

Digital Devotional Content in the Spiritual Formation of Generation Z: A Christian Religious Education Perspective

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Abstract: Digital media has become part of how Generation Z encounters religious messages and explores faith. This study examined the role of digital devotional content in spiritual formation from a Christian Religious Education perspective. It used an integrative literature review of scholarly works on Generation Z, digital religion, spiritual formation, and Christian education, with particular attention to Indonesian contexts and publications from 2020 to 2026. The literature was analysed through identification, thematic categorisation, comparison, and theological-pedagogical synthesis. The findings highlighted four features of digital devotions: conciseness, multimodal presentation, emotional-reflective engagement, and contextual-interactive engagement. These features could encourage biblical engagement and faith practice, although short-form content also risked limiting biblical understanding and weakening connections with faith communities. The study proposed a five-stage conceptual model: catalyst, text, reflection, praxis, and community. The model offered a framework for developing digital devotions that connect biblical teaching with reflection, daily practice, and Christian community.

Keywords: Christian Education; digital devotional; digital religion; Gen Z; spiritual formation

Abstrak: Media digital telah menjadi bagian dari kehidupan Generasi Z dalam menerima pesan keagamaan dan memahami iman. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran konten renungan digital dalam pembentukan spiritualitas dari perspektif Pendidikan Agama Kristen. Penelitian menggunakan tinjauan literatur integratif terhadap kajian tentang Generasi Z, agama digital, pembentukan spiritualitas, dan pendidikan Kristen, dengan perhatian pada konteks Indonesia dan publikasi tahun 2020–2026. Literatur dianalisis melalui tahap identifikasi, pengelompokan tema, perbandingan temuan, serta sintesis teologis-pedagogis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan empat karakteristik renungan digital, yaitu pesan ringkas, penyajian multimodal, keterlibatan emosional-reflektif, dan interaksi kontekstual. Karakteristik ini dapat mendorong keterlibatan dengan Alkitab dan praktik iman, tetapi konten singkat juga berisiko membatasi pemahaman Alkitab dan mengurangi keterhubungan dengan komunitas iman. Penelitian ini mengusulkan model konseptual lima tahap: katalisator, teks, refleksi, praksis, dan komunitas. Model ini menawarkan kerangka untuk menyusun renungan digital yang menghubungkan pengajaran Alkitab dengan refleksi, praktik hidup, dan komunitas Kristen.

Kata kunci: agama digital; formasi spiritual; Generasi Z; Pendidikan Agama Kristen; renungan digital

Introduction

Digital technology has reshaped the environments in which people communicate, acquire knowledge, construct identities, maintain relationships, and engage with questions of belief and meaning. For Generation Z, whose formative years have coincided with the widespread availability of the internet, smartphones, and social media, digital platforms are not simply supplementary communication tools but integral parts of everyday life. In Indonesia, research involving 1,177 respondents aged 15–25 identified substantial patterns of media and social media use among this generation (Evita et al., 2023). Zis et al. (2021) likewise documented changes in communication practices among Generation Z and millennials, including a growing reliance on digital devices. Although these findings should not be taken to mean that all members of Generation Z use digital media in the same way, they demonstrate the importance of considering digital environments when examining contemporary learning, relationships, and meaning-making.

These developments have implications for religious life and spiritual formation. Digital platforms provide opportunities to access sermons, devotional messages, biblical reflections, testimonies, prayer resources, theological discussions, and faith-based communities beyond the physical boundaries of churches. Digital religion scholarship has emphasized that religion in digital contexts cannot be understood merely as traditional religious activities transferred online. Rather, religious practices and meanings are shaped through interactions between online and offline environments, technological structures, and social relationships (Campbell & Cheong, 2022; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Sumiala, 2022). From this perspective, digital media can become a space in which religious knowledge is encountered, interpreted, discussed, and shared. In Indonesia, Gaol and Hutasoit (2021) examined social media as a space for church ministry and the development of Generation Z spirituality, highlighting the need to consider the relationship between virtual religious experiences and everyday life. Digital environments therefore present both opportunities for religious participation and questions about how faith is understood and practised.

For Christian Religious Education (CRE), these changes raise pedagogical and theological questions that extend beyond the adoption of new communication technologies. CRE is concerned not only with the transmission of biblical and theological knowledge but also with the formation of faith, character, reflection, and practices that are embodied in everyday life. As young people encounter religious information through multiple digital sources, churches and Christian educators need to consider how learners interpret this information and

relate it to their existing faith commitments and communities. Studies on Christian education in digital contexts have called attention to the need for adaptive, contextual, and reflective approaches to spiritual formation (Davito Lethulur et al., 2025; Evimalinda, 2023; Naibaho et al., 2024). Damanik and Yuli (2024) also discussed the role of Christian education in responding to the challenges of digital culture. Taken together, these studies indicate that digital adaptation in CRE involves more than making educational materials available online; it also requires pedagogical approaches that connect religious knowledge with reflection, practice, and relationships.

One form of digital religious communication relevant to this discussion is digital devotional content. Such content may present a biblical passage or faith-related theme, provide a brief explanation, connect the message with everyday experience, and invite reflection or action. It can be distributed through short videos, social media reels, visual carousels, podcasts, or brief written messages. The visual, auditory, and interactive features of these platforms can provide ways to communicate religious ideas in formats familiar to digital audiences. Kertamukti (2022) for example, examined Instagram as a space for religious dialogue involving Generation Z. Nabila et al. (2023), in a study of Islamic da'wah content, discussed how accessible and concise communication formats could engage younger audiences. While the latter study concerns a different religious tradition, it may offer comparative insight into digital communication practices; its findings, however, should not be assumed to represent Christian devotional engagement directly. These studies provide a basis for considering the communicative possibilities of digital devotional content, while leaving open questions about its theological and pedagogical role in Christian spiritual formation.

The communicative accessibility of digital devotions does not, by itself, establish their contribution to spiritual formation. Brief content may make religious messages easier to encounter, but brevity can also limit the explanation of biblical context or complex theological ideas. Similarly, visual appeal and emotional engagement may encourage attention and interaction without necessarily leading to sustained reflection, faith practices, or deeper relationships within a community. Liu et al. (2025), in an empirical study involving 534 Generation Z respondents in China, identified associations between content innovation, empathic engagement, and digital religious behaviour. These findings offer insight into the relationship between digital content and religious engagement in that particular context, but they do not demonstrate that online engagement is equivalent to spiritual maturity or that the

same relationships apply to Christian Generation Z in Indonesia. Agustin et al. (2026) also drew attention to digital distraction and fragmented attention as challenges for Christian education and spiritual practice. In addition, digital platforms shape the visibility and circulation of content through their design and recommendation systems, raising questions about the sources of religious authority and the criteria by which users evaluate online religious messages (Campbell & Cheong, 2022; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). These considerations suggest the need to distinguish the reach or popularity of digital devotional content from its theological integrity and its potential contribution to a more comprehensive process of faith formation.

This study addresses this conceptual gap through an integrative literature review of scholarship on Generation Z, social media, digital religion, spiritual formation, and CRE, with particular attention to Indonesian contexts. Rather than treating views, likes, reach, or emotional responses as direct indicators of spiritual growth, the study considers digital devotional content in relation to a broader pedagogical process involving engagement with Scripture, reflection on lived experience, faith practice, and connection with a faith community. The article proposes understanding digital devotions as a catalyst for staged spiritual formation: a point of entry that may encourage further learning and practice but does not replace sustained discipleship, pastoral relationships, or communal participation. Its contribution is a theological-pedagogical synthesis that connects the communicative characteristics of digital content with the formative aims of CRE and provides a conceptual basis for evaluating devotional content beyond platform engagement metrics. This framework is conceptual and requires further empirical investigation; it is not presented as evidence that digital devotions independently cause spiritual transformation.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the role of digital devotional content in the spiritual formation of Generation Z from a Christian Religious Education perspective. It addresses five research questions: (1) How does the digital ecosystem shape the spaces and conditions in which Generation Z encounters and develops faith? (2) What characteristics of digital devotional content may support communication with Generation Z? (3) How may digital devotional content function as a catalyst within a broader process of spiritual formation? (4) What theological, pedagogical, and communicative risks are associated with short-form digital devotional content? and (5) What theological-pedagogical principles may guide churches and Christian educators in designing and evaluating digital devotions?

Research Method

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach through an integrative literature review to examine the role of digital devotional content in the spiritual formation of Generation Z from a Christian Religious Education (CRE) perspective. An integrative literature review was selected because it enables the synthesis of findings from studies with different methodological approaches, as well as the integration of conceptual and theoretical perspectives to develop a broader understanding of a research problem (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The review focused on the relationship between digital media, religious engagement, spiritual formation, and Christian education. Rather than measuring changes in spirituality among participants, the study synthesized existing scholarly literature to identify recurring patterns, conceptual connections, opportunities, and challenges associated with digital devotional content. The review was guided by five questions concerning the influence of the digital ecosystem on Generation Z's faith formation, the communicative characteristics of digital devotions, their potential role as catalysts for spiritual formation, the risks associated with short-form content, and the theological-pedagogical principles relevant to churches and Christian educators.

Participants and Sampling

No human participants were recruited for this study. The units of analysis were published scholarly sources relevant to the research questions. These sources included national and international journal articles, academic book chapters, and selected institutional publications where their relevance and bibliographic information could be verified.

A purposive approach to literature selection was applied. Sources were considered relevant when they addressed one or more of the following areas: Generation Z and media-use patterns; digital religion and religious practices; spirituality and faith formation; Christian Religious Education in digital contexts; and religious communication or devotional content on social media. Priority was given to recent literature published between 2020 and 2026, while earlier publications were considered where they provided foundational theoretical or methodological contributions.

The selection of literature was based on its relevance to the research objectives, the clarity of its scholarly contribution, and the availability of verifiable bibliographic information,

such as a DOI or publisher record. As the original search records did not document the number of sources identified, screened, excluded, or retained at each stage, exact numerical screening figures cannot be reported retrospectively. The study therefore avoids presenting unverified counts as part of its sampling procedure.

For clarity, a source was retained when it had a discernible scholarly or academic contribution and addressed at least one review theme; sources were not treated as evidence for claims beyond their population, religious tradition, or study design. Material with unverifiable bibliographic details or no substantive relevance was not used to support the synthesis. These principles describe the selection logic available for this manuscript; they do not replace a contemporaneous database search log or a formal, independently documented quality-appraisal protocol.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the identification, examination, and documentation of relevant published literature. The process involved reviewing the titles, abstracts, keywords, aims, methods, and findings of sources to assess their relevance to the research questions. Sources were prioritized when they were published in peer-reviewed journals, had a DOI or verifiable publisher page, and made a substantive contribution to the study's focus.

Information from the selected literature was compared using bibliographic details, publication context, research design or publication type, key findings or arguments, and relevance to the review themes. This comparison informed the synthesis reported in the Results and Discussion. The original working records do not contain a complete, auditable literature matrix or search log. Accordingly, the manuscript does not claim a fully reproducible database search, and specific database names, search dates, exact search strings, and numerical screening totals are not reported as verified facts.

Data Analysis

The literature was analyzed through a thematic and interpretive synthesis process. The analysis proceeded through four interconnected stages. First, identification involved examining the central aims, methods, and findings of each relevant source. Second, thematic categorization organized the literature around eight analytical categories: accessibility, visibility, duration, emotional engagement, relevance, community, authority, and risks of fragmentation.

Third, comparative analysis examined areas of convergence and divergence across the literature, particularly regarding the assumption that increased access to digital religious content necessarily leads to deeper spiritual engagement. This stage considered both the opportunities offered by digital devotional content and the limitations identified in previous research. Fourth, theological-pedagogical synthesis integrated the themes into principles for the design and use of digital devotional content in Christian Religious Education.

The analysis combined concept-informed categorization with openness to patterns emerging from the literature. The eight analytical categories were subsequently brought together to interpret broader characteristics of digital devotional content and their potential implications for spiritual formation. The synthesis distinguished among empirical findings reported by previous studies, conceptual interpretations developed through comparison, and pedagogical recommendations derived from the authors' analysis. This distinction helped ensure that conceptual propositions and recommendations were not presented as direct empirical evidence.

The resulting synthesis informed a staged conceptual model in which digital devotional content serves as a catalyst that may direct users towards engagement with Scripture, personal reflection, spiritual practice, and faith community. The model is proposed as a conceptual contribution for further empirical investigation and is not presented as a validated causal model of spiritual formation.

Results and Discussion

Digital Ecosystem of Generation Z as a Space for Faith Formation

Digital media has become an important environment in which Generation Z accesses information, maintains relationships, and negotiates personal and social identities. The reviewed literature indicates that digital technology is embedded in everyday communication practices rather than functioning solely as an additional channel. Evita et al. (2023), in a study involving 1,177 respondents aged 15–25 in Indonesia, documented patterns of media and social media use among Generation Z. Zis et al. (2021) also identified changes in communication behaviour associated with the increasing use of digital devices. These studies provide contextual evidence for the significance of digital media in young people's lives, but they do not establish identical habits or religious outcomes for all Generation Z members.

Within the framework of digital religion, online environments are not simply spaces where religious messages are distributed. Rather, religious practices and meanings are shaped through the interaction of digital technologies, social relationships, and offline religious life (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Cheong & Campbell, 2022). Digital platforms allow users to encounter sermons, devotional content, biblical reflections, testimonies, and religious discussions beyond physical church boundaries. Camerling et al. (2020) discussed digital media in church mission, including sermon videos, live streaming, and social media. Gaol and Hutasoit (2021) similarly examined social media as a space for church ministry and the development of Generation Z spirituality.

For Christian Religious Education (CRE), this expansion has implications for how faith knowledge is encountered and interpreted. Young people may access religious messages from church accounts, Christian content creators, peers, and other online sources. Such encounters can become part of religious meaning-making, although exposure should not be equated with theological understanding or spiritual maturity. Tetelepta and Gultom (2022) discussed the potential for synergy between churches and spiritual influencers in supporting Generation Z spirituality, while also raising questions about the distinction between communication skills, audience reach, and theological authority.

The digital ecosystem therefore presents CRE with both an expanded educational environment and a more complex context for faith formation. Churches and educators cannot assume that religious learning occurs exclusively through formal instruction, sermons, or face-to-face fellowship, but digital encounters should not substitute for these settings. From a pedagogical perspective, the task is to help learners interpret digital religious messages critically, connect them with Scripture and Christian teaching, and relate them to practices and relationships within their faith communities.

Digital Devotions: From Message Distribution to Pedagogical Design

Digital devotional content is commonly presented in concise and accessible formats, including short videos, reels, visual carousels, brief podcasts, and written reflections. These formats enable religious messages to circulate through platforms integrated into everyday communication practices. However, the educational value of digital devotions cannot be assessed solely by accessibility or attention. From a CRE perspective, devotional content also needs to support understanding, reflection, and application of Christian faith in daily life.

The reviewed literature on digital religion emphasizes that religious communication is shaped by the interaction between content, media environments, and users (Campbell & Cheong, 2022; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). In Christian education, this suggests that digital devotions should be designed with clear pedagogical intentions rather than treated merely as brief religious messages. Evimalinda (2023) and Naibaho et al. (2024) highlight adaptive approaches that connect digital media with meaningful learning and spiritual objectives.

A pedagogically designed digital devotion may begin with a question, concern, or experience familiar to its audience. It can then introduce a relevant biblical passage, offer a concise explanation that respects the passage's context, and invite reflection on its significance. The content may conclude with prayer, further Bible reading, an act of service, or discussion with a mentor or small group. This sequence is a design principle rather than a required format.

The distinction between message distribution and pedagogical design is important. Message distribution concerns whether content reaches an audience, while pedagogical design considers what learners may understand, reflect upon, and practise. Views, likes, shares, and comments can describe interaction but cannot independently demonstrate biblical understanding, character development, or spiritual transformation. Digital devotions should therefore be evaluated for theological integrity, learning purpose, and pathways for continued engagement.

This approach also recognizes the limitations of short-form communication. A concise devotion may introduce a biblical idea without sufficient space to explain a complex passage or theological issue. Rather than forcing every topic into a single short message, content creators can connect brief devotions with longer explanations, Bible study materials, reflective questions, or group discussions so that digital devotions function as entry points to deeper learning.

Four Characteristics of Communicative Digital Devotions

The thematic synthesis identified four recurring characteristics relevant to digital devotions: conciseness, multimodal presentation, emotional-reflective engagement, and contextual-interactive engagement. These characteristics are interpreted as communicative and pedagogical considerations rather than direct indicators of spiritual growth. Their value depends on integration with biblical interpretation, educational purpose, and the broader context of faith formation.

First, Concise. Conciseness can make devotional content more accessible within digital environments where users encounter large amounts of information (Nabila et al., 2023; Zis et al., 2021). Nevertheless, conciseness should not remove essential biblical context or theological complexity. A devotion may focus on one biblical passage, one key insight, and one reflective invitation; when a topic requires more extensive interpretation, additional resources should be provided.

Second, Multimodal. Digital platforms enable devotional messages to combine written text, images, audio, video, animation, and other visual or auditory elements. Kertamukti (2022) examined Instagram as a space for religious dialogue involving Generation Z, while Liu et al. (2025) explored digital religious behaviour in a Chinese Generation Z context. From a CRE perspective, multimodal elements should reinforce the biblical message rather than replace theological content.

Third, Emotional-reflective. Digital devotions may connect biblical themes with experiences such as anxiety, relationships, academic pressure, family concerns, vocation, or identity. Liu et al. (2025) reported associations between content innovation, empathic engagement, and digital religious behaviour among Generation Z respondents in China. This does not establish lasting spiritual change or direct generalization to Christian Generation Z in Indonesia. Emotional engagement should therefore be connected with biblical reflection and meaningful practice.

Fourth, Contextual-interactive. Contextual relevance concerns the relationship between devotional messages and everyday experiences, while reflective questions, comments, polls, and follow-up discussions can support participation and dialogue. Gaol and Hutasoit (2021) and Tetelepta and Gultom (2022) discuss digital communication in relation to Generation Z spirituality and community. Online participation does not automatically replace pastoral care or face-to-face fellowship, and contextualisation still requires theological discernment.

Taken together, the four characteristics describe ways of communicating devotional content while preserving educational and theological purpose. Conciseness supports focus, multimodality shapes presentation, emotional-reflective engagement connects faith with lived experience, and contextual interaction opens opportunities for dialogue and community. None independently guarantees spiritual formation; their significance lies in integration with Christian learning and discipleship.

Digital Devotional Content as a Catalyst for Spiritual Formation

The concept of spiritual formation requires distinction from the simple reception of religious information or participation in online activities. Within a Christian perspective, spiritual formation concerns a continuing process of growing in faith, deepening one's relationship with God, developing Christian character, and embodying faith through everyday practices and relationships. Tumarar and Camerling (2021) discuss intimacy with God as an important dimension of Christian faith. This perspective helps clarify why online engagement metrics should not be treated as sufficient evidence of spiritual growth.

Table 1. Characteristics of digital devotions for Generation Z from a Christian Religious Education perspective.

Characteristic	Literature findings	Implications for devotions	Pedagogical limitation
Conciseness	Generation Z tended to consume information rapidly and through digital platforms (Nabila et al., 2023; Zis et al., 2021).	One main idea, one key text, and one invitation to reflection within a limited duration.	Brevity must not remove textual context or excessively simplify doctrine.
Multimodal presentation	Digital platforms facilitated communication through visuals, audio, video, and interaction (Kertamukti, 2022; Liu et al., 2025)	Use visuals and sound to strengthen the message, not replace theological content.	Aesthetic appeal can attract attention but does not guarantee understanding or transformation.
Emotional-reflective	Emotional engagement was associated with participation and interaction in digital spaces (Liu et al., 2025).	Connect Scripture with real experience and provide reflective questions.	Emotional response needs to be directed towards reflection and faith practice, not merely momentary response.
Contextual-interactive	Social media provided space for relationships, participation, and digital community (Gaol & Hutasoit, 2021; Tetelepta & Gultom, 2022).	Use questions, comments, follow-up discussions, and links to faith communities.	Digital interaction does not automatically replace pastoral relationships and direct church community.

The reviewed literature supports a pedagogical understanding of spiritual formation that includes cognitive, reflective-affective, practical, and communal dimensions. These dimensions are interrelated rather than a rigid sequence. Studies of Christian education in digital contexts emphasize reflective, contextual, and transformative approaches to faith learning (Davito Lethulur et al., 2025; Evimalinda, 2023; Naibaho et al., 2024). In this context, digital devotional content may serve as a catalyst by initiating engagement with Scripture and encouraging further reflection and practice. For example, a short devotion about forgiveness may introduce a biblical teaching and invite consideration of a relationship requiring reconciliation. The content itself does not establish that reconciliation will occur; rather, it may prompt prayer, personal reflection, pastoral guidance, or further discussion within a community.

Understanding digital devotions as a catalyst helps distinguish the role of content from the broader process of formation. Content may create an opportunity for learning or reflection, but spiritual formation involves ongoing engagement, practice, relationships, and time. If a learner encounters a devotion without engaging beyond passive viewing, it would be inappropriate to conclude that holistic spiritual formation has taken place. Conversely, a digital devotion may contribute to a wider process when connected with Bible study, mentoring, worship, service, or small-group participation.

This interpretation positions digital devotional content as a possible component of a broader educational and spiritual ecosystem. Its contribution depends on the relationship between the biblical message, the learner's context, the quality of interpretation, opportunities for practice, and the support of a faith community. Digital content can provide an initial encounter with Scripture or a Christian theme, but it cannot guarantee spiritual transformation or replace sustained relationships and practices. Since the present study is based on a literature review, this relationship is presented as a conceptual interpretation rather than a demonstrated causal effect. Empirical research is needed to examine how Generation Z actually engages with digital devotions and whether particular content designs are associated with specific dimensions of spiritual formation.

Risks of Digital Devotional Content in Generation Z Spiritual Formation

Although digital devotional content can expand access to religious communication, the reviewed literature also points to risks requiring theological and pedagogical consideration. These risks do not mean that digital media is inherently harmful to spirituality; rather, they

indicate that educational value depends on content quality, patterns of use, platform structures, and the relationships in which digital engagement takes place.

One risk is fragmented biblical understanding. Short-form content may present a verse or theological idea without enough space to explain its literary, historical, or theological context. When biblical passages are isolated from their wider context, audiences may develop partial or misleading interpretations. Concise communication can be useful, but it needs to be supported by responsible interpretation and opportunities to access fuller explanations. CRE can respond by helping learners examine the biblical text, consider its context, and distinguish between the meaning of Scripture and an individual content creator's interpretation.

A second risk concerns the confusion of emotional engagement with spiritual growth. Devotional content may use personal stories, music, imagery, or emotionally resonant language to encourage attention and reflection. However, a strong emotional response does not necessarily indicate a lasting change in understanding, character, or practice. Liu et al. (2025) explored associations involving empathic engagement and digital religious behaviour in China, but such associations should not be interpreted as evidence that emotional engagement alone produces spiritual maturity. Christian educators therefore need to guide learners from emotional responses towards reflection, discernment, and actions consistent with Christian faith.

A third risk relates to religious authority and content popularity. Digital platforms enable individuals and organizations to communicate religious ideas directly to broad audiences. This can widen access to religious discussion, but it can also make audience reach, visibility, or perceived popularity appear to be indicators of theological credibility. Tetelepta and Gultom (2022) discussed the relationship between churches and spiritual influencers in the development of Generation Z spirituality, while Cheong and Campbell (2022) considered complexities in the future of digital religion. These discussions highlight the importance of evaluating the sources and authority of religious content. CRE can support this process by encouraging learners to ask who produced a message, what biblical interpretation it offers, what theological assumptions it contains, and whether its claims can be responsibly examined.

A fourth risk concerns algorithmic mediation and selective exposure. Platform recommendation systems influence which content becomes visible to users and may repeatedly present material based on previous interactions. Consequently, the religious content encountered by an individual may reflect platform design and patterns of engagement as well as deliberate choices. This can shape the range of perspectives to which users are exposed.

Rather than assuming that algorithms determine religious belief or behaviour, it is more appropriate to recognize them as part of the media environment that can influence content visibility. Algorithmic literacy is therefore relevant to CRE: learners can be encouraged to consider why particular content appears in their feeds, how recommendations are generated, and why popularity should not be treated as a measure of truth.

A further risk is the weakening of sustained community relationships when digital engagement is treated as sufficient. Online comments, livestream participation, and interactions with religious accounts may create opportunities for connection, but they do not necessarily provide the continuity, mutual responsibility, and pastoral care associated with an established faith community. Gaol and Hutasoit (2021) emphasize the importance of considering the relationship between virtual religious experience and real-life contexts. Digital devotional content should therefore create pathways towards meaningful relationships rather than encourage the assumption that online participation alone is equivalent to communal discipleship.

These risks are interconnected. Fragmented interpretation can be reinforced by brief formats; emotional engagement can be mistaken for spiritual progress; popularity can be confused with authority; and online interaction can be mistaken for sustained community. The pedagogical response is not necessarily to reject digital devotions, but to design and use them critically. CRE can help learners develop biblical literacy, theological discernment, reflective habits, ethical media practices, and meaningful connections with faith communities.

A Staged Digital Devotional Content Model for Churches and Its Evaluation Principles

Based on the thematic synthesis, this article proposes a five-stage conceptual model for designing digital devotional content: catalyst, text, reflection, praxis, and community. The model is intended as a theological-pedagogical framework for connecting short-form content with a broader process of spiritual formation. It is not a validated instrument or an empirically tested intervention; its stages represent a proposed design sequence that requires further assessment in practical settings.

The catalyst stage introduces a question, situation, or concern that connects with the audience's lived experience. This may include issues such as social comparison, friendship, family relationships, study, work, or uncertainty about the future. Its purpose is to invite attention and establish the relevance of the topic without relying on sensationalism or emotional

manipulation. The text stage introduces the biblical passage or theological foundation relevant to the issue. The passage should be presented with sufficient context to avoid reducing Scripture to a slogan or an isolated quotation. The content creator should communicate the central idea clearly and avoid claims that extend beyond what the text can responsibly support.

The reflection stage connects the biblical message with the audience's experience. A concise explanation, reflective question, or brief illustration may help learners consider the significance of the passage for their attitudes, decisions, and relationships. This stage should invite thoughtful engagement rather than prescribe a single emotional response. The praxis stage invites a practical response consistent with the biblical message. This may include prayer, further Bible reading, reconciliation, service, ethical decision-making, or the development of a constructive habit. The proposed action should be realistic and appropriate to the content. It should not imply that complex personal, relational, or social problems can always be resolved through a single action.

The community stage provides a pathway for continued learning and participation. This may involve a small-group discussion, mentoring, a church activity, a follow-up Bible study, or a conversation with a trusted spiritual leader. Its purpose is to connect individual reflection with shared learning, mutual support, and ongoing discipleship. Community is not simply an additional digital feature; it represents the relational dimension of Christian formation. The model can be summarized as a progression from initial engagement to biblical grounding, reflection, practice, and communal continuation. The stages may overlap or recur depending on the audience, biblical topic, and ministry setting. For example, a discussion within a small group may raise new questions that lead participants back to Scripture and further reflection. The model should therefore be understood as a flexible framework rather than a fixed formula.

The theological orientation of the proposed model can be related to several biblical narratives and teachings, although the five stages should not be understood as a sequence prescribed verbatim by Scripture. The catalyst stage may be illustrated by Jesus' encounter with the lawyer in Luke 10:25–37, where a question about eternal life leads to a discussion that challenges the hearer's understanding of neighbourly love. The text stage reflects the formative role of Scripture described in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which presents Scripture as useful for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. The reflection stage resonates with James 1:22–25, which calls believers not merely to hear the word but to respond to it with discernment and obedience. The praxis stage is consistent with James 2:17, where faith is discussed in

relation to action, emphasizing that belief has practical implications. Finally, Acts 2:42–47 illustrates the communal dimension of Christian life through teaching, fellowship, shared meals, prayer, and mutual care. Read together, these passages provide theological points of reference for connecting engagement, biblical understanding, reflection, practice, and community. They do not establish the proposed model as a biblically mandated sequence or provide empirical evidence of its effectiveness.

To complement this model, the article proposes six dimensions for evaluating digital devotional content: biblical accuracy, theological clarity, contextual relevance, pedagogical quality, digital communication quality, and community continuity. These dimensions are conceptual criteria derived from the article's synthesis and should not be treated as a validated measurement scale.

For practical use, each dimension may be examined through guiding questions: (1) Biblical accuracy, Is the passage read in its literary and historical context, and are claims traceable to the text? (2) Theological clarity, Is the main theological claim understandable, coherent, and free from misleading simplification? (3) Contextual relevance, Does the content engage a real audience concern respectfully and without stereotyping? (4) Pedagogical quality, Does it state a learning or formative purpose and invite comprehension, reflection, or an appropriate response? (5) Digital communication quality, Do language, duration, visuals, sound, accessibility features, and platform format serve the message? (6) Community continuity, Is there a realistic route to discussion, mentoring, worship, service, or further learning? These questions are proposed prompts for reflective review, not validated scale items or a scoring rubric.

The staged model and evaluation dimensions serve complementary purposes. The five stages describe how a devotional message may be designed to connect with a broader formation process, while the six dimensions provide criteria for examining the quality and continuity of that design. Together, they offer a conceptual contribution to CRE by linking digital communication with biblical interpretation, reflective learning, practical response, and communal engagement. Their usefulness, however, needs to be explored through empirical studies, expert review, and application in diverse church and educational contexts.

The relationship among the levels of synthesis can be stated explicitly. The eight analytical categories identify features and tensions in the literature: accessibility and duration inform conciseness; visuality informs multimodal presentation; emotional engagement informs

emotional-reflective engagement; and relevance and community inform contextual interaction. Authority and fragmentation risks operate across all four characteristics as critical safeguards. The four characteristics then inform the design choices represented in the five stages: catalyst draws on relevance and accessibility; text addresses biblical grounding and fragmentation risks; reflection connects emotional engagement with interpretation; praxis translates reflection into practice; and community provides relational continuity while inviting discernment about authority. This is an interpretive mapping developed by the authors, not a causal sequence established by the reviewed studies.

Table 2. Staged digital devotional design framework

Stage	Purpose	Example form	Theological principle	Continuation pathway
Catalyst	Open attention and raise a real issue	Question, short story, everyday situation	Human problems are read in the light of faith	Towards the text
Text	Introduce the biblical foundation	Verse/passage + brief context	The text is not separated from its context	Towards reflection
Reflection	Connect Scripture with life	Explanation and reflective question	Faith touches thought and affect	Towards praxis
Praxis	Turn reflection into action	One concrete step, prayer, exercise	The Word is embodied in life	Towards community
Community	Extend the formation process	Small group, mentoring, discussion	Faith is lived together	Ongoing discipleship

Implications for Churches, Educators, and Digital Ministers

The proposed framework has several implications for churches, Christian educators, and those involved in digital ministry. These implications are derived from the literature synthesis and are offered as practical considerations rather than as outcomes already demonstrated through field testing.

For churches, digital devotional content can be incorporated into a broader discipleship strategy rather than managed only as social media communication. A church may connect devotional series with sermon themes, small-group discussions, Bible study, mentoring, and pastoral care. Churches may also establish review processes for biblical interpretation, language, and pastoral sensitivity.

For Christian educators, social media could be used as a laboratory for theological literacy. This idea extended Lobang and Camerling's (2021) view of online media use in congregational education. Learners could analyse several digital devotions by identifying the text, assessing context, checking claims, analysing communication style, and evaluating the call to action. Such activity can teach both theology and how theology operates within digital culture.

For digital ministers and content creators, the framework highlights the importance of aligning communication choices with theological and pedagogical purposes. Short duration, engaging visuals, and accessible language can support communication, but they should not displace biblical accuracy or thoughtful interpretation. Content creators can provide biblical references, supplementary resources, and pathways for continued learning. Communication ethics also requires care when presenting personal testimonies and claims about spiritual matters.

From a Christian communication ethics perspective, digital devotional content should be evaluated not only by accessibility and audience engagement but also by the responsibilities involved in communicating religious messages. Campbell and Garner (2016) emphasize critical and faithful engagement with digital technologies in relation to Christian life and community. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) identify authority, community, and ethical and theological questions as important themes in digital religion. Applied to devotional practice, these perspectives call for responsible representation of biblical texts, distinction between theological interpretation and personal opinion, respect for audience dignity and vulnerability, and avoidance of fear, guilt, or emotional distress merely to increase engagement. These principles are proposed applications of the literature rather than findings empirically tested by this review.

For church leaders and mentors, the expansion of digital religious communication calls for attentiveness to the questions and experiences that young people bring from online environments. Rather than dismissing digital religious content as inherently inadequate, leaders can create spaces where learners discuss what they have encountered, ask questions, and examine theological claims. Such conversations may help connect digital experiences with relationships of trust, pastoral guidance, and participation in a faith community.

Across these contexts, the central implication is that digital ministry requires integration rather than mere adoption of technology. The educational and spiritual value of digital devotions depends not only on the content itself but also on how churches, educators, and

communities support further understanding, reflection, practice, and relationships. The proposed framework offers a basis for planning and discussion, while its effectiveness in specific contexts remains a matter for future research.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, it is an integrative literature review and does not provide direct empirical data on how Christian Generation Z in Indonesia encounters, interprets, or responds to digital devotional content. Spiritual formation is therefore treated as an analytical and theological-pedagogical concept rather than as a measured outcome.

Second, the reviewed literature includes studies conducted in different national, cultural, and religious contexts. For example, Liu et al. (2025) examined Generation Z in China, while Laderi and Uecker (2025) studied internet activity and religious commitment among American adults. These studies can offer comparative perspectives on digital religious engagement, but their findings cannot be assumed to represent Christian Generation Z in Indonesia. Similarly, studies of digital religious communication in other religious traditions may provide insights into communication practices without directly establishing how Christian audiences respond to devotional content.

Third, the literature on CRE and digital devotional practices remains varied in its focus, context, and research design. The sources considered include conceptual discussions and studies with different methodological approaches. As a result, the synthesis identifies recurring themes and develops a conceptual framework, but it does not establish that the proposed model or evaluation dimensions have been validated across different educational and ecclesial settings. In addition, the search and selection process had limitations in its retrospective documentation. Where exact historical search counts, screening figures, or quality-appraisal records were not documented, these cannot be reported as verified results. This limits the reproducibility of the review and should be taken into account when interpreting the breadth of the synthesis.

Fourth, Generation Z is not a homogeneous group. Differences in age, education, geographical location, socioeconomic circumstances, denomination, family background, digital access, and church participation may shape how individuals engage with digital religious content. The reviewed literature does not provide sufficient evidence to generalize one pattern of engagement to all Christian young people in Indonesia. The findings are therefore best

understood as a conceptual synthesis that identifies issues for further examination rather than as a comprehensive description of the experiences of this generation.

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. Qualitative studies involving Christian Generation Z may explore how young people interpret digital devotions, evaluate religious authority, and connect online messages with personal faith and community life. Interviews, focus group discussions, and digital ethnography may provide insight into experiences that cannot be established through literature synthesis alone. Quantitative research may examine associations between content characteristics and selected indicators of biblical understanding, reflection, religious practice, or communal participation, while taking care not to treat online engagement metrics as direct measures of spiritual maturity.

The five-stage model may be examined through design-based research or pilot interventions in churches, youth ministries, and Christian educational institutions. The six evaluation dimensions may be subjected to expert review and empirical validation, while content analysis of digital devotions on Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts could examine biblical interpretation, theological clarity, contextual relevance, pedagogical structure, communication quality, and community continuity.

Further comparative research may also consider differences across denominations, regions, and educational settings. Studies in Eastern Indonesia, including Makassar, Maluku, Papua, and Kalimantan, may contribute contextual insights that are not sufficiently represented in the literature reviewed. Cross-denominational research could explore how theological traditions and church practices shape the design and reception of digital devotions. Such research would help distinguish principles that may be applicable across contexts from those that require adaptation to particular communities.

Overall, further empirical and conceptual work is needed to evaluate the proposed framework and clarify the conditions under which digital devotional content may contribute to Christian spiritual formation. Such work can build on this study by testing its conceptual propositions, refining its evaluation dimensions, and examining how digital communication can be integrated responsibly into the educational and communal life of the church.

Conclusion

This integrative literature review examined the role of digital devotional content in the spiritual formation of Generation Z from a Christian Religious Education (CRE) perspective.

The synthesis indicates that digital media provides an important environment in which Generation Z encounters religious messages, explores questions of faith, and participates in religious communication. However, digital access and online engagement alone do not necessarily demonstrate spiritual growth. The formative significance of digital devotional content depends on how it connects biblical understanding with reflection, faith practice, and relationships within Christian communities.

The review identified four communicative characteristics of digital devotional content: conciseness, multimodal presentation, emotional-reflective engagement, and contextual-interactive engagement. These characteristics were synthesized from eight analytical categories and informed a five-stage conceptual model comprising catalyst, text, reflection, praxis, and community. The model presents digital devotional content as a potential starting point for a broader formative process rather than an independent means of producing spiritual transformation. The review also proposes six conceptual dimensions for evaluating digital devotions: biblical accuracy, theological clarity, contextual relevance, pedagogical quality, digital communication quality, and community continuity. These dimensions are reflective criteria and have not yet been empirically validated as a measurement instrument.

The study contributes a theological-pedagogical framework that connects digital religious communication with the educational, reflective, practical, and communal aims of CRE. It highlights the need for churches, Christian educators, and digital ministry practitioners to develop devotional content that maintains biblical and theological integrity while responding thoughtfully to the communication practices of Generation Z. Digital platforms may complement Christian education and discipleship, but they should not replace Scripture-based teaching, pastoral guidance, embodied faith practices, or participation in Christian community.

This study is limited by its literature-based design, the incomplete documentation of the historical search process, and the diversity of contexts represented in the reviewed sources. It therefore does not provide direct empirical evidence that digital devotional content causes changes in the spiritual lives of Generation Z, nor can its conceptual framework be generalized to all Indonesian Christian communities. Future research should examine how young Christians engage with digital devotions in specific regional and denominational contexts, assess the practical applicability of the proposed five-stage model, and subject the six evaluation dimensions to expert review and empirical validation. Such work may further clarify how digital devotional content can be integrated responsibly into Christian spiritual formation.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to the research, writing, or publication of this article.

Author Contributions (CRediT)

Revaldi Tri Wira Atan and Nela Bura Parrang contributed to the initial drafting of the manuscript, conceptualization of the research idea, and writing of the article. Yosua Feliciano Camerling contributed to reviewing and editing the manuscript, completing and refining the citations, incorporating and addressing reviewer feedback, improving the manuscript, and translating the article into English.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was not applicable because this study did not involve human participants, interviews, identifiable personal data, or interventions. The study used publicly available scholarly literature and cited the original sources.

Disclaimer

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