



## The Role of Social Media in Christian Religious Education: Reaching the Digital Generation and Building a Faith Community

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### ABSTRACT

*The rapid advancement of digital technology has revolutionized various aspects of life, including Christian Religious Education (CRE). The digital generation, which thrives in an environment of instant and interactive information, demands new approaches in conveying faith values. This study aims to analyze the role of social media in reaching the digital generation and building faith-based communities using a qualitative-descriptive method and practical theology framework. Data were collected through literature studies and observations of social media usage by churches and Christian institutions. The findings reveal that platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook serve as effective tools for teaching faith, nurturing digital communities, and expanding evangelism. Social media functions not merely as a one-way communication channel but as an interactive and relational space for spiritual formation. Nonetheless, challenges such as shallow content, fragmented spirituality, and weak digital ethics require serious attention. Professional content management, digital spiritual literacy, and integration between online and offline ministry are key to successfully implementing social media in CRE. In conclusion, social media represents a strategic medium that, when used wisely and responsibly, can effectively engage the digital generation, strengthen faith communities, and fulfill the Great Commission in today's digital era.*

**Keywords:** social media, Christian Religious Education, digital generation, faith community

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the development of digital technology has drastically transformed the face of the world. This transformation is not only evident in the economic, communication, and entertainment sectors but has also significantly influenced education, including Christian Religious Education (CRE). The digital generation—those born and raised amidst the advancement of information technology—possess unique characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations. They are accustomed to speed, interactivity, and instant access to information. Consequently, traditional approaches to conveying the teachings of faith, which rely solely on face-to-face interactions in classrooms or conventional church activities, are losing their appeal and effectiveness.

In this context, social media emerges as a highly potential means of bridging the gap between traditional teaching methods and the communication and learning needs of the digital generation. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are no longer merely entertainment media; they have become an integral part of young people's daily lives. They use social media to express themselves, build relationships, seek information, and shape their identity. Thus, social media offers tremendous opportunities for churches and Christian educational institutions to be present in their digital lives. The primary aim of Christian Religious Education is to shape individuals who know, love, and live out Christian values. This process is not merely the transfer of theological knowledge but also the formation of character, relationships, and spirituality. Here, social media plays a dual role: as a tool for delivering information and as a space for formation. Through social media, Christian teachings can be presented in engaging, creative, and contextual ways—ranging from short videos highlighting biblical principles, daily devotional graphics, theological podcasts, to live-streamed worship services and online Bible classes. Such content reaches audiences directly and personally, anytime and anywhere.

Beyond this, social media opens opportunities for building faith communities in digital spaces. Through WhatsApp groups, Telegram forums, or Facebook community pages, Christians can share faith experiences, discuss God's Word, pray for one another, and grow together. These interactions create an ecosystem that nurtures spirituality and active engagement in religious life, even beyond the church walls. For the digital generation, which values flexibility and egalitarian relationships, such online communities are highly relevant and meet their needs. Social media also expands the scope of evangelism and mission. Whereas the preaching of the Word was once limited by geographical boundaries, today, through social media, the Gospel can reach various corners of the world in seconds. A CRE teacher, church worker, or even an ordinary congregation member can share faith values through inspiring posts. Each post becomes a form of digital testimony that can bring light to many, including those previously unreached by conventional ministry. Nevertheless, the use of social media in Christian Religious Education comes with challenges. One is the tendency of digital content to be shallow and instant. The digital generation often prefers short and engaging content, sometimes at the expense of spiritual depth. In this regard, churches and Christian educational institutions are called to be wise and creative in presenting content that remains deeply rooted in God's Word while being relevant and applicable to daily life.

Another challenge is maintaining ethics and integrity in the digital realm. Open platforms can be fertile ground for the spread of hate speech, misinformation, or unconstructive debates. Therefore, CRE practitioners need to equip themselves and the younger generation with spiritual digital literacy—the ability to use social media wisely, lovingly, and responsibly. Here lies the importance of a comprehensive and strategic approach to integrating social media into Christian Religious Education. Churches and educational institutions must form dedicated teams to manage spiritual content professionally, involving creative personnel, educators, and theologians. Training for teachers and ministry leaders in social media use should be part of their competency development. The synergy between technological expertise and faith understanding will produce strong, impactful, and relevant content and ministry. Social media is not an end in itself but a tool

to achieve a greater purpose—shaping individuals who live in Christ and bear witness to Him in the digital world. When used wisely, social media can become a space filled with light, where God’s Word is proclaimed, faith is built, and spiritual communities grow. In an increasingly digitally connected world, now is the time for Christian Religious Education to be present with new strategies that reach the hearts of today’s generation.

The advancement of information technology has ushered in a digital era that has transformed how people interact, learn, and perceive the world around them. In the context of Christian Religious Education, this change demands adjustments in paradigms and approaches to communicating the values of faith. Digital technology—particularly social media—has become an inseparable part of the lives of today’s young generation. These so-called “digital natives” live in a highly connected environment and rely heavily on digital media to seek information, communicate, and shape their identity. Therefore, the presence of Christian Religious Education in digital spaces, especially through social media, is an inevitable necessity. Christian Religious Education aims to form individuals who believe in Christ, live according to His Word, and serve as His witnesses in the world. This educational function is not only cognitive but also affective and spiritual. According to Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008), Christian education is the process of shaping disciples of Christ through authentic relationships, Bible-based teaching, and transformative learning. Within this framework, social media can be seen as a potential medium that supports all three dimensions. Social media offers interactive spaces that enable two-way communication, foster relationships between teachers and learners, and provide a variety of contextual and engaging teaching content.

Contemporary studies emphasize that Generations Z and Alpha learn differently from previous generations. Tapscott (2009) notes that the digital generation tends to learn visually, interactively, and collaboratively. They are accustomed to short, fast, and visually rich content. This challenges Christian educators to design teaching materials and delivery strategies that are not only informative but also engaging and easily digestible in digital formats. In this regard, using social media such as YouTube for sermons and teaching videos, Instagram for inspirational quotes and daily devotions, and TikTok for short biblical principles becomes highly relevant and effective. Christian Religious Education is inseparable from the mandate of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20. The call to disciple all nations demands strategies that are inclusive and adaptive to changing times. Evangelism and discipleship in the digital era require the active presence of the church and Christian educational institutions in digital spaces, including social media. As Rhema and Sweet (2011) argue, the church must understand technology as God’s gift that can be used to expand ministry and reach those previously unreached. Within this mission framework, social media becomes fertile ground for extending the influence of the Gospel—whether through evangelistic content, personal testimonies, or constructive faith discussions.

The role of social media in building faith communities is also a crucial focus in Christian Religious Education. Digital communities enable the formation of spiritual relationships without physical face-to-face interaction. George Barna (2006) notes that involvement in a faith community has a significant impact on the spiritual growth of individuals, especially

adolescents and young adults. In digital contexts, communities can be built through WhatsApp groups, Facebook discussion forums, or active spiritual Telegram channels. These online communities provide space for learners to pray for one another, share faith experiences, and study God's Word together. Thus, Christian Religious Education in the digital age is not only individual but also communal, creating networks of relationships that strengthen one another. However, the use of social media in CRE brings ethical and theological challenges that must be seriously addressed. One major challenge is the tendency for digital content to be superficial and instant. Christian values, which should be deeply reflected upon, risk being oversimplified to fit social media algorithms. This can lead to narrow and inaccurate theological understanding. Furthermore, the digital space is not free from hate speech, hoaxes, and content contrary to Christian values. As Campbell (2013) suggests, there is a need for spiritual digital literacy—the ability to use technology wisely, responsibly, and in alignment with faith values.

Another equally important challenge is professionalism in managing Christian social media. Many educational institutions or churches have used social media but have not optimized its management. Inconsistent content, unattractive visuals, and minimal interaction often hinder the effectiveness of digital ministry. Therefore, a professional approach is needed that combines theological competence with digital skills. Christian social media teams should be equipped with knowledge of digital communication, content production techniques, and strategies for audience engagement. This approach aligns with Miller and Soden's (2016) idea that digital ministry requires multidisciplinary teams that integrate technology and spirituality. Not only institutions but also CRE teachers are expected to utilize social media as part of the learning process. Christian teachers are not merely transmitters of material but also facilitators of healthy digital communities. In modern education, the teacher's role has shifted from sole authority to companion and mentor. As Palmer (1998) notes, effective teaching is rooted in the teacher's integrity and authenticity. In digital spaces, this authenticity and integrity must be consistently demonstrated through online interactions, shared content, and relationships built with learners. This paradigm shift also demands adjustments in the CRE curriculum. The curriculum should accommodate digital-based learning in terms of content, methods, and assessment. Some theological institutions have begun developing online learning modules that include video lectures, online quizzes, discussion forums, and virtual spiritual reflections. Such learning processes are not only flexible but also inclusive, reaching students from diverse backgrounds and locations, aligning with the universality of the Gospel that transcends time and space.

The role of social media in Christian Religious Education is not limited to internal church or school contexts but also affects public witness. Every piece of content shared by teachers, students, or Christian institutions becomes a form of digital testimony that can either build or damage Christ's reputation before the world. Therefore, Christian digital ethics must be instilled in all educational actors. Values such as love, honesty, courtesy, and faithfulness to truth should be foundational in social media interactions. This is not merely about communication strategies but about living as witnesses of Christ in the digital world.

Social media should not be seen as a threat to traditional values but as a new opportunity to expand ministry reach and faith formation. It is not a replacement for the church or CRE classrooms but an extension of spiritual ministry into the real lives of the digital generation. By understanding the digital cultural context and the spiritual needs of young people, Christian Religious Education can be present in ways that are relevant and impactful. This literature review demonstrates that integrating social media into Christian Religious Education is both a strategic and theological step that churches and educational institutions must take. Social media offers a flexible, participatory, and transformative learning space—provided it is implemented with integrity, professionalism, and spiritual depth. Amidst rapid change, Christian education is called to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word while being adaptive to the new tools provided by the times, so that today’s generation is not merely a consumer of technology but also a disciple of Christ who proclaims His love and truth through social media.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive method aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social media utilization within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly in reaching the digital generation and building a faith community. A qualitative approach is chosen as it aligns with the nature of the topic, which focuses on meaning, understanding, and reflection on real-life practices. Meanwhile, the descriptive method is used to systematically and factually illustrate how social media is utilized by churches, Christian schools, and digital communities as a tool for Christian faith education. To support this approach, a practical theology framework is applied—a discipline that connects theological reflection with real-life practice, in this case, digital ecclesial practices. Practical theology enables the researcher to evaluate the use of social media not only from technical and sociological aspects but also from the perspective of faith, spirituality, and the mission of the church.

Data collection in this study was conducted through library research, reviewing relevant written sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, previous research reports, and institutional documents from churches or Christian educational institutions related to digital strategies. In addition, indirect observation was carried out on various practices of social media use by Christian communities, such as monitoring the Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok accounts of churches or religious organizations, as well as online discussion groups on WhatsApp or Telegram used for spiritual teaching. This observation was exploratory in nature and aimed to identify patterns, frequency, types of content, and user responses to digital CRE activities taking place on social media. Data analysis was conducted by categorizing the findings based on key issues, such as strategies for delivering instructional content, participant engagement in digital communities, user-to-user interactions, and forms of spiritual transformation that emerged as a result. Furthermore, a reflective-narrative approach was employed, allowing room for theological interpretation of social media practices as a means of faith formation. In this regard, the researcher connected these digital practices with biblical principles, particularly in relation to discipleship, faith testimony, and the formation of Christian character. Key biblical texts such as Matthew 28:19–20 and 2 Timothy 2:2 served as

theological foundations for understanding how the Great Commission can be realized in today's digital context.

The main focus of this study is to assess the extent to which social media is effective as a spiritual educational tool in shaping faith understanding, strengthening relationships within the Christian community, and fostering spirituality in a digital culture. Through this approach, the research findings are expected to offer both conceptual and practical contributions for churches, Christian educators, and religious institutions in designing holistic, relevant, and biblically faithful digital strategies. This study does not seek to provide quantitative generalizations but rather to present a contextual and in-depth understanding of the dynamics of social media use in the sphere of contemporary Christian faith education.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings from observations of social media use in the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), it was found that social media has become a highly effective medium for delivering faith-based teachings to the digital generation. Churches and Christian educational institutions have adopted various digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook to disseminate instructional materials, conduct evangelism, and foster faith communities. Various forms of content—including sermon videos, visual devotionals, podcasts, and biblical infographics—are creatively utilized to reach a broad audience, especially young people. These contents are not merely informative but also transformational, as they are packaged in a contextual manner relevant to the daily lives of the digital generation. For example, short TikTok videos containing excerpts from Scripture paired with visual illustrations can capture attention within seconds, while YouTube serves as a platform for in-depth theological teaching through vlogs or video series. The interactivity offered by social media enables learners to ask questions, give feedback, and engage in direct discussions with instructors and fellow participants. These findings indicate that social media has shifted from being merely a communication tool to becoming a dynamic spiritual space. CRE is no longer confined to the classroom or church setting but is now embedded in the daily digital life of believers, reaching users at flexible times and places. The presence of CRE in digital content formats also increases the frequency and consistency of exposure to Christian values.

### ***Formation of Faith Communities in Digital Spaces***

Social media has facilitated the emergence of digital faith communities that strengthen the affective and spiritual dimensions of Christian education. Observations from WhatsApp groups, Telegram communities, and Facebook discussion forums reveal that CRE participants are not merely recipients of information but also active contributors in building shared spiritual life. Activities such as Bible discussions, online prayer meetings, and sharing of personal faith struggles have become integral to these communities. Two-way interaction—enabled by features such as comments, live chat, and polls—enhances a sense of belonging and active participation. This stands in sharp contrast to traditional teaching models, which tend to be one-directional. In digital communities, every

individual is given the space to speak and be heard, fostering relationships characterized by equality and mutual encouragement. Many learners report feeling more comfortable expressing their questions or emotions in online communities than in face-to-face settings. The dynamics of such digital communities are crucial for nurturing faith that is not only individual but also communal. A supportive online fellowship enables participants to grow together in Scripture, offer mutual counsel, and strengthen one another amid personal faith challenges. This demonstrates that social media serves not only as a learning tool but also as a space for Christian character formation and collective spirituality.

### ***Digital Evangelism and Discipleship: Contemporary Expressions of the Great Commission***

One of the significant findings of this study is the emergence of new forms of evangelism and discipleship conducted through social media. Platforms such as YouTube and TikTok have been employed to share evangelistic messages, opening opportunities for individuals unfamiliar with Christ to encounter the Gospel. For instance, personal testimony videos uploaded to social media often carry strong emotional appeal and can reach viewers from diverse backgrounds. Discipleship practices are also increasingly conducted in digital formats—through online Bible classes, personal faith mentoring via instant messaging, and small group discipleship sessions held on Zoom or Google Meet. This digital transformation expands the scope of ministry, which was previously limited by geography and time. Participants from remote or overseas locations can actively engage in discipleship programs without the need for physical presence. These findings demonstrate that the Great Commission is not only relevant in the time of Jesus but also highly applicable in the digital era. Every Christian social media user can serve as a witness for Christ through the content they share, the edifying comments they post, or even by showing love through digital interactions. In this regard, Christian education through social media becomes a tangible and impactful missiological strategy.

### ***Challenges: Shallow Content and Fragmented Spirituality***

Nevertheless, the study also reveals substantial challenges in utilizing social media for CRE. One major challenge is the prevalence of shallow content. Much digital CRE content is created with a focus on virality rather than theological depth. As a result, spiritual messages are often presented superficially, disconnected from their biblical context, and at times even distorted to attract mass attention. The inherently brief and instant nature of certain social media formats (such as TikTok's 15-second videos) forces creators to oversimplify messages to the point of losing reflective and contemplative dimensions. This poses the risk of fostering a generation of Christians who consume the Word of God quickly and superficially, without adequate depth. Moreover, social media algorithms that curate information based on user preferences make CRE participants vulnerable to informational bias and trapped within a "filter bubble." Another challenge is the fragmentation of spirituality. Spiritual life on social media often remains disconnected from real-life practice. Many participants are active in online communities yet do not engage in local, in-person fellowship. This creates a dissonance between digital faith and everyday living. Without the balance of physical community and direct mentorship, online-formed spirituality risks becoming individualistic and isolated.

Additionally, the study identifies the need for digital ethics education within CRE. Social media as an open space allows for the entry of hate speech, unhealthy debates, and the spread of misinformation. In Christian digital communities, these pose serious threats to faith witness and the credibility of the church. Therefore, it is essential to instill Christian digital ethics among teachers, learners, and all ministry workers. Digital ethics in the CRE context include courtesy in interaction, honesty in sharing information, responsibility in content dissemination, and love as the foundation of all relationships. This ethical formation cannot be achieved merely through technical regulations but must be cultivated as part of Christian spirituality. In this sense, **spiritual digital literacy**—the ability to evaluate, filter, and use social media responsibly in accordance with biblical values—becomes vital.

### ***Professionalism and Strategic Management of Spiritual Content***

Observation of churches and Christian educational institutions reveals that the success of digital CRE largely depends on professionalism in content management and digital strategy. Churches with well-organized digital content teams tend to be more effective in reaching and sustaining youth engagement. Such teams typically include theologians, graphic designers, video editors, and online community managers. Theologically sound and aesthetically compelling content increases audience trust and strengthens CRE's position in digital spaces. Key factors that support effective message delivery include content scheduling, thematic consistency, understanding of social media algorithms, and storytelling skills. Churches and institutions lacking professional resources need to build internal capacity through training for teachers, ministry workers, and young volunteers with digital skills. Moreover, integrating digital ministry with in-person ministry is crucial to ensure continuity in spiritual growth. Online activities such as virtual classes and faith discussions should be complemented with face-to-face gatherings, pastoral visits, and other church ministries, so that the spirituality formed is not only strong in the digital realm but also impactful in real life.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the overall discussion in this study, it can be concluded that social media has become a highly potential and strategic tool in supporting Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the digital era. The advancement of information technology has created a new educational landscape that is no longer bound by spatial and temporal limitations. In this context, social media provides an inclusive, flexible, and participatory space for the process of Christian faith learning, particularly in reaching the digital generation. The digital generation is characterized by its dependence on technology, preference for visual and interactive content, and a fast-paced, collaborative learning style. These characteristics demand new approaches in communicating the message of faith. Churches and Christian educational institutions that have adapted their communication strategies by utilizing social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have proven to be more effective in attracting the attention and participation of young people. Content such as short devotional videos, spiritual podcasts, online Bible classes, and theological infographics has become an integral part of contemporary CRE methods.

More than merely a communication tool, social media also serves as a space for spiritual formation. Digital communities formed through WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, and Facebook forums have become vital arenas for building mutually edifying faith relationships. Active engagement in these online communities fosters spiritual support networks, strengthens the sense of belonging, and reinforces the Christian identity of the younger generation. These spaces also enable faith learning to become more dynamic, dialogical, and contextual. In addition to its role as an educational and community-building tool, social media plays a crucial role in evangelism and discipleship. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 finds renewed relevance in the digital context, where the Gospel can reach diverse backgrounds and geographical locations with just one click. The use of social media to share inspirational content, testimonies of faith, and foundational Christian teachings has opened doors for many to encounter Christ, including those previously untouched by conventional ministry.

However, the use of social media in CRE is not without significant challenges. One of the primary issues is content superficiality, where the tendency to simplify messages for the sake of attracting attention may diminish the depth of spiritual values. The fragmentation of spirituality—namely, the separation between digital faith life and real-life practice—also emerges as a challenge that must be addressed through synergy between online and face-to-face ministry. Furthermore, the presence of hate speech, misinformation, and weak digital ethics poses serious threats that require wise and proactive responses. The integration of social media into Christian Religious Education must be carried out with strategic planning, professional execution, and a firm grounding in Christian values. This necessitates content management teams who are not only skilled in digital technology but also possess theological depth and spiritual integrity. Churches and Christian educational institutions must equip ministers, teachers, and young people with spiritual digital literacy so that they can engage with social media wisely, responsibly, and in alignment with God’s Word. Social media is not an end in itself but a means through which ministry can be expanded and resilient disciples of Christ can be formed—disciples who are steadfast in faith and relevant in today’s digital culture. When used appropriately, social media can become a space filled with light, where God’s Word is proclaimed, faith communities are strengthened, and Christian character is nurtured. In an increasingly digital world, this is the moment for churches and Christian educational institutions to be present meaningfully and strategically, reaching every individual with the love of Christ through the very media they use daily.

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