

Technological Opportunities for the Spiritual Formation of Generation Z through Christian Religious Education

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Abstract

The field of education, including Christian education, has undergone significant changes as a result of the digital revolution. As a human being who directly deals with progress in all aspects, humans must be willing to face every change that exists. Every generation will always be confronted with various developments in all aspects, including the digital aspect. In this case, it is very necessary for humans to have sensitivity and ability in everything that must always have an impact. One of the generations that is currently in direct contact with digital change is often called generation Z. Generation Z has different attitudes, traits, and ways of assimilating spiritual beliefs. The purpose of this article is to critically examine the potential use of digital technology to help the spiritual development of generation Z through Christian teaching. The use of technology such as social media, interactive learning applications, and other digital platforms can be an efficient way to communicate Christian values in a contextual, reflective, and individual way, according to literature reviews and qualitative-descriptive approaches. Participatory and transformative religious learning is made possible with heuristic techniques, contextual spirituality methods, and the use of digital pedagogy. However, in order not to get mired in digital formalism, the use of this technology must be supported by ethical and theological considerations. As a result, technology serves as a tool and spiritual channel that connects the daily digital presence of generation Z with their religious experiences. To answer the spiritual demands in the digital era, this study suggests creating an adaptive curriculum and improving the spiritual digital literacy of educators

Keywords

Digital Era, Generation Z, Education, Technology, Spirituality.



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INTRODUCTION

Almost every element of human life has changed over the past 20 years because of advances in digital technology, including education. In addition to its technical impact, this change has significant consequences for learning paradigms, including Christian religious education. In this regard, the first generation to truly grow up within a digital ecosystem is Generation Z, comprising people born between 1997 and 2012. This generation is distinctive because its members are critical, multitasking, visually oriented, and highly dependent on technology for social connections and knowledge.

Rather than viewing technology as a threat to spiritual life, many Christian theologians and educators see technology as a strategic opportunity to create contextual and participatory spiritual formation. The main challenge of Christian religious education today is how to communicate enduring faith values in forms and language relevant to the characteristics of Generation Z. Traditional approaches that are verbalistic and one-way are beginning to lose their appeal because they do not correspond to the way this generation thinks and learns.

Yanuar & Widya mengatakan bahwa penggunaan strategy learning berbasis heuristik, that melibatkan eksplorasi, pengalaman, and refleksi faith melalui media digital, can memperkuat pemahaman and keterlibatan spiritual students. Joseph juga menekankan bahwa spiritual formation Generation Z harus mengintegrasikan dimensi digital dalam praksis learning faith, agar values Christian tidak sekadar dipelajari, tetapi juga dihidupi and diekspresikan dalam ruang digital.

Dalam rangka memenuhi needs spiritual generasi saat this and memperluas cakupan pelayanan Christian education di era digital, artikel this bertujuan for mengupas secara menyeluruh bagaimana Christian religious education can memanfaatkan opportunities-opportunities that ada dalam digital technology for membentuk perkembangan spiritual Generation Z.

Based on the background above, the authors formulate the following research questions: How do the characteristics of Generation Z in the context of digital life influence approaches to Christian religious education? What opportunities does digital technology offer to support the spiritual formation of Generation Z? How can Christian religious education strategies effectively integrate technology without losing theological essence and Christian spirituality?

The objectives of this study are as follows. First, to critically analyze the characteristics of Generation Z in relation to their reception of faith learning in the digital era. Second, to identify and evaluate opportunities offered by digital

technology as a means of developing contextual spiritual formation for Generation Z. Third, to formulate adaptive and transformative implementation strategies for Christian religious education in the digital context without sacrificing the core values of the Christian faith.

METHODS

This study combines library research with a descriptive qualitative approach. This method was selected because it is suitable for examining socio-theological phenomena in depth within the framework of Christian religious education, particularly in understanding the dynamics of Generation Z's spiritual development in the digital era. Data were obtained through analysis of various relevant literature sources, such as scientific journals, books on Christian education theology, research articles, and academic documents related to digital transformation, Generation Z spirituality, and digital pedagogy strategies in Christian religious education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of the literature review show that digital transformation has created a new landscape in education, including Christian religious education. Amid these changes, Generation Z has emerged as an age group strongly influenced by digital technology, living alongside technology and integrating it into daily life. Their characteristics, such as their preference for interactive experiences, speed in absorbing information, and tendency to learn visually, present both opportunities and challenges for spiritual formation.

Generation Z tends to move away from doctrinal, one-way, and monotonous learning practices within Christian religious education. Instead, they respond better to methods that are contextual, actively engaging, and have a tangible impact. Therefore, to meet their spiritual needs in the context of the digital world, religious learning methodologies must be modified.

Several studies show that digital technology can be used constructively as a tool to support spiritual formation. Misalnya, penggunaan media sosial seperti Instagram and TikTok for menyampaikan konten spiritual that singkat namun bermakna; podcast that membahas tema-tema spiritual dalam bahasa that dekat with anak muda; hingga aplikasi Bible that dilengkapi with fitur-fitur interactive seperti renungan harian, kuis faith, and komunitas digital.

The use of technology in Christian religious education is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is the risk of superficiality, in which faith values are conveyed only in shallow forms without undergoing full spiritual deepening.

Therefore, Christian educators need adequate spiritual digital literacy so that they can guide the use of technology wisely, maintain the integrity of the Gospel message, and prevent distortions of meaning.

Overall, the findings indicate that the opportunities for using digital technology in the spiritual formation of Generation Z are very substantial, provided that they are managed reflectively, contextually, and theologically. Christian religious education in the digital era is required to be adaptive without losing substance, innovative without losing spiritual direction, and participatory without losing theological depth.

Discussion

The theoretical framework in this study is designed to explain the relationship among spiritual formation, the characteristics of Generation Z, and digital transformation in Christian religious education. These three theoretical pillars serve as a conceptual basis for understanding how technology can function as an effective and contextual medium for faith formation among the digital generation.

Spiritual Formation Theory

Spiritual formation is a process of faith development that aims to shape individuals to become more like Christ in thought, attitude, and action. Richard defines spiritual formation as the cultivation of the inner life through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, contemplation, and service. Steibel membedakan antara religious education and spiritual formation, tetapi menyatakan bahwa keduanya tidak can dipisahkan secara mutlak dalam konteks Christian. Ia menyatakan bahwa Christian education sejati harus memiliki dimensi formatif that membentuk hati and bukan hanya pikiran. In the educational context, spiritual development includes not only a cognitive component (knowledge of faith), but also an emotional component (spiritual experience) and volitional component (ethical decision-making in accordance with faith).

Joseph emphasizes the importance of this formation by stating that faith education must be transformative, not merely informative. Otto and Harrington meneliti pentingnya menciptakan lingkungan education tinggi Christian that mendukung spiritual formation. Mereka menegaskan bahwa masa remaja and dewasa muda merupakan periode kritis di mana para students mencari meaning in life and panggilan spiritual, sehingga education harus menyediakan ruang bagi pengalaman spiritual that autentik. Thus, technology used in faith learning must serve as a bridge toward deeper spiritual experiences, not as a substitute for a personal relationship with God.

From the various views above, it can be concluded that Christian spiritual

formation is a multidimensional process requiring synergy among sound theological teaching, participatory educational methods, and a living faith community. Di era digital saat this, challenges utamanya adalah bagaimana menghadirkan spiritual formation that autentik, mendalam, and kontekstual tanpa terjebak dalam formalitas keagamaan or kedangkalan spirituality visual.

Characteristics of Generation Z

Individualisme

One of the defining characteristics of Generation Z is a tendency toward individualism. Sociologically, individualism refers to a value orientation that prioritizes individual interests, freedom, and self-expression over collective social or institutional demands. In the context of Generation Z, individualism is understood not merely as a reluctance to conform, but also as a quest for identity and authenticity within a highly pluralistic and digitized world.

Generation Z was born and raised in the information technology era, which enables them to freely express their opinions, preferences, and lifestyles through social media and other digital platforms. Paparan besar-besaran terhadap konten global membuat they terbiasa with concept self-branding, pilihan pribadi, and kustomisasi, that semakin memperkuat orientasi individualistik they. Individualism among Generation Z is characterized by several aspects, including:

Independence in decision-making: particularly in education, careers, and life choices. Mereka cenderung lebih percaya pada riset pribadi (internet, media sosial) daripada otoritas formal seperti teacher or orang tua. The importance of authenticity: namely, being one's own unique "self." Mereka menolak peran or label sosial that dipaksakan and lebih memilih membangun identitas sesuai with values internal they. Limited loyalty to institutions, whether organizational, religious, or national, when they are perceived as irrelevant to their personal needs or values.

This independence is not necessarily negative. Menurut psikologi perkembangan, individualitas Generation Z can diartikan sebagai komponen from proses aktualisasi diri, yaitu dorongan for mencapai potensi and identitas diri sepenuhnya. Isolasi emosional, kecemasan sosial, and rasa rapuh terhadap diri sendiri can terjadi jika individualism this tidak disertai with kemampuan for membentuk ikatan sosial that positif. Penggunaan media sosial oleh Generation Z semakin mendukung gagasan bahwa meskipun digitalisasi meningkatkan ekspresi pribadi, namun hal this mengurangi kedalaman interaksi interpersonal secara langsung.

Therefore, Generation Z's individuality is a characteristic arising from shifts in global value systems, technological advances, and educational philosophies that

prioritize freedom of thought and action. To create strategies that respect their independence while continuing to encourage positive social concern and engagement, educators, legislators, and social leaders must have a comprehensive understanding of this characteristic.

Openness to various traditions

Generation Z is more accepting of various cultures, beliefs, and values because they were raised in an interconnected global world. They tend to be tolerant and selectively embrace ideals from different traditions based on their applicability and identity. Multicultural education, exposure to international media, and cross-cultural connections facilitated by the ever-expanding digital world all contribute to this mindset.

According to Kurniawaty and Widayatmo, Generation Z's openness is heavily influenced by globalization and digital technology. They are accustomed to living amidst a rapid flow of cross-cultural information, which causes the boundaries between local traditions and global culture to blur. This generation is capable of adopting new values while simultaneously reinterpreting traditional values they deem relevant. In the context of local culture, Zafila and Purnairawan found that Generation Z still shows interest in traditional values—such as **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation) and local spirituality—but approaches them in a more flexible and contextual manner. This openness to traditions is selective: they absorb what they consider relevant to their contemporary personal and social needs.

Regarding religion, Afrian and Saumantri demonstrate that Indonesian Generation Z members are capable of maintaining religious moderation because they accept diverse spiritual practices and ways of thinking—a crucial foundation for religious moderation in the modern era. The researchers also point out that this openness can have dual effects: it can enhance tolerance and mental flexibility, yet without effective cultural education, it may also erode cultural identity and local values.

Digital tendencies

Generation Z is the first generation to grow up with digital technology, often referred to as "digital natives." They came of age during the information revolution, a time when social media, smart devices, and internet access became commonplace in daily life. This digital orientation encompasses not only technical proficiency but also the ways in which they learn, think, communicate, and construct their social identities.

Digitalization as an environment

Generation Z's digital nature is defined not merely by the use of gadgets or apps,

but by the creation of a new social ecosystem. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter have become primary spaces for constructing narratives of self-identity, building social networks, and seeking social validation. According to Junita, platforms like TikTok are used for social campaigns, education, and even spiritual expression—beyond mere entertainment—indicating a significant shift in how this generation interacts with one another.

Digitalization and spirituality

Generation Z's digital orientation also influences how they access spiritual and religious values. Rather than physically attending places of worship, they tend to engage in religious study via YouTube or podcasts and build spiritual communities through online groups. Aristawidya describes this phenomenon as a form of "digital religiosity reconstruction" that is more contextual and aligned with their fast-paced, instant lifestyle.

Generation Z's digital nature shapes new dimensions in social culture, education, and spirituality. Digitalization is not merely a tool but a mindset that molds their identities and patterns of interaction. Therefore, understanding these digital characteristics is crucial for designing relevant and transformative educational, social, and religious approaches.

Loose relationships

A striking social characteristic of Generation Z is the tendency to form loose social relationships. This term refers to interpersonal relationship patterns that are generally non-binding, functional, flexible, and rapidly changing. Such relationships differ from those of previous generations, who tended to build connections based on long-term commitment, group loyalty, and deep emotional attachment. Digital platforms shape how Gen Z interacts within close relationships. They tend to be more comfortable with non-verbal communication—such as emojis, GIFs, and text messages—reflecting a sense of flexibility and emotional distance within their relationships. Gen Z's social relationships are often situational and platform-based, not always requiring physical presence or deep emotional intimacy. Gen Z forms social relationships within the context of digital globalization, which demands flexibility, adaptability, and openness to informal connections. Consequently, Generation Z's social interactions are characterized by openness, flexibility, and rapid adaptation. These traits are rooted in digital culture and blur the boundaries between communication effectiveness and emotional intimacy within ever-evolving social networks.

The Spiritual Needs of Generation Z

Amidst digital globalization and shifting social values, Generation Z exhibits unique and complex spiritual dynamics. As a generation born and raised in the high-tech era, they face existential challenges linked not only to social identity but also to their spiritual dimensions. Generation Z's spiritual needs are not fully met by traditional religious institutions; instead, they often explore spirituality through digital media, personal practices, and online spaces that foster self-reflection and a sense of life's meaning.

Studies indicate that Gen Z requires a spiritual approach that is contextual and relevant to their fast-paced, emotionally demanding lives. Through journaling, meditation, or spiritual content on social media, they frequently seek spiritual experiences that are interfaith, inclusive, and personal. Therefore, understanding Generation Z's spiritual needs is crucial for developing character education and spiritual development strategies that are relevant to the times..

The Search for Meaning

One characteristic of Generation Z's spiritual needs is a strong desire to search for meaning in life amidst a world filled with uncertainty and an abundance of information. Unlike previous generations, who tended to seek life direction through conventional religious institutions, Generation Z explores the meaning of life in ways that are more personal, reflective, and open to various spiritual approaches. Spirituality is not merely about religious rituals; rather, it is an effort to understand one's existence, life purpose, and relationship with something greater than oneself. The importance of this search for meaning is also evident in how Gen Z accesses and internalizes spiritual values through digital media. They utilize podcasts, reflective videos, religious content on TikTok and YouTube, as well as meditation and journaling apps, to uncover narratives that provide direction and meaning to their lives. It is observed that Gen Z's search for life purpose often coincides with their efforts to manage psychological discomfort, indicating that the spiritual realm contributes to emotional recovery and resilience.

Spiritual Guidance

Although not always defined solely in religious terms, Generation Z exhibits complex spiritual needs within the context of sociocultural changes driven by globalization and technology. They require spiritual support that is flexible, relevant, and relationship-based, given that they inhabit a fast-paced, individualistic, and psychologically draining digital world. In this context, guidance is no longer about simply teaching dogma; instead, it involves employing methods that resonate with their lived reality to help them discover meaning, values, and depth in life. Despite

being physically safer, Gen Z faces a mental health crisis stemming from a lack of meaningful social connections and excessive digital exposure. White emphasizes that the church must understand Gen Z's culture to reach them effectively. He urges the church to adopt an incarnational presence in the digital world and speak the language of the times. Consequently, spiritual guidance for Generation Z must shift from an indoctrinative model to a relational and exploratory approach that bridges their spiritual needs with the challenges of the digital era they face.

Access to Accurate Information

In an era of relentless digital information flow, Generation Z faces significant challenges in filtering and comprehending information related to spirituality and life values. As digital natives, they are accustomed to accessing spiritual resources not through formal religious institutions, but rather via social media, podcasts, YouTube, and various other online platforms. Unfortunately, this flood of information often lacks validity, depth, and clarity, leading to confusion in establishing a healthy and holistic spiritual foundation. Access to accurate, reliable, and contextual spiritual information is a crucial need for Generation Z. Thus, such access serves not merely to satisfy their curiosity but acts as a primary foundation for cultivating a healthy, independent, and meaningful spirituality in an ever-changing world.

Mental Health

Generation Z grows up amidst complex psychosocial pressures: high academic and social expectations, economic uncertainty, and constant exposure to digital media. In this context, spiritual needs cannot be divorced from mental health issues, as the two are closely intertwined in shaping inner balance and psychological resilience. The importance of integrating spirituality into mental health approaches is also emphasized by Hayes, who notes that when spiritual interventions are tailored to the digital context and emotional needs of Gen Z, they are more effective in reducing stress levels and bolstering holistic well-being. Therefore, for Generation Z, spirituality and mental health are not separate matters; rather, they work in tandem to foster a resilient, self-aware generation that leads a meaningful life. To fully meet these needs, spiritual counseling grounded in empathy and positive psychology is essential..

Digital Transformation Theory in Christian Religious Education

Digital transformation in education involves more than simply changing learning materials. It also involves changing how people think about and understand the educational process. Digital change makes it possible to convey principles of faith in Christian religious education through media more suitable for Generation Z's lifestyle, such as podcasts, short films, and digital Bible applications. Suggests a

heuristic method that works well in digital environments by conducting learning based on discovery and exploration. This strategy invites students to create virtual religious communities, actively reflect on their experiences, and connect biblical ideas with everyday life.

By integrating spiritual formation theory, the characteristics of Generation Z, and the potential of digital transformation, Christian religious education in the modern era can be designed as an adaptive, reflective, and community-based spiritual process. This framework emphasizes that technology is not a substitute for faith, but a tool that can deepen and expand faith experiences when used ethically and theologically.

Digital transformation concept

The process of integrating Christian faith-learning techniques, media, and tactics into digital environments to address contemporary challenges and connect with digital generations, particularly Generation Z and Alpha, is known as "digital transformation" in Christian religious education. This shift requires more than simply transferring content to online platforms; it also requires incorporating Christian ideals into sophisticated virtual environments and expanding the meaning and context of digital spirituality. Christian theology in the digital era is challenged to answer how the faith and truth of the Gospel remain authentic in a digital space full of alternative narratives. Digital transformation requires inclusive, dialogical, and contextual faith teaching, in which biblical narratives are not merely presented as dogma but are brought to life through relevant and interactive digital experiences. For example, the use of short videos (reels, TikTok), spiritual podcasts, and digital Bible studies are new forms of effective evangelism.

Digital transformation in Christian education includes the use of LMS (Learning Management System), interactive Bible applications, online discussion forums, learning gamification, and virtual church communities. Technology enables asynchronous, personalized, and reflective teaching. This aligns with the spiritual needs of Generation Z, which values flexibility and personal exploration. Belvin highlighted that the ability of churches and Christian schools to develop authentic spirituality through digital platforms, rather than simply conveying religious content technically, is crucial to the success of Christian religious education in the digital age. Thus, the Church must facilitate educators and teachers so that they remain faithful in proclaiming the Gospel of truth through the proper and appropriate digitalization of social media..

CONCLUSION

Every element of life has been influenced by the digital revolution permeating

the modern era, including the methods and approaches used in Christian religious education. Sebagai penduduk asli digital, Generation Z menawarkan opportunities and challenges dalam bidang religious education. Mereka sering menggunakan pertemuan kontekstual, interactive, and visual for memperoleh and membentuk makna spiritual. Akibatnya, method tradisional that hanya berfokus pada penyampaian kognitif tidak lagi memadai for pengajaran religious Christian.

This study shows that, when used together with Christian spiritual practices and theological concepts, digital technology can become a strategic tool for supporting the spiritual formation process. In addition to being educational tools, digital applications, social media, introspective films, and spiritual podcasts can also function as spaces for reflection that create new pathways to spiritual experiences. It has been shown that pedagogical techniques such as heuristic methods, digital peer guidance, and religion-based virtual communities can produce reflective, transformative, and participatory learning experiences.

In addition, spiritual guidance (mentoring) communities and spiritual fellowships play an important role in connecting technology with spirituality. Technology functions as a tool for enhancing spiritual contact and genuine faith development, rather than as a distraction within a healthy community environment. For digital transformation to have significant theological and pastoral impacts in addition to its technical impact, there is an urgent need for spiritual digital literacy among educators and church staff. Therefore, the potential of technology to support the spiritual development of Generation Z is not merely a possibility, but a necessity that must be addressed.

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