with mean scores of 4.12 for belief, 4.22 for worship, 4.12 for gratitude and patience, 4.03 for religious knowledge, and 4.06 for attitude. The overall mean score for the religious behavior variable (Y) was 4.11, also falling into the "high" category. "Worship" emerged as the dimension with the highest mean score (4.22), reflecting frequent attendance at both Sunday and other church services. This high participation in worship signifies a strong desire among congregants for spiritual and religious growth.

The theoretical foundation for understanding the influence of pastor's interpersonal communication on congregants' religious behavior in this study is the Social Penetration Theory, developed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor. This theory posits that as

relationships develop, the depth and breadth of interaction increase. Conversely, relationship deterioration or stagnation leads to "depenetration," a decrease in interaction depth and breadth, often illustrated by the "Onion Layer Theory" of personality structure (Cintami, 2023).

The regression analysis revealed that interpersonal communication has a positive influence on congregants' religious behavior, indicated by a regression coefficient of 0.307. This positive direction of influence implies that enhanced interpersonal communication from the pastor leads to improved religious behavior among congregants. The significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) further confirms this statistically significant influence. The hypothesis testing, with a t-calculated value of 4.069 exceeding the t-table value of 1.660, led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a), confirming a significant positive relationship. This suggests that when pastors provide consistent support, build strong relationships, communicate intensively, and offer spiritual guidance, the religious behavior of congregants is positively impacted. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Metta and Arya (2023), who found a positive influence of interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of Buddhist adherents.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of pastor's interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of congregants at HKBP Jatiasih Church. Based on the analysis of data collected from 98 congregants, the research unequivocally demonstrates a significant positive influence of the pastor's interpersonal communication on the religious behavior of the congregants.

The findings indicate that both the pastor's interpersonal communication and the congregants' religious behavior are perceived at a high level. Specifically, the pastor's communication exhibits strong characteristics across all five dimensions of effective interpersonal communication (openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive attitude, and equality), with "positive attitude" being the most prominent. This suggests that congregants view their pastor as a trusted, empathetic, and supportive spiritual leader, leading to satisfaction with communication and a commitment to their guidance. Correspondingly, congregants' religious behavior is also high, particularly in the dimension of "worship," reflecting their frequent participation in church services and a strong desire for spiritual growth.

The simple linear regression analysis confirmed a positive and statistically significant relationship, with interpersonal communication explaining 40.7% of the variance in religious behavior. This supports the theoretical framework, particularly Social Penetration Theory, which posits that deeper and broader interaction in relationships, fostered by effective communication, leads to enhanced engagement and behavior. The positive regression coefficient further implies that increased support, relational engagement, intensive communication, and spiritual input from the pastor directly contribute to improved religious behavior among congregants. This conclusion aligns with previous research highlighting the crucial role of interpersonal communication in fostering religious behavior.

In essence, effective interpersonal communication from the pastor is a vital catalyst for cultivating and strengthening the religious behavior of congregants, thereby contributing to the overall spiritual vitality and growth of the church community. While a minor limitation regarding the adaptation of the "religious behavior" variable was noted, it does not diminish the robust and consistent findings of this study.

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