

Christian Religious Education and Digital Spirituality among Gen-Z: Challenges and Opportunities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the spiritual and educational experiences of Generation Z. As digital natives, Generation Z increasingly encounters religious ideas, spiritual practices, and faith communities through digital platforms, creating new forms of digital spirituality that influence how young Christians understand faith, identity, and religious commitment. This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities presented by digital spirituality in the age of artificial intelligence and to explore the role of Christian Religious Education in fostering authentic spiritual formation among Generation Z. Employing a qualitative approach based on library research and theological reflection, the study analyzes relevant literature from the fields of Christian education, digital religion, artificial intelligence, and youth spirituality. Data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and contemporary theological studies and analyzed thematically to identify major trends and implications for Christian education. The findings reveal that artificial intelligence and digital technologies provide significant opportunities for expanding access to biblical resources, facilitating personalized learning, and encouraging interactive faith communities. The study demonstrates that Christian Religious Education must move beyond doctrinal instruction toward a holistic model of spiritual formation that integrates biblical literacy, ethical discernment, digital wisdom, and relational discipleship. AI should be understood as a supportive instrument rather than a substitute for human mentoring and ecclesial community. Ultimately, Christian Religious Education is called to guide Generation Z toward a Christ-centered digital spirituality in which technological innovation serves spiritual maturity and faithful discipleship rather than replacing them.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, digital spirituality, Generation Z, artificial intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed contemporary society, influencing communication, education, culture, and religious life. Artificial intelligence technologies, including generative AI, machine learning systems,

and conversational agents, have become increasingly integrated into everyday experiences, particularly among younger generations. Beyond their technical functions, these technologies shape the ways individuals acquire knowledge, construct identities, and interact with communities (Luckin et al., 2016). Consequently, digital culture is no longer merely a technological phenomenon but represents a new social environment in which spiritual experiences and religious practices are increasingly mediated by digital platforms.

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, constitutes the first generation to grow up entirely within a digital ecosystem. Their lives are characterized by constant connectivity, social media engagement, algorithm-driven information consumption, and interactive online communities. According to Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017), digital natives are accustomed to rapid access to information and multimedia learning environments, which significantly influence their cognitive habits and social interactions. Such developments also affect the manner in which young people experience faith, seek spiritual guidance, and participate in religious communities.

The emergence of digital spirituality has become one of the most important phenomena within contemporary Christianity. Campbell (2013) argues that digital media do not simply provide alternative channels for communication but fundamentally reshape religious authority, community formation, and spiritual practices. Likewise, Campbell and Garner (2016) emphasize that digital technologies create new spaces where believers negotiate religious identity and express faith in ways that differ from traditional institutional structures. For Generation Z, spiritual formation increasingly occurs not only through churches and families but also through social media, online worship services, podcasts, YouTube sermons, and AI-assisted applications. These developments have introduced both opportunities and challenges for Christian communities and educational institutions.

On the one hand, artificial intelligence and digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for expanding access to Christian education. AI-powered learning platforms, personalized educational systems, and digital resources enable learners to engage with biblical teachings more flexibly and interactively (Holmes et al., 2019). Online communities and digital ministries have also facilitated broader participation in religious life beyond geographical limitations. Such developments demonstrate that technological innovation can support the dissemination of Christian values and enhance educational accessibility. On the other hand, the digital environment also presents significant challenges to spiritual formation. Contemporary digital culture often promotes immediacy, entertainment, individualism, and fragmented attention, characteristics that may hinder deep reflection and sustained spiritual growth (Turkle, 2011). Generation Z frequently encounters diverse worldviews, moral relativism, and algorithmically curated content that influence perceptions of truth and authority. Furthermore, excessive dependence on technology risks reducing spirituality to personalized consumption rather than fostering authentic relationships with God and participation in faith communities (Campbell & Garner, 2016). The presence of generative AI raises additional questions regarding discernment, wisdom, and the role of human relationships in religious education.

Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) occupies a strategic position in nurturing digital spirituality among Generation Z. Christian education has traditionally been concerned not merely with the transmission of doctrinal knowledge but with the holistic formation of faith, character, and discipleship (Groome, 2011). According to Pazmiño (2008), Christian education seeks to guide believers toward spiritual maturity through intentional processes of teaching and community life. Therefore, the emergence of artificial intelligence should not be viewed solely as a technological challenge but also as an opportunity to reimagine pedagogical practices capable of addressing the spiritual needs of digitally connected generations. Although numerous studies have examined digital religion and technological transformation, existing research has predominantly

focused on online ministry, digital communication, or ethical issues associated with artificial intelligence (Campbell, 2013; Hutchings, 2017). Relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how Christian Religious Education can foster digital spirituality among Generation Z within the context of AI-driven culture. Consequently, the relationship between digital spirituality, Generation Z, and Christian education remains insufficiently explored.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities of cultivating digital spirituality among Generation Z in the age of artificial intelligence from the perspective of Christian Religious Education. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how Christian education can provide theological guidance and pedagogical strategies that enable young believers to engage critically with digital technologies while maintaining authentic spiritual formation. In doing so, the study intends to contribute to contemporary discussions on theology, digital culture, and Christian education by demonstrating that technological innovation and spiritual maturity need not be mutually exclusive but can interact constructively in forming faithful disciples in the digital age.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach utilizing library research and theological reflection to investigate the challenges and opportunities of digital spirituality among Generation Z in the age of artificial intelligence from the perspective of Christian Religious Education. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring meanings, concepts, and interpretive relationships rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the objective of this study is to understand the interaction between digital culture, artificial intelligence, and spiritual formation, the investigation focuses primarily on conceptual analysis and theological interpretation.

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical design. Descriptive qualitative research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by examining ideas,

experiences, and theoretical perspectives within their broader contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this regard, digital spirituality was approached not merely as a technological phenomenon but as a religious and educational reality that influences faith formation, identity construction, and the spiritual practices of Generation Z. Consequently, the study aimed to analyze the implications of artificial intelligence and digital culture for Christian Religious Education and to identify pedagogical responses that remain faithful to Christian values.

Library research served as the principal methodological framework. According to Zed (2014), library research involves the systematic examination of books, journal articles, reports, and other scholarly documents relevant to the research problem. Such an approach is particularly suitable for theological and educational studies because it enables researchers to synthesize diverse perspectives and construct conceptual frameworks based on authoritative sources. Rather than relying on empirical fieldwork, this study investigated existing literature concerning digital spirituality, Generation Z, artificial intelligence, and Christian Religious Education to formulate a coherent understanding of the phenomenon. Data collection was conducted through systematic literature review procedures. Relevant literature was identified, classified, and organized into four thematic categories: digital spirituality and religious practices; characteristics of Generation Z within digital culture; the influence of artificial intelligence on education and spirituality; and the role of Christian Religious Education in fostering spiritual maturity. This thematic categorization facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and conceptual relationships among the issues investigated. Theological reflection was employed as an interpretative framework. Osmer (2008) argues that practical theological reflection enables contemporary realities to be brought into dialogue with Christian traditions and theological principles. Accordingly, this study analyzed digital spirituality not only from sociological and technological perspectives but also through the lens of Christian theology and educational philosophy. Such an approach made it possible to

evaluate the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence while preserving the centrality of discipleship, spiritual formation, and Christian community. The research seeks to provide a conceptual foundation for developing Christian Religious Education capable of nurturing authentic digital spirituality among Generation Z while engaging constructively with the opportunities and challenges of the age of artificial intelligence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The emergence of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the ways individuals experience spirituality and religious life. For Generation Z, digital environments are not merely tools for communication but have become integral spaces where identity, relationships, and meaning are constructed. Unlike previous generations that primarily encountered religious teachings through families, churches, and formal educational institutions, Generation Z increasingly interacts with spiritual content through digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, podcasts, livestream worship services, and various online communities. Consequently, spirituality has entered a new phase characterized by connectivity, accessibility, and continuous interaction with digital media. Campbell (2013) argues that digital media have fundamentally altered the patterns of religious authority and community formation. Religious experiences are no longer confined to physical spaces but increasingly occur within networked environments. In this context, digital spirituality refers to the ways individuals seek meaning, engage with religious practices, and express faith through technologically mediated environments. Rather than replacing traditional spirituality, digital spirituality represents an extension of religious life into the digital sphere.

For Generation Z, digital culture provides unprecedented opportunities to access biblical resources, participate in online worship, and engage with diverse theological perspectives. Bible applications, Christian podcasts, and AI-powered educational platforms enable young believers to learn independently and explore their faith more

deeply. Such accessibility reflects broader cultural changes associated with digital natives, who prefer interactive, visual, and flexible forms of learning (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). However, the abundance of information also creates challenges. Generation Z is exposed to competing narratives and diverse religious interpretations that may influence theological understanding and spiritual identity. Campbell and Garner (2016) observe that digital culture encourages individualized expressions of faith, where authority is increasingly negotiated rather than simply inherited from institutions. As a result, spirituality among younger generations tends to become more personalized and less dependent upon traditional ecclesiastical structures.

This development presents both opportunities and concerns for Christian Religious Education. On one hand, digital technologies enable broader participation in religious life. On the other hand, the increasing individualization of spirituality raises questions regarding discipleship, accountability, and communal formation. Christian education therefore faces the challenge of guiding Generation Z toward a spirituality that remains rooted in biblical truth while engaging constructively with digital realities.

Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Religious Experience

The rapid development of artificial intelligence represents one of the most significant technological transformations of the twenty-first century. AI systems are increasingly integrated into educational, social, and religious contexts, influencing how people acquire information and interact with knowledge. Intelligent chatbots, generative AI platforms, adaptive learning systems, and virtual assistants have become part of daily life, especially among younger generations. Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019) argue that artificial intelligence possesses enormous potential for enhancing educational accessibility and personalization. Within Christian contexts, AI technologies can facilitate biblical study, provide devotional resources, support language translation, and generate educational materials. Such capabilities demonstrate that AI can serve as a valuable instrument for extending the reach of Christian teaching. The integration of AI into religious life has

contributed to the transformation of spiritual practices. Individuals increasingly utilize digital applications for Bible reading, prayer reminders, theological inquiries, and access to sermons. AI-assisted tools allow users to obtain information instantly, reducing barriers associated with traditional educational resources. In many respects, these developments have democratized access to religious knowledge.

The growing presence of artificial intelligence raises important theological questions. Herzfeld (2023) argues that AI challenges conventional understandings of human uniqueness, wisdom, and moral responsibility. Although AI systems are capable of generating sophisticated responses, they lack consciousness, spirituality, and the relational capacities that characterize human beings created in the image of God. Consequently, AI cannot replace the spiritual and moral dimensions that are essential to Christian formation.

The distinction between information and wisdom becomes increasingly important in this context. Artificial intelligence excels in providing information but cannot cultivate spiritual maturity or moral discernment. Biblical wisdom involves more than knowledge acquisition; it encompasses obedience, character, and the fear of the Lord. Therefore, while AI may function as an educational aid, it cannot assume the role traditionally occupied by communities of faith, mentors, pastors, and Christian educators. This insight highlights a fundamental principle: technology should remain subordinate to human and spiritual purposes. Artificial intelligence must be understood as a servant rather than a master of educational processes. Its value lies not in replacing human relationships but in supporting the broader mission of nurturing faith and promoting holistic development.

Challenges of Digital Spirituality in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Despite the numerous benefits associated with digital technologies, contemporary culture presents several challenges to spiritual formation. One of the most significant concerns is the tendency toward superficiality. Turkle (2011) observes that digital environments often encourage fragmented attention and shallow interactions. Constant exposure to

notifications, social media content, and algorithm-driven entertainment may hinder the development of contemplation and sustained reflection. Christian spirituality has historically emphasized silence, prayer, meditation, and communal worship. Such practices require patience and intentionality, qualities that are increasingly threatened by cultures characterized by speed and immediacy. Generation Z frequently encounters environments that prioritize instant gratification and rapid consumption of information. Consequently, spiritual disciplines may be neglected in favor of more entertaining and emotionally stimulating activities.

Another challenge concerns the fragmentation of religious authority. In digital culture, individuals encounter numerous theological voices representing different traditions and ideologies. While diversity can enrich understanding, it may also create confusion and doctrinal instability. Campbell (2013) notes that authority within digital religion becomes decentralized, allowing individuals to select teachings according to personal preferences rather than ecclesial guidance. The rise of generative AI introduces additional complexities. AI-generated theological responses may provide useful explanations, but they cannot exercise spiritual discernment or pastoral sensitivity. Without proper guidance, individuals may become overly dependent on technological systems and neglect the communal dimensions of faith. Christianity, however, has always emphasized relationships within the body of Christ rather than isolated spiritual experiences.

Digital culture tends to promote individualism and self-centered forms of spirituality. Online religious practices may inadvertently encourage consumers rather than disciples. Faith risks becoming another commodity within the marketplace of digital content, where convenience and personal preference outweigh commitment and accountability. These tendencies challenge Christian Religious Education to move beyond mere information transfer. Spiritual formation requires more than cognitive understanding; it demands transformation of character and participation within communities of faith. Therefore, educational approaches must address not only technological competencies but also spiritual maturity and ethical discernment.

Opportunities for Christian Religious Education

Although digital transformation presents substantial challenges, it simultaneously offers remarkable opportunities for Christian Religious Education. Throughout history, Christianity has consistently adapted to changing communication technologies. From the use of Greek language and Roman roads in the early church to the printing press and contemporary digital media, technological developments have often served as instruments for advancing the mission of the church (Campbell & Garner, 2016). Artificial intelligence and digital technologies provide new possibilities for personalized and accessible learning. Adaptive educational systems enable students to learn according to their individual needs and preferences. Interactive multimedia resources facilitate deeper engagement and encourage active participation. Such innovations correspond with the characteristics of Generation Z, who generally prefer visual, collaborative, and technology-enhanced learning environments.

Christian Religious Education can benefit from these developments by integrating digital literacy and theological reflection. Rather than rejecting technological innovations, educators are called to cultivate responsible and discerning engagement with digital culture. Students need to develop the ability to evaluate information critically and to distinguish between biblical truth and misleading narratives. Pazmiño (2008) emphasizes that Christian education seeks holistic formation encompassing intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Consequently, digital literacy should be accompanied by spiritual literacy. Young believers must be equipped not only with technological competencies but also with biblical wisdom and ethical sensitivity.

Digital platforms provide opportunities for extending Christian education beyond physical classrooms. Online communities, virtual Bible studies, podcasts, and interactive learning resources enable faith formation to continue across geographical boundaries. Such flexibility allows Christian education to reach individuals who might otherwise lack access to traditional religious institutions. These developments demonstrate that artificial

intelligence should not be perceived solely as a threat. Instead, when employed responsibly, technological innovations may enhance educational effectiveness and contribute to the formation of digitally competent disciples who are capable of engaging faithfully with contemporary society.

Toward a Christ-Centered Model of Digital Spiritual Formation

The analysis conducted in this study indicates that the future of Christian Religious Education requires a balanced approach that embraces technological innovation while preserving theological integrity. Digital spirituality should neither be rejected uncritically nor accepted without discernment. Instead, Christian education must cultivate a Christ-centered model of digital spiritual formation. Such a model begins with the recognition that technology is a gift that should serve God's purposes rather than redefine them. Human beings remain central to the educational process because they are created in the image of God and possess capacities for love, moral responsibility, and spiritual discernment. Artificial intelligence may support learning, but it cannot replace the relational dimensions that characterize authentic discipleship.

A Christ-centered model of digital spirituality emphasizes several principles. First, biblical truth must remain the ultimate source of authority. Digital resources should be evaluated according to scriptural principles rather than cultural trends. Second, spiritual formation should prioritize relationships and community. Faith matures through participation in Christian fellowship, mentoring, and shared worship experiences. Third, technology should be employed as a means of service rather than as an end in itself. Educational innovations should facilitate discipleship and character formation rather than merely increasing efficiency. Fourth, Christian education should cultivate wisdom and discernment. In an era characterized by information abundance, the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood becomes increasingly essential. Wisdom involves not only knowing but also living in accordance with God's purposes. Finally, digital spirituality should encourage mission and witness. Rather than withdrawing from digital

culture, believers are called to engage it responsibly and creatively, using technological resources to communicate the gospel and serve others.

The age of artificial intelligence does not diminish the importance of Christian Religious Education. On the contrary, it underscores its continuing relevance. As technological transformations reshape contemporary society, Christian educators are challenged to form disciples who possess both digital competence and spiritual maturity. By integrating theological reflection with responsible technological engagement, Christian Religious Education can contribute significantly to nurturing authentic spirituality among Generation Z and preparing them to live faithfully in an increasingly digital world.

4. CONCLUSION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence and digital technologies has profoundly transformed the ways individuals learn, communicate, and experience spirituality. For Generation Z, whose lives are deeply embedded in digital environments, faith formation increasingly occurs within contexts characterized by connectivity, immediacy, and algorithm-driven interactions. Consequently, digital spirituality has emerged as an important phenomenon that reshapes the relationship between religious experience, technological innovation, and Christian education. This study sought to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with digital spirituality among Generation Z from the perspective of Christian Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence. The findings demonstrate that digital technologies have created new possibilities for religious engagement and spiritual growth. Digital platforms, online communities, educational applications, and AI-assisted learning systems provide broader access to biblical resources and facilitate more flexible forms of learning. These developments indicate that technological innovation can support the dissemination of Christian teachings and enhance educational accessibility. For Generation Z, whose learning preferences are closely connected to digital culture, such opportunities offer significant potential for strengthening engagement with faith and expanding participation in

Christian communities beyond traditional geographical boundaries. The study also reveals that digital spirituality is accompanied by substantial challenges. Contemporary digital culture often encourages fragmented attention, instant gratification, individualism, and the consumption of information without sufficient reflection. The abundance of religious content and the decentralization of authority may contribute to theological confusion and superficial expressions of faith. Furthermore, the emergence of artificial intelligence introduces important questions regarding wisdom, discernment, and the nature of authentic spiritual formation. Although AI systems are capable of generating information and facilitating educational processes, they lack consciousness, moral responsibility, and relational capacities. Therefore, artificial intelligence cannot replace the interpersonal and spiritual dimensions that lie at the heart of Christian discipleship. The analysis highlights that Christian Religious Education possesses a strategic role in addressing these realities. Christian education should not be limited to the transmission of doctrinal knowledge but should emphasize holistic formation that integrates intellectual, moral, spiritual, and relational dimensions. In the context of artificial intelligence, educators are called to cultivate digital literacy alongside spiritual literacy. Young believers need to be equipped not only with the ability to utilize technological tools effectively but also with the wisdom to evaluate information critically and to distinguish biblical truth from competing narratives that characterize digital culture.

The findings further suggest that technological developments should not be viewed solely as threats to Christian faith. Throughout history, Christianity has demonstrated its capacity to engage with changing cultural and technological contexts while maintaining its theological identity. In a similar manner, artificial intelligence may serve as a valuable instrument for supporting educational processes and extending opportunities for discipleship. Nevertheless, technology must remain subordinate to the mission of spiritual formation rather than becoming an end in itself. Human relationships, Christian community, and pastoral guidance continue to occupy irreplaceable positions in

nurturing mature faith. This study proposes the importance of developing a Christ-centered model of digital spiritual formation. Such a model emphasizes biblical authority, relational discipleship, ethical discernment, and responsible technological engagement. Rather than withdrawing from digital culture, Christian Religious Education should prepare Generation Z to participate actively and faithfully within digital environments while preserving their identity as followers of Christ. Spiritual maturity in the age of artificial intelligence requires not only technological competence but also wisdom, character, and commitment to Christian values.

In conclusion, the age of artificial intelligence does not diminish the relevance of Christian Religious Education; instead, it underscores its continuing importance. As digital technologies continue to transform contemporary society, Christian education is called to provide theological guidance and pedagogical responses that enable Generation Z to cultivate authentic spirituality amid rapid technological change. By integrating faith and technological literacy, Christian Religious Education can contribute to the formation of disciples who are capable of engaging the digital world responsibly, witnessing faithfully, and living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century.

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