

Christian Religious Education in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: Missiological Opportunities in the Formation of Digital Faith for Generation Z

Benyamin Dadi Ratu Mofu^{1*}, Diana Binkor Jenbise², Martha Maria Wospakrik³

^{*1} Department of Christian Religious Education, STFT GKI Izaak Samuel Kijne Jayapura, Papua

^{2,3} Department of Master of Missiology, STFT GKI Izaak Samuel Kijne Jayapura, Papua

* Corresponding Author: benyaminmofu@stftkijne.ac.id

Abstract: Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have transformed the way the younger generation learns, interacts, and constructs religious meaning in the digital space. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) faces new challenges, as the formation of Generation Z's faith no longer takes place solely in the classroom or church, but also within a digital ecosystem mediated by platforms, algorithms, and AI-assisted content. This study aims to analyze the missiological opportunities for PAK in shaping Generation Z's digital faith in the AI era. The research employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review using a systematic-narrative review model. Data sources include relevant journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic books, particularly publications from the past five years, retrieved through selected academic databases. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning, conceptual trends, and research gaps. The synthesis results reveal four main themes. First, AI reconfigures the pedagogical ecology of PAK through personalized learning, academic efficiency, and expanded access to religious knowledge. Second, Generation Z's faith is formed within a hybrid digital space, meaning their faith identity is influenced by virtual communities, digital spiritual content, and algorithmic logic. Third, this situation opens new missiological opportunities for PAK as a space for digital discipleship, spiritual literacy, and theological curation. Fourth, the use of AI in PAK must be grounded in an ethical-theological framework to avoid oversimplifying faith, introducing bias, and fostering dependence on non-human authorities. This article concludes that PAK in the AI era needs to be developed as a theological, critical, relational, and missionary practice of digital faith formation. Theoretically, this study brings together the discourses of AI, digital religion, and missiology; practically, it provides direction for teachers, churches, and Christian curriculum developers in designing faith-based learning that is relevant to Generation Z.

Received: March, 23 2026

Revised: April, 20 2026

Accepted: May, 08 2026

Online Availbale: May, 28 2026

Curr. Ver.: May, 28 2026

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Christian Religious Education; Digital Faith; Generation Z; Missiology.

1. Introduction

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought about fundamental changes in the way humans learn, communicate, seek meaning, and establish authority in knowledge. In the context of education, AI can no longer be understood merely as a technical tool, as this technology is beginning to encroach on pedagogical spaces that previously relied heavily on human interaction, such as teaching, assessment, dialogue, and mentoring. In the realm of religious education, Papakostas demonstrates that AI has been utilized in teaching, assessment, and pastoral engagement (Papakostas, 2025). This situation highlights a new urgency for religious education, as the emerging issues concern not only learning efficiency but also ethical, theological, and character-forming dimensions. Therefore, religious education in the AI era must be understood as part of the transformation of the faith-formation ecosystem, not merely the use of digital learning media.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.
Submitted for possible open
access publication under the
terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY SA) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

For Christian Religious Education (CRE), this urgency is even more critical because CRE aims not only to transmit biblical knowledge but also to foster character, spiritual maturity, ethical reasoning, and a living relationship with faith. The emergence of AI as a new mediator in the learning process raises fundamental questions about how faith is formed, who holds the role of interpretive authority, how truth is discerned, and how the relationship between teachers, students, the church, and technology is structured theologically. Papakostas asserts that while AI can support personalized learning and administrative efficiency, it also carries risks of theological distortion, excessive dependence, and epistemic uniformity (Papakostas, 2025). Therefore, Christian Education and Training's (PAK) response to AI must not be merely reactive or technocratic, but rather reflective, critical, and normative. This is where the urgency of this article lies: positioning AI as a formative issue that directly influences the direction of Christian faith formation.

The urgency of this research is further reinforced when considered in relation to Generation Z, a generation born and raised in the digital revolution. Polok and Szromek (2024) explain that Generation Z is deeply connected to digital communication devices and social media, so that the formation of their identity, morality, affections, and religiosity takes place in a space heavily influenced by digital culture. In a Christian context, Meisyani et al. (2026) demonstrate that Christian youth navigate their faith within a digital faith ecosystem that has given rise to hybrid faith communities, while simultaneously presenting challenges such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and the blurring of authority in faith formation. This indicates that the central issue is no longer merely whether Generation Z remains religious, but rather how their faith is shaped, negotiated, and articulated within a digital space mediated by platforms, algorithms, and AI. Therefore, Christian Religious Education must urgently formulate relevant approaches to Generation Z's faith experiences amidst an ever-changing digital ecology.

In this situation, Religious Education (PAK) cannot simply be positioned as a normative subject that conveys doctrines and moral values in a linear manner. Gulo and Tapilaha (2024) emphasize that the reform of Religious Education in the digital age requires the integration of spirituality and critical reasoning, so that students not only consume religious information but are also able to evaluate, test, and internalize it responsibly. Similarly, Veldhuis et al. (2025) stress that AI literacy for the younger generation must be critical, particularly in understanding the social, political, cultural, and ethical implications of the technology. The urgency lies in the need to cultivate spiritual-digital intelligence the ability to distinguish between truth, authority, algorithmic bias, symbolic manipulation, and the quality of faith narratives circulating in the digital space. Therefore, Religious Education in the AI era must move beyond merely teaching faith content toward fostering a faith that is critical, reflective, and contextual.

Recent literature indicates that the digital space is not merely a channel for conveying messages, but a formative environment that contributes to the development of spiritual identity, moral reasoning, and community engagement. Boiliu, Jura, and de Carvalho (2025) emphasize that digital Christian education must integrate theology, ethics, digital literacy, and spirituality. Maranatha and Tandana (2025) add that digital faith formation must remain relational, participatory, and rooted in the incarnational model of Christ. On the other hand, Priyono (2025) highlights that the mission of the digital church requires visionary digital leadership and digital spiritual literacy, while Triposa and Lumingas (2025) emphasize that AI demands the integration of technology, local culture, and spirituality in Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesia. These studies demonstrate the importance of renewing Christian Religious Education (CRE), yet they also reveal that discussions regarding AI, CRE, Generation Z's digital faith, and missiology often proceed in isolation.

The uniqueness of this article lies in its effort to unify four fields that are typically discussed separately: Artificial Intelligence, Christian Religious Education, the formation of Generation Z's digital faith, and missiological opportunities. Previous research has addressed AI in religious education, the transformation of Christian Religious Education in the digital age, the faith identity of young Christians, and the mission of the digital church.

However, few have explicitly considered Christian Religious Education as a space for digital faith formation that also serves a missiological function in the AI era. Therefore, this article offers a conceptual synthesis that positions Christian Religious Education not only as a space for the transfer of faith knowledge but also as a critical, relational, ethical, and missional practice of digital formation. Theoretically, this article contributes to the dialogue between the theology of education, digital religion, AI literacy, and missiology. Practically, this

article provides a foundation for Christian Religious Education teachers, churches, youth leaders, and Christian curriculum developers to design faith-based learning that is relevant to Generation Z's digital experiences without losing its theological depth and missional orientation.

2. Literature Review

Summary of Previous Research

Research on Christian Religious Education, Artificial Intelligence, digital faith, and Generation Z has grown rapidly over the past five years, but these studies remain scattered across several groups that are not yet fully interconnected. Based on a recent literature review, at least four main groups stand out: AI in religious education, the transformation of Christian Religious Education in the digital age, the religious identity and behavior of Generation Z within the digital ecosystem, and the mission of the digital church and digital spiritual literacy. These four groups are highly relevant to the topic of this article, yet each operates with distinct focal points.

In the first group, Papakostas's (2025) study indicates that AI in religious education opens opportunities for personalized learning, dialogic simulations, and administrative efficiency, yet also poses risks of theological distortion, bias, excessive dependence, and the weakening of relational-formative aspects in religious education. This article is significant as it is one of the most explicit studies addressing the relationship between AI and religious education. However, its focus remains on religious education in general, not specifically on Christian Religious Education, let alone on the issue of digital faith formation among Generation Z and its missiological opportunities.

In the second group, Gulo and Tapilaha (2024) emphasize the integration of spirituality and critical reasoning in Christian Religious Education so that students are not only devout but also capable of reflective thinking in the face of digital technology. Additionally, Boiliu et al. (2025) developed a framework linking theology, ethics, digital literacy, and spirituality as the foundation for Christian education in the digital space. Triposa and Lumingas (2025) add a managerial dimension by proposing the integration of AI, local culture, and spirituality within the Indonesian context. However, these three studies remain stronger at the pedagogical-conceptual and educational management levels and have not yet explicitly interpreted PAK as a missiological space for the formation of Generation Z's digital faith.

In the third group, research on youth, religion, and the digital space indicates that the faith of the younger generation is now taking shape in increasingly hybrid, dynamic, and digitally connected ways. Meisyani et al. (2026) identified the emergence of hybrid religious communities, the challenge of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, and the need for a digital theological literacy curriculum for Christian adolescents. Choong (2023) demonstrate that the consumption of religious digital content can enrich the spiritual lives of Christian youth, though its effects are highly dependent on motivation and consumption patterns. Beyond the Indonesian Christian context, Liu et al. (2025) show that visual, interactive, and emotionally engaging digital content has a significant influence on the digital religious behavior of Generation Z in China. Meanwhile, Polok and Szromek (2024) emphasize that Generation Z is a generation shaped by the digital revolution, so their religious and moral attitudes cannot be separated from the media-mediated cultural context. However, this group generally stops at analyzing digital religious identity, behavior, and experiences, rather than formulating missiological implications for the PAK.

In the fourth group, Priyono (2025) highlights that the mission of the digital church requires visionary digital leadership and digital spiritual literacy so that technology is not used pragmatically but remains within the framework of Gospel values. This finding is crucial for this article as it introduces the idea that the church's digital transformation is not merely about platforms but also about the formation of ethical and spiritual reasoning. However, the focus of this study remains on church leadership and ministry, not on PAK as a medium for shaping digital missionary faith for Generation Z.

When synthesized, it becomes evident that the current literature offers key insights: some studies address AI in religious education, others explore Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the digital age, some highlight the digital faith identity of young people, and others examine the church's digital mission. However, these four areas tend to remain isolated from one another. Therefore, the primary gap in this research is not a lack of studies, but rather a lack of synthesis that explicitly unites AI, Christian Religious Education, the digital faith

formation of Generation Z, and missiological opportunities within a single comprehensive conceptual framework.

Thus, the research gaps in this article can be categorized into four main areas. First, there is a thematic gap because studies on AI and religious education have largely remained at the level of general religious education or educational management, without specifically focusing on Christian Religious Education. Second, there is a generational gap because studies on Christian adolescents and youth in the digital space have not yet formulated a systematic response from Christian Religious Education (CRE) regarding the formation of Generation Z's digital faith. Third, there is a theoretical-missiological gap because the literature on digital missions has not explicitly positioned CRE as a missiological praxis for the younger generation in the digital space. Fourth, there is a synthesis gap because few studies have integrated AI, Christian Religious Education, the digital faith formation of Generation Z, and missiological opportunities within a single integrative framework. Unlike previous studies that tend to be fragmented, this article positions itself as an integrative literature review. The main novelty of this article lies in its conceptual synthesis, which affirms Christian Religious Education in the AI era as a space for the digital faith formation of Generation Z that simultaneously serves a missiological function.

Theoretical Studies

This theoretical section is structured around three theoretical frameworks deemed most relevant to explaining the core issues of this article: digital religion/digital theology, critical AI literacy, and contextual-digital mystrology. The selection of these three theories is based on the need to interpret the phenomenon holistically: the first theory explains the space in which Generation Z's faith is formed; the second theory explains the critical competencies required when AI acts as an intermediary of knowledge and meaning; while the third theory explains the direction of PAK praxis as missionary, contextual, and transformative formation.

Digital religion theory stems from the idea that digital media is not merely a neutral tool for conveying religious messages, but rather a socio-cultural environment that shapes religious practices, identity, community, authority, and the religious experience itself. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) emphasize that studies of digital religion must address issues of ritual, identity, community, authority, and incarnation. In a Christian context, this framework is enriched by a more explicit approach to digital theology that highlights how theological reflection, pedagogy, ethics, and faith formation change as religious life unfolds within digital culture. Boiliu et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital media function not only as a means of communication but also as a formative environment that influences spiritual identity, moral reasoning, and community engagement.

While digital religion theory explains the digital context of faith formation, critical AI literacy theory outlines the competencies that must be developed to prevent students from becoming passive consumers of technology. Veldhuis et al. (2025) and Corpus (2025) emphasize that adequate AI literacy involves not only the ability to use AI systems but also the critical ability to understand how AI works, how bias and power are embedded within it, and how AI influences social, cultural, political, and educational life. In the context of this article, this theory is particularly important because Generation Z interacts not only with conventional digital media but also with AI systems that generate answers, recommend content, and subtly shape perceptions of knowledge and authority.

The third theory employed is contextual-digital missiology, a framework that views mission not as an additional activity outside of education, but as the foundational orientation of the church and Christian education to accompany, witness to, and nurture people in a relevant way within their contexts. Priyono (2025) adds that digital church mission requires digital visionary leadership and digital spiritual literacy so that technology is used in harmony with Gospel values. This perspective is enriched by Suwin (2024) and Langi et al. (2025), who demonstrate that Generation Z, as a digital native generation, requires mission strategies that are creative, inclusive, and sensitive to changes in digital culture.

The three theories above complement one another but have different focal points. Digital religion/digital theology is strongest in explaining the space and process of faith formation; critical AI literacy is strongest in explaining the critical and ethical capacities that must be built in the face of AI; while digital-contextual missiology is strongest in explaining the direction of practice and the normative goals of PAK. Since the focus of this article is on the missiological opportunities in the digital faith formation of Generation Z, digital

theology/digital religion is chosen as the primary lens, while the other two theories serve as supporting lenses.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review using a systematic-narrative review model. This approach was chosen because the study does not aim to measure variables statistically, but rather to search for, select, compare, and critically interpret the literature regarding the relationship between Artificial Intelligence, Christian Religious Education, the formation of digital faith, and Generation Z. The systematic review model is used to ensure that the synthesis process is conducted through explicit and reproducible eligibility criteria to reduce bias, while the narrative approach is maintained so that the research results remain conceptually and reflectively readable within the framework of educational theology and missiology (Brignardello-Petersen et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2023). The research focus is directed at four main areas: AI in religious education, Christian Religious Education in the digital age, digital faith formation for Generation Z, and missiological opportunities in digital learning and discipleship. Data sources consist of relevant journal articles, academic proceedings, and scholarly books, retrieved via Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Crossref, DOAJ, and Garuda/SINTA, with a time frame of 2021–2026 for journal articles and 2016–2026 for scholarly books.

The literature search was conducted using a combination of keywords in Indonesian and English, such as “Christian Religious Education” AND “Artificial Intelligence,” “Christian Religious Education” AND “Artificial Intelligence,” “digital faith” AND “Generation Z,” “digital religion” AND “adolescents,” “missiology” AND “digital era,” “digital theology” AND “Christian education,” and “religious education” AND “AI ethics.” The literature was selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, then processed through four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, following the PRISMA 2020 flowchart (Page et al., 2021). Selected sources were extracted into a data matrix containing author, year, title, study context, method, focus of discussion, main findings, and relevance to the research topic. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through six phases: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and synthesis writing, as supported by Braun and Clarke (2021) and Ahmed et al. (2025). The validity of the study was ensured through transparency in the search, consistency in selection, audit trails, conceptual triangulation, and academic integrity through proper citations in accordance with the 7th edition of the APA Style.

4. Results and Discussion

Since this study employs a literature review, the results section is not presented as interview excerpts or field observations, but rather as a thematic synthesis of core literature addressing AI in religious education, the reconfiguration of PAK in the digital age, the formation of digital faith among Christian adolescents, critical AI literacy, and the church’s digital mission. From this synthesis, four main themes emerge: (1) AI reconfigures the pedagogical ecology of PAK, (2) Generation Z’s faith is formed in a hybrid, algorithm-mediated digital space, (3) PAK presents new missiological opportunities as a space for digital discipleship, and (4) all these opportunities are constrained by the need for ethical-theological grounding and the relational nature of faith.

AI Reconfigures the Pedagogical Ecology of Christian Religious Education

Preliminary findings suggest that AI cannot be viewed as a neutral tool in Christian Religious Education, but rather as a force that transforms learning structures, sources of authority, and patterns of interaction in religious education. Papakostas (2025) asserts that AI has been used in teaching, assessment, and pastoral engagement, thereby moving religious education toward personalized learning and greater academic efficiency. However, these developments also present serious risks, such as over-reliance, theological distortion, and epistemic conformity. In the context of Christian Religious Education in Indonesia, Triposa and Lumingas (2025) point out that these changes require AI-based pedagogical adaptation, the digitization of the theology curriculum, and the formation of cross-generational virtual learning communities.

In this situation, the role of PAK can no longer be understood merely as the transmission of the content of faith but must be directed toward fostering students’ spiritual-critical abilities. Gulo and Tapilaha (2024) emphasize that PAK reform in the digital age must integrate spirituality and critical reasoning, enabling students to navigate knowledge, meaning,

and the truth of faith within an AI-mediated digital environment. Thus, AI shifts the focus of PAK's work from mere doctrinal teaching to formative guidance that helps students discern authority, truth, and the meaning of faith. Therefore, these findings are integrative in nature because changes in PAK pedagogy in the AI era can only be fully understood when considered alongside developments in AI studies, PAK, digital theology, adolescent faith identity, and digital mission.

Generation Z's Faith Is Formed in a Hybrid and Algorithm-Mediated Digital Space

The second finding indicates that Generation Z's faith is no longer shaped primarily within a single physical space such as a classroom, church, or family, but rather within a digital-hybrid ecosystem that brings together various platforms, communities, content, and algorithms. Meisyani et al. (2026) explicitly point to the existence of a digital faith ecosystem, the emergence of hybrid faith communities, and the influence of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism in the formation of Christian identity among adolescents. Boiliu et al. (2025) emphasize that the digital environment shapes faith formation, moral reasoning, and community engagement; thus, the digital presence is not merely a distribution medium but a space that helps shape who and how a person believes.

At this point, AI deepens this digital logic. When students receive instant answers, content recommendations, and AI-mediated narrative development, the process of faith formation also becomes increasingly vulnerable to oversimplification, fragmentation, and dependence on non-human authorities. Therefore, the literature synthesis indicates that the primary issue is not merely how much spiritual content is available, but how Generation Z filters, trusts, and internalizes that content within their lives of faith. Veldhuis et al. (2025) help elucidate these dynamics through a framework of critical AI literacy.

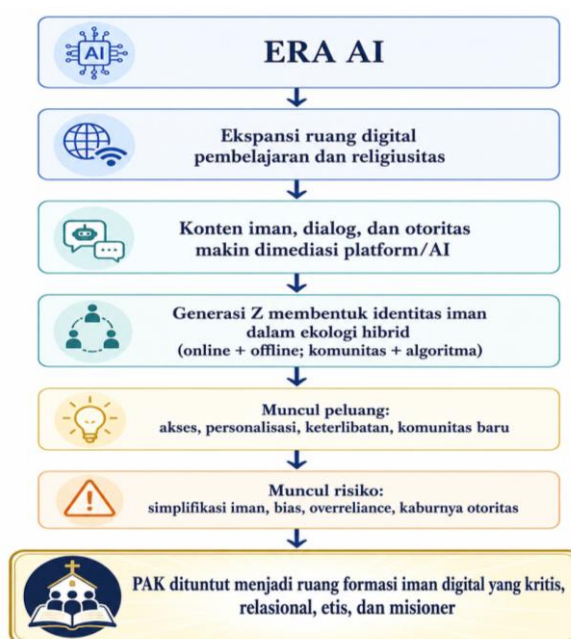


Figure 1. The flow of digital faith formation of Generation Z in the AI era

This visualization summarizes a key pattern of synthesis: AI is expanding the digital environment in which beliefs are formed, and these changes present both opportunities and risks. The most important conclusion here is that PAK can no longer be understood merely as a normative subject; rather, it must serve as a space for reconfiguring

PAK Has New Missiological Opportunities as a Digital Discipleship Space

The third finding indicates that the literature not only highlights risks but also reveals tangible missiological opportunities. Priyono (2025) emphasizes that the digital transformation of the church requires visionary digital leadership and digital spiritual literacy to ensure that technology remains within the framework of Gospel values. In the context of PAK, these findings suggest that the classroom, curriculum, and learning processes can be

viewed as arenas for digital faith formation, not merely the delivery of religious content. Triposa and Lumingas (2025) reinforce this by emphasizing the need for AI pedagogy that is contextual to digital culture, spirituality, and ethics.

Maranatha and Tandana (2025) add that the formation of a healthy digital faith must remain relational, participatory, and rooted in the incarnational model of Christ. This finding is significant because it indicates that missiology here is not synonymous with the expansion of as much content as possible, but rather with a pedagogical and spiritual presence that is truly constructive. Meisyani et al. (2026) also demonstrate that Christian adolescents require digital discipleship that acknowledges the complexity of their identity and faith community.

Opportunities are Limited by the Need for Ethical-Theological Discernment and the Relationality of Faith

The fourth finding confirms that while AI offers opportunities for faith formation, it must not replace the human, relational, and spiritual dimensions of that process. Papakostas (2025) warns of the risks of theological distortion, overreliance, and epistemic conformity when AI is used without a critical theological framework. In line with this, Veldhuis et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of critical AI literacy so that learners are able to discern the biases, interests, and social implications of the technology. Maranatha and Tandana (2025) also emphasize that digital faith formation must remain participatory and relational. Thus, AI can support the faith learning process, but it cannot replace spiritual authority, teacher guidance, the faith community, the church, and the example of a life lived in faith.

In the context of PAK, the ethical-theological limitations of AI use manifest in two primary forms: epistemic limitations and relational limitations. Epistemic limitations require students not to accept all AI outputs as ultimate truth, while relational limitations affirm that faith formation still requires the presence of teachers, communities, and the church as spaces for correction, fellowship, and exemplary living. Therefore, the value of AI for PAK does not lie in the technology itself, but rather in how personalization, access, and efficiency are safeguarded by critical literacy, digital ethics, and tangible guidance. Based on a synthesis of the literature, the missiological opportunities of PAK emerge in five dimensions: formation as a space for digital discipleship; pedagogy through personalization and expanded access to faith-based learning; community through hybrid faith communities; the leadership of teachers and the church as curators of meaning; and ethics through the development of the ability to discern AI bias and authority.

Table 1. The missiological opportunities of PAK arising from the synthesis of results.

Opportunity dimension	Shape opportunities	Markers in the literature
Formation	PAK becomes a digital discipleship space	The need for a digital faith ecosystem and the development of Christian identity.
Pedagogy	Personalization and expansion of access to faith learning	AI supports teaching, assessment, and adaptive learning.
Community	The birth of a cross-space community of learning and faith	Hybrid faith communities and virtual communities across generations.
Leadership	Teachers and churches become curators of meaning, not just senders of material	Visionary digital leadership and spiritual digital literacy.
Ethics	PAK fosters discernment against AI bias and authority	Critical AI literacy and ethical-theological filters.
Opportunity dimension	Shape opportunities	Markers in the literature
Formation	PAK becomes a digital discipleship space	The need for a digital faith ecosystem and the development of Christian identity.

Overall, the findings of this study reveal four main patterns. First, AI has transformed the pedagogical ecology of PAK and necessitates a shift in the teacher's role from merely a content deliverer to a facilitator of the learning process. Second, the formation of Generation Z's faith takes place in a hybrid digital space, mediated by various platforms, and is increasingly influenced by the logic of AI. Third, these changes open up new missiological opportunities for PAK as a contextual digital space for discipleship. Fourth, all these opportunities will only be meaningful if implemented within an ethical-theological framework that upholds relationality, community, and the depth of faith.

5. Discussion

The findings of this synthesis indicate that the most fundamental change in the era of Artificial Intelligence is not merely the emergence of new digital tools, but rather a shift in the environment in which faith is formed. In this regard, the findings of this study reinforce the perspective of digital religion/digital theology, which views digital media as an environment that shapes religious practices, identity, community, and authority, rather than merely a neutral channel for conveying messages. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) position the study of digital religion as a field that examines religious practices in digital media, while Golan (2023) asserts that the relationship between young people, digital culture, and religion still requires a more comprehensive analysis. Therefore, as this study's findings reveal that Generation Z's faith is formed within platform-mediated hybrid spaces and is increasingly influenced by AI, it implies that PAK can no longer assume that faith formation occurs primarily in the classroom and church, separate from the digital world.

The first finding, that AI is restructuring the pedagogical ecology of religious education indicates that technology is now altering the rhythm of learning, the distribution of authority, and how students access religious answers. Papakostas (2025) notes that AI in religious education offers benefits such as personalization, assessment support, and administrative efficiency, yet simultaneously carries risks of theological distortion, over-reliance, and epistemic conformity. When these findings are considered alongside those of Gulo and Tapilaha (2024), it becomes clear that PAK cannot simply incorporate AI into instruction; rather, it must redefine its pedagogical objectives. PAK teachers can no longer merely act as conveyors of doctrinal content; they must instead serve as hermeneutical guides who help students distinguish between easily accessible religious information and the wisdom of faith that grows through relationships, tradition, and mentoring.

Within this framework, the findings of this study enrich previous research by demonstrating that the issue of AI in PAK is not merely a matter of integration techniques but also concerns the repositioning of educational authority. The literature on digital religion highlights that religious authority in digital spaces tends to shift and become fragmented, as religious knowledge now circulates through networks, platforms, and new forms of mediation. When AI acts as an answer generator and information curator, learners may view it as an instant authority that appears neutral, even though it actually contains biases, data limitations, and specific predictive logic. Therefore, the conceptual contribution of these findings is the assertion that religious education in the AI era must be designed as a space that restores and reconfigures the authority of faith: the Bible, the church community, teachers, and theological traditions remain the primary framework, while AI is positioned as a tool that must be tested, not as a source of ultimate truth.

The second finding, that Generation Z's faith is formed within a hybrid, algorithm-mediated digital space makes it clear that the reality of young people's faith is now multisite. Meisyani et al. (2026) highlight the existence of a digital faith ecosystem and hybrid faith communities, while Boiliu et al. (2025) emphasize that the digital environment shapes spiritual identity, moral reasoning, and community engagement. When these two findings are considered together, Generation Z's digital faith cannot be reduced to merely a matter of personal spiritual discipline. It is the result of complex interactions between physical communities, media habits, spiritual content, digital affect, and platform recommendations. This means that the formation of faith no longer occurs through a linear teacher-to-student process but within a far more fluid and layered network of influence.

Here, the results of this study align with the theory of critical AI literacy. Veldhuis et al. (2025) demonstrate that adequate AI literacy must go beyond technological skills and move toward the critical ability to understand how AI works, its biases, and its social implications. When this lens is applied to PAK, the formation of Generation Z's digital beliefs must include the ability to test AI responses, distinguish credible theological sources, recognize moral

oversimplifications, and question viral yet superficial religious narratives. Thus, the findings of this study expand upon Gulo and Tapilaha's (2024) formulation regarding the integration of spirituality and critical reasoning: in the AI era, critical reasoning in PAK needs to be developed into spiritual-digital discernment that is, the ability to weigh, theologically, ethically, and epistemologically, every technological mediation that influences faith.

The third finding points to new missiological opportunities for Christian Education. This implies that digital transformation should not be understood solely in a defensive context, as if the task of Christian education were merely to mitigate the negative impacts of technology. Priyono (2025) highlights that the mission of the digital church requires digital visionary leadership and spiritual-digital literacy, while Triposa and Lumingas (2025) emphasize three strategic dimensions: AI-based pedagogical adaptation, the digitization of the theology curriculum, and intergenerational virtual learning communities. Viewed through the lens of contextual-digital missiology, these two studies suggest that PAK may be one of the most strategic mission practices today, precisely because PAK operates at the levels of formation, habituation, and interpretation of meaning. PAK not only teaches faith to Generation Z but also shapes how they embody their identity as disciples of Christ in the digital spaces that constitute their living environment.

From this perspective, the missiological opportunities of PAK can be understood in at least three directions. First, PAK can serve as a digital formation space a process that helps Generation Z connect their digital habits with spiritual discipline, communication ethics, and the responsibility of witness. Second, PAK can serve as a space for theological curation, because amidst a flood of content and instant answers, students need a guide to help them distinguish between quality sources and manipulative ones. Third, PAK can function as an interpretive community space, where faith is not merely consumed alone through a screen but lived out and questioned together.

However, the findings of this study also emphasize that these opportunities can only be realized in a healthy way if PAK resists the temptation to make AI the new center of faith formation. Maranatha and Tandana (2025) stress that digital faith formation must remain relational, participatory, and rooted in the incarnational model. This finding is particularly significant as it touches on the normative boundaries of this article: Christian faith formation cannot be reduced to an accumulation of algorithmic answers, content, or recommendations. Faith grows through encounter, example, communal correction, Scripture reading, and the work of the Holy Spirit in real relationships. Therefore, while this research reaffirms the ethical-theological boundaries of AI use, it does not imply a ban on AI; rather, it rejects the replacement of human relational and pastoral functions by machines.

At this point, the findings of this study also enrich the discourse on the theology of education. Boiliu et al. (2025) propose an integration of theology, ethics, digital literacy, and spirituality; this study goes a step further by situating that integration within a missiological framework. This means that the use of AI in PAK is not adequately evaluated based on learning effectiveness or media sophistication, but must be tested against deeper theological questions: does it help students become more mature, more critical, more ethical, more relational, and better prepared to bear witness? With this framework, this article offers a conceptual contribution in the form of a shift from a technology-based PAK model to a missionary-digital PAK model.

Practically, this discussion implies several implications. PAK teachers need to be trained not only to be technologically literate but also to be capable of serving as theological curators, dialogue facilitators, and guides for digital affirmation. The church needs to view digital faith education not as a side project of youth ministry, but as part of a core discipleship strategy. Christian curriculum developers also need to integrate critical AI literacy, digital ethics, and hybrid faith community practices into learning design.

Thus, the main implication of all these research findings is that AI does not replace PAK, but rather compels PAK to redefine its identity and mission. If PAK is still understood merely as the transfer of doctrinal content, then AI will easily take over some of its functions. However, if PAK is understood as a space for critical, relational, ethical, and missionary digital faith formation, then the AI era actually opens up opportunities to demonstrate the unique contribution of Christian education that cannot be reduced to an automated system.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can no longer be understood merely as a process of transferring religious knowledge, but rather as a practice of digital faith formation that takes place within an ecosystem of media, platforms, and AI systems. A literature synthesis indicates that AI is transforming PAK pedagogy, while the faith of Generation Z is formed within a hybrid digital space through the interplay of online and offline experiences, community, and algorithmic interactions. Therefore, PAK presents new missiological opportunities as a space for digital discipleship, but these opportunities must be pursued within an ethical-theological framework that upholds relationality, community, the authority of faith, and spiritual maturity.

The key insight of this study affirms that AI does not replace the roles of teachers, the church, community, and mentoring, but rather highlights the importance of their presence in shaping the faith of Generation Z. Amid an abundance of instant answers, algorithmic recommendations, and digital religious content, PAK must function as a space that is critical, reflective, relational, and missional. Practically, this requires curriculum developers to integrate critical AI literacy, Christian digital ethics, and contextual faith guidance; while PAK teachers, churches, and youth ministries need to serve as facilitators of digital mentoring, curators of theology, and companions in spiritual growth within hybrid spaces.

Conceptually, this study emphasizes that the formation of digital faith must not be reduced to mere access to technology or learning efficiency, as Christian faith continues to grow through encounters, examples, dialogue, community, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The uniqueness of this article lies in its integrative synthesis of AI, PAK, Generation Z's digital faith, and mystology topics that are typically discussed separately. However, since this study is based on a literature review, its conclusions still need to be strengthened through empirical research in schools, churches, or Christian youth communities. Further research could focus on case studies, digital ethnography, phenomenology, as well as comparisons across denominations, regions, or digital PAK curriculum models.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu and Martha Maria Wospakrik; Methodology and Software: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu; Validation: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu, Martha Maria Wospakrik, and Diana Binkor Jenbise; Formal analysis: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu; Investigation: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu and Diana Binkor Jenbise; Resources: Martha Maria Wospakrik; Data management: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu and Diana Binkor Jenbise; Writing, drafting: Benjamin Dadi Ratu Mofu; Writing, review, and editing: Martha Maria Wospakrik and Diana Binkor Jenbise. All authors have read and approved the published version of this manuscript.

Funding: This study did not receive funding from external sources.

Data Availability Statement: This study is a literature review and does not generate new primary data. The data supporting the findings of this study are drawn from published articles, books, and academic sources, as listed in the references. These sources are publicly accessible through their respective publishers, journals, or online platforms, as cited in this manuscript.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank all those who provided academic, administrative, and technical support during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors also state that generative Artificial Intelligence tools were used to a limited extent to assist with language refinement, the drafting of the manuscript's initial structure, and to improve writing efficiency. All substantive reviews, source verification, scientific interpretation, and final responsibility for the manuscript's content rest entirely with the authors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. This study received no external funding. Therefore, no funding source played a role in the study design; data collection, analysis, or interpretation; manuscript preparation; or the decision to publish the results.

References

- Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khedhir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 6, 100198. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198>
- Boiliu, E. R., Jura, D., & de Carvalho, A. O. (2025). Reinterpreting religion in the digital age: Theology, ethics, and Christian education. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 6(2), 219–242. <https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v6i2.1075>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/thematic-analysis/book248481>
- Brignardello-Petersen, R., Santesso, N., & Guyatt, G. H. (2025). Systematic reviews of the literature: An introduction to current methods. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 194(2), 536–542. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwae232>
- Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (2021). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in digital media* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683>
- Choong, W. W. T. (2023). *Digital Christianity: how digitalization affects the Christian beliefs and practices of young people*. <https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/167964>
- Corpuz, J. C. G. (2025). Faith and artificial intelligence (AI) in Catholic education: A theological virtue ethics perspective. *Religions*, 16(8), 1083. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16081083>
- Golan, O. (2023). Introduction: Digital youth and religion. *Religions*, 14(6), 704. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060704>
- Gulo, R. P., & Tapilaha, S. R. (2024). Reforming Christian religious education: Integrating spirituality and critical reasoning in the digital era. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 5(2), 105–123. <https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v5i2.837>
- Ismail, F. M. M., Tan, E., Rudolph, J., Crawford, J., & Tan, S. (2023). Artificial intelligence in higher education. A protocol paper for a systematic literature review. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2023.6.2.34>
- Langi, E. A., Nyaming, F. G., Palempung, F. F., Pantow, A. G. F., Nendissa, J. E., & Kowal, J. R. (2025). Cultural transformation through contextual mission approach in the digital age. *Studia Philosophica et Theologica*, 25(1), 18–34. <https://doi.org/10.35312/studia.v25i1.711>
- Liu, Z., Ghouri, A. M., Wang, J., & Lin, C. (2025). Digital religion and Generation Z: An empirical study in the context of China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1536644. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1536644>
- Maranatha, C. A., & Tandana, E. A. (2025). Digital faith formation and Christian Religious Education teachers' leadership in 21st-century learning. *MODERATE: Journal of Religious, Education, and Social*, 3(1), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.46362/moderate.v3i1.25>
- Meisyani, L., Simon, L. O. C. C., Nainupu, A. M. Y., & Sean, I. (2026). Adolescents and Christian identity: Navigating faith in the digital era. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 7(1), 25–50. <https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v7i1.1124>
- Papakostas, C. (2025). Artificial intelligence in religious education: Ethical, pedagogical, and theological perspectives. *Religions*, 16(5), 563. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563>
- Polok, G., & Szromek, A. R. (2024). Religious and moral attitudes of Catholics from Generation Z. *Religions*, 15(1), 25. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010025>
- Priyono, B. (2025). Pengaruh kepemimpinan visioner digital dan literasi digital rohani terhadap implementasi misi gereja digital: Sebuah studi literatur dan kajian Alkitabiah. *Regula Fidei: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 10(2), 231–242. <https://doi.org/10.33541/rfidei.v10i2.317>
- Suwin. (2024). Membangun strategi misi kontekstual bagi Generasi Z: Memanfaatkan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi. *Proceeding National Conference of Christian Education and Theology*, 2(2), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.46445/nccet.v2i2.969>
- Tripasa, R., & Lumingas, G. G. (2025). Manajemen Pendidikan Agama Kristen di era algoritma: Integrasi kecerdasan buatan, budaya lokal, dan spiritualitas dalam konteks Indonesia. *Regula Fidei: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 10(2), 205–217. <https://doi.org/10.33541/rfidei.v10i2.314>
- Veldhuis, A., Lo, P. Y., Kenny, S., & Antle, A. N. (2025). Critical artificial intelligence literacy: A scoping review and framework synthesis. *International Journal of Child-Computer Interaction*, 43, 100708. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcci.2024.100708>