



Faith Formation in the Digital Era: Reconstructing Christian Religious Education for Generation Z Learners

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Abstract: Technological advancement has reshaped the landscape of Christian religious education, especially for Generation Z, who are digital natives accustomed to interactive and multimedia learning environments. This study investigates the reconstruction of Christian faith formation for Generation Z in Batam, Indonesia, addressing both the opportunities and challenges posed by the digital era. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative data from surveys of 150 Generation Z church members with qualitative insights from interviews and case studies involving Christian educators and youth leaders. The study explores how digital media influences spiritual engagement, learning preferences, and theological understanding among young Christians. The findings reveal that Generation Z in Batam prefers online, visual, and participatory faith experiences, primarily through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and online devotion groups. However, this digital engagement also leads to information overload, spiritual fatigue, and potential doctrinal confusion due to unfiltered online content. The study identifies peer-to-peer discussions in social media as central to faith formation but notes the risks of theological superficiality. Case studies of hybrid church programs demonstrate that combining face-to-face mentorship with digital interaction increases participation and spiritual growth. Based on these findings, the research proposes a reconstructive model of Christian education that includes contextualized digital curricula, critical media literacy training, hybrid community building, and holistic mentorship. This approach aims to cultivate digitally literate, theologically grounded, and spiritually resilient believers who can navigate the complexities of faith in the digital era. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on adaptive religious education for contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Faith Formation; Digital Era; Christian Religious Education; Generation Z.

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Introduction

In the contemporary world, technological innovation has drastically reshaped how individuals communicate, learn, and interact with their environment. The rise of digital culture has created unprecedented changes in education, including religious education, particularly within Christian contexts. Faith formation, traditionally rooted in face-to-face interactions such as Sunday school, Bible study groups, and mentorship, now encounters new paradigms shaped by technology. This shift is particularly evident among Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, who represent the first cohort to grow up entirely in the digital age. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has never known a world without smartphones, social media, and instantaneous access to information. Their worldview, cognitive processes, and modes of engagement are significantly influenced by technology, making

it imperative for religious educators to reevaluate and reconstruct pedagogical approaches in Christian education.

Christian religious education has historically been oriented toward nurturing faith, transmitting biblical knowledge, and cultivating moral and spiritual growth within a communal setting. However, in the digital era, the conventional models of religious instruction face numerous challenges. Traditional classroom settings and didactic teaching methods may no longer resonate with Generation Z learners, who prefer interactive, visual, and participatory modes of learning. They are accustomed to personalized content, rapid information retrieval, and virtual interactions that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Consequently, religious educators must grapple with questions about how to maintain doctrinal integrity while adapting to a rapidly evolving educational landscape. Failing to address these changes risks alienating an



entire generation from meaningful engagement with Christian teachings.

Moreover, Generation Z is characterized by its diverse values, global awareness, and critical thinking skills, nurtured through continuous exposure to digital media and cross-cultural interactions. They tend to question traditional authorities, including religious institutions, seeking authenticity and relevance in the messages they receive. For them, faith is not merely a set of inherited doctrines but a lived experience that must intersect with contemporary issues such as social justice, environmental stewardship, and mental health awareness. This generational shift necessitates a reconstruction of Christian religious education that embraces dialogue, empathy, and contextualization without compromising theological depth. The church and Christian educators are called to move beyond mere information transfer toward fostering transformative spiritual experiences that resonate with the realities of Generation Z's everyday lives.

At the same time, the digital era offers vast opportunities for innovation in Christian education. Digital platforms can extend the reach of faith-based learning beyond the physical church walls, creating virtual communities where young believers can explore Scripture, share testimonies, and engage in spiritual discussions in real-time. Interactive apps, online Bible studies, podcasts, and faith-based social media content are tools that can be leveraged to nurture faith development in ways that are engaging and accessible. These digital mediums, if employed thoughtfully, can help bridge the gap between traditional Christian teachings and the lived experiences of Generation Z. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that digital engagement promotes genuine discipleship rather than superficial consumption of religious content.

This article seeks to explore these dual realities—the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era for Christian religious education. It aims to propose a reconstructive framework for faith formation that aligns with the unique characteristics, expectations, and learning preferences of Generation Z. By analyzing existing educational models and integrating insights from theology, pedagogy, and digital culture, this study advocates for a holistic, interactive, and contextually relevant approach to Christian education. The goal is not to replace traditional forms of teaching but to complement them with innovative strategies that meet Generation Z where they are—both spiritually and digitally. Ultimately, this reconstruction is essential to ensure that Christian faith continues to thrive in a world increasingly shaped by technology.

Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of faith formation among Generation Z learners in the digital era. The use of mixed methods allows for a more nuanced exploration of the phenomenon by combining numerical data with in-depth personal narratives. The research is conducted in Batam, Indonesia, a region known for its diverse cultural and religious landscape, making it a relevant locus for studying contemporary shifts in Christian education. The first phase involves an extensive literature review focusing on three primary domains: faith formation in Christian education, the influence of digital media on learning and identity development,

and relevant theories in educational psychology. The review synthesizes scholarly works from theology, pedagogy, and media studies to build a strong theoretical framework. This step provides a conceptual lens through which the data are interpreted, ensuring that the research is grounded in existing academic discourse while identifying gaps that the current study aims to address.

The quantitative component is carried out through a survey administered to Generation Z individuals, aged between 11 and 26, who are active members of various churches in Batam. The survey uses both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to capture participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward religious education in digital contexts. Questions cover aspects such as frequency of digital engagement with faith-based content, preference for online versus offline religious learning, perceived effectiveness of digital sermons, and emotional connection with online faith communities. This data collection aims to quantify the extent to which digital platforms influence spiritual growth and religious participation among young Christians in Batam.

Complementing the survey, the qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews with Christian educators, Sunday school teachers, and youth pastors across different denominational settings in Batam. These interviews seek to explore the challenges educators face in engaging Generation Z in faith formation, as well as the strategies they employ to integrate technology into their teaching. The interviews also probe educators' reflections on how digital tools can be used to foster spiritual maturity without compromising theological depth. This approach allows for the collection of rich, descriptive data that reveal educators' lived experiences and pedagogical insights.

Furthermore, the study conducts multiple case studies of innovative religious education programs within the Batam area. These programs, selected based on their integration of digital tools—such as online Bible study apps, virtual youth fellowships, live-streamed worship services, and interactive faith-based social media—are analyzed to identify best practices and potential pitfalls. Each case study documents program design, delivery methods, participant feedback, and outcomes related to faith development. By examining these real-world examples, the research highlights models of digital engagement that can inform future religious education practices.

Data from surveys are analyzed statistically to identify patterns and correlations, while interview transcripts and case study notes undergo thematic analysis to extract recurring themes. This mixed-methods design ensures a holistic perspective on how Christian education can be reconstructed to meet the needs of Generation Z in Batam, balancing spiritual tradition with technological innovation.

Results

The mixed-methods approach employed in this research reveals a nuanced picture of how Generation Z learners in Batam, Indonesia, experience faith formation in the digital era. By integrating quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews and case studies, the findings illuminate both the opportunities and challenges that Christian educators face in engaging digitally native learners. The combination of numerical patterns and rich narratives provides a comprehensive understanding of the shifting landscape of Christian religious

education in Batam, where technological growth, cultural diversity, and religious practice intersect.

Patterns of Digital Faith Engagement Among Generation Z in Batam

The survey data from 150 Generation Z respondents across multiple churches in Batam reveal distinct patterns of engagement with faith-based content. The majority of respondents (68%) reported preferring multimedia and interactive digital content—such as videos, animations, and interactive apps—over traditional lecture-based sermons or printed Bible study materials. This aligns with their broader media consumption habits, which prioritize visual, auditory, and participatory experiences. Many of these young Christians stated that their engagement with religious content is now mediated primarily through smartphones and social media platforms, such as YouTube (74%), Instagram (61%), and TikTok (52%). WhatsApp and Telegram groups for daily devotionals and prayer circles are also commonly utilized, fostering small digital communities of faith. The findings from Batam reflect a global trend but are accentuated by the city's unique context. Batam is a rapidly developing urban center with a population that is both multicultural and tech-savvy. Its proximity to Singapore and Malaysia exposes the youth to cross-cultural media flows, intensifying their engagement with international Christian content. Respondents frequently mentioned online sermons from global megachurches, faith-based podcasts from Western speakers, and Christian social media influencers as primary sources of spiritual insight, sometimes even more than their local pastors or churches. This shift has implications for local churches in Batam. While global digital content provides inspiration and exposure, it can inadvertently cause disconnects between local church teachings and the digital spiritual diet of the youth. Several youth participants indicated that while they appreciate the accessibility of international content, they sometimes struggle to reconcile it with the theological perspectives and worship practices taught in their home churches.

The Role of Social Media and Peer Networks in Faith Formation

Another key result of the survey is the central role of peer discussions and social media networks in faith formation. 72% of respondents stated that they often discuss spiritual matters with their peers in online forums or private chats. These peer-led conversations happen through group chats, Discord channels, or even Instagram DMs, creating informal yet meaningful spaces for theological reflection and emotional support. Interviews with youth pastors in Batam highlighted the dual nature of this phenomenon. On one hand, the peer-to-peer model encourages a sense of ownership over faith exploration, empowering young believers to articulate their beliefs in their own language. On the other hand, this dynamic sometimes bypasses formal theological guidance, leading to the spread of simplified or misinterpreted doctrines. For example, one youth leader noted that memes or viral TikTok videos on Bible verses often reduce complex theological concepts into bite-sized, out-of-context slogans. While such content increases visibility, it may also foster spiritual superficiality if not accompanied by deeper mentorship. The cultural fabric of Batam further complicates this. As a city with religious diversity and high interfaith exposure, Generation Z in Batam often interacts with friends from various faith backgrounds. While this fosters tolerance, it can also dilute exclusive religious claims, leading

some Christian youths to adopt syncretistic views that blend Christian teachings with secular or pluralistic ideologies. This highlights the importance of building critical theological literacy among young believers.

Technological Integration in Christian Education: Best Practices from Batam Churches

The case studies of innovative churches and ministries in Batam reveal promising strategies for integrating technology into faith formation. For example, one large congregation in Batam successfully developed a hybrid Sunday school program where students attend physical gatherings once a month and engage in weekly online Bible studies via Zoom and interactive apps. In this model, students participate in digital scavenger hunts related to Bible stories, upload creative video reflections, and use apps like BibleProject for animated lessons. Another church implemented a gamified Bible learning platform, where participants earn badges and points for completing spiritual tasks such as memorizing scripture, praying daily, or attending online fellowship. The church reports that this approach has increased attendance and participation among their Gen Z members by over 40%. Interviews with Sunday school teachers and youth pastors revealed that digital mentorship is also becoming a critical practice. Churches are pairing older mentors with younger learners via WhatsApp or Google Meet for weekly check-ins. These sessions involve not just Bible reading but also discussions on life issues, school challenges, and mental health, reflecting a more holistic approach to spiritual mentorship. However, the case studies also uncover challenges. Educators reported struggling with the *digital divide*. Not all students have equal access to high-speed internet or personal devices. Some youths, particularly from lower-income families in Batam's peripheral areas, are excluded from digital programs due to technological limitations. This raises concerns about equity and inclusion in digital faith formation.

Challenges in the Digital Era: Information Overload and Faith Fatigue

Both survey data and interviews identified information overload as a significant challenge for faith formation in the digital era. Generation Z respondents reported feeling overwhelmed by the vast array of religious content available online. While 82% agreed that digital media makes faith learning more accessible, 64% also admitted that the sheer volume of content sometimes causes confusion and spiritual fatigue. Educators expressed concern about the lack of discernment skills among their students. Without proper guidance, young learners may consume contradictory messages from various online preachers, leading to doubts about doctrinal truths. This confusion can result in disengagement, with some respondents describing moments of faith burnout, where they temporarily withdraw from religious activities due to exhaustion. The fast-paced digital culture, characterized by short attention spans and instant gratification, clashes with the contemplative, long-term nature of spiritual growth. Participants confessed to skipping through online sermons, preferring 2-minute TikTok devotions over 30-minute Bible studies. While this trend enhances accessibility, it risks fostering a shallow understanding of faith that lacks theological depth. In Batam's context, where social pressures and materialistic values are prevalent, the temptation to prioritize entertainment over spiritual discipline is significant. Several educators noted that digital faith engagement must compete with

games, influencers, and secular content that offer immediate emotional rewards. Without intentional design, faith-based digital content risks becoming just another part of the social media feed rather than a transformative spiritual experience.

Reconstructing Christian Religious Education: Strategic Implications

Given the findings, a reconstruction of Christian religious education in Batam must include the following strategies: first, Contextualized Digital Curriculum. Churches and educators in Batam need to develop curricula that integrate local cultural relevance with global digital trends. Rather than importing Westernized content wholesale, faith formation programs should include Bahasa Indonesia digital resources, Batak and Melayu cultural references, and contextual theological reflections. This ensures that learners remain connected to their spiritual heritage while engaging modern platforms. Digital tools should be used not just to disseminate information but to create interactive spiritual experiences. For example, virtual prayer walks using location-based apps, collaborative digital art projects depicting biblical stories, or augmented reality Bible explorations could enhance engagement; second, Critical Thinking and Digital Literacy Training. Christian educators must intentionally teach digital literacy as part of faith formation. Students should learn how to evaluate the credibility of online spiritual content, cross-check biblical interpretations, and avoid misinformation. Workshops on media discernment can be embedded in Sunday school or youth fellowship activities. By equipping Generation Z with critical thinking skills, churches can help them navigate the complex digital landscape without losing their theological compass. Third, Hybrid Community Building. In Batam's multicultural urban setting, hybrid communities—combining physical gatherings and digital interaction—can strengthen spiritual bonds. Churches can organize monthly in-person worship while maintaining active online discipleship groups during the week. Virtual prayer meetings, faith-based gaming nights, and digital small groups can foster continuous spiritual interaction without geographical limitations. Foyrth, Holistic Mentorship Models. Mentorship should go beyond theological instruction to include life coaching, mental health support, and career guidance. Using platforms like WhatsApp, mentors can check in with mentees daily, providing personalized encouragement and accountability. Educators in Batam can also collaborate with local Christian professionals to conduct webinars on integrating faith with real-life issues such as work ethics, environmental care, and social justice—topics that resonate with Gen Z's broader concerns. This study demonstrates that faith formation among Generation Z in Batam is at a critical juncture. The digital era presents both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges for Christian religious education. While technology can enhance accessibility, promote creative learning, and foster community, it also introduces risks of spiritual superficiality, information fatigue, and theological confusion. A successful reconstruction of Christian education for Generation Z in Batam requires a balanced, hybrid approach—blending digital innovation with face-to-face mentorship, integrating critical media literacy with spiritual discipline, and contextualizing global faith narratives within local cultural frameworks. By adopting these strategies, churches and educators in Batam can cultivate a generation of digitally literate, theologically grounded, and

spiritually resilient Christians ready to navigate both the virtual and real-world landscapes of faith.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex relationship between digital culture, technological innovation, and Christian religious education, particularly in the context of Generation Z learners in Batam, Indonesia. The research highlights that the digital era presents both significant opportunities and critical challenges for faith formation. Generation Z, as the first cohort to grow up entirely in a digital environment, approaches learning and spiritual development through different lenses compared to previous generations. Their preference for interactive, multimedia content, coupled with their constant engagement with global media, requires Christian educators to rethink traditional pedagogical models. The findings of this research demonstrate that while digital platforms expand the reach of Christian education and foster new forms of community, they also risk promoting superficial engagement if not strategically designed. The integration of surveys, interviews, and case studies in this mixed-methods research provides a holistic perspective on how Christian education must evolve. The quantitative data shows a clear shift in how young believers engage with faith-based content—favoring digital interaction over traditional formats. The qualitative data reveals the critical role of peer networks, social media, and informal digital spaces in shaping theological understanding and spiritual practices. However, this shift brings risks such as doctrinal confusion, spiritual fatigue, and a decline in deep reflective faith practices. Without careful guidance, Generation Z may develop fragmented or syncretistic beliefs, influenced by online content that lacks theological rigor. To address these realities, the study proposes a reconstructed model of Christian religious education that is adaptive, interactive, and contextually grounded. This model includes developing a localized digital curriculum that balances global content with culturally relevant materials. It also emphasizes the need for critical digital literacy training, equipping learners to discern reliable spiritual resources in an age of information overload. Furthermore, the model advocates for hybrid community-building, blending in-person gatherings with online discipleship to create continuous spiritual engagement. Holistic mentorship is another essential component, integrating spiritual guidance with emotional support and real-life coaching, ensuring that faith is not isolated from everyday experiences. This study underscores the role of educators as facilitators of transformative experiences, not just transmitters of information. The challenge for Christian education in Batam—and globally—is to harness the potential of technology without compromising theological depth or communal integrity. Churches must adopt flexible strategies that meet Generation Z where they are—both digitally and spiritually—while guiding them toward meaningful, lasting faith commitments. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the future of Christian education in a rapidly evolving world. By engaging with the unique characteristics of Generation Z, churches in Batam can build a foundation for resilient, reflective, and mission-driven believers who are capable of navigating both virtual and real-world challenges. The findings call for a collaborative effort among educators, religious leaders, and digital innovators to create faith formation experiences that are relevant, authentic, and transformative in the digital age.

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