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Digital Religious Engagement and Spiritual Identity Formation among Generation z in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to investigate the digital religious engagement and spiritual identity formation among generation z in Kenya.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings suggested that digital religious engagement enhances religious accessibility, spiritual learning, and opportunities for religious belonging among Generation Z through online worship, social media, and digital religious discussions. However, excessive reliance on digital religious platforms may limit deeper spiritual commitment, consistent religious practices, and meaningful interpersonal connections. Overall, digital religious engagement has the potential to strengthen spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya, although its effectiveness depends on meaningful participation and integration with offline religious experiences.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social identity theory, uses and gratifications theory, social cognitive theory may be used to anchor future studies on the digital religious engagement and spiritual identity formation among generation z in Kenya. The study is expected to provide practical insights for religious institutions, spiritual leaders, educators, parents, and digital religious content creators seeking to strengthen spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya. The study is expected to inform the development of policies and institutional guidelines that promote responsible digital religious engagement, youth spiritual development, and inclusive participation in online religious environments.

Keywords: *Digital Religious Engagement, Spiritual Identity Formation, Generation Z*

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual identity formation encompasses four interconnected dimensions: religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs. Religious belonging refers to an individual's sense of acceptance and attachment to a religious community, while spiritual commitment concerns the importance attached to religious beliefs, worship, and spiritual practices. Religious self-identification describes how individuals define themselves in relation to a religious tradition, whereas consistency of religious beliefs reflects the stability and coherence of religious convictions over time. In the United States, spiritual identity formation is increasingly shaped by changing patterns of religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs, particularly among younger generations (Mercadante, 2020). Religious belonging refers to individuals' attachment to religious communities, while spiritual commitment reflects the extent to which individuals integrate religious beliefs and practices into their daily lives (Mercadante, 2020). According to Pew Research Center (2019), the proportion of American adults identifying as Christian declined from 77% in 2009 to 65% in 2018–2019, whereas the religiously unaffiliated population increased from 17% to 26% during the same period. Mercadante (2020) observed that individuals identifying as spiritual but not religious increasingly construct personal spiritual identities outside established religious institutions, suggesting that religious self-identification does not necessarily correspond with institutional membership or traditional spiritual commitment. These developments indicate that spiritual identity formation in the United States is becoming more individualized, with religious belonging, spiritual commitment, and consistency of religious beliefs increasingly influenced by personal experiences rather than institutional religious expectations (Mercadante, 2020).

In Japan, spiritual identity formation reflects the interaction between traditional religious practices, cultural belonging, spiritual commitment, and changing patterns of religious self-identification (Cavaliere, 2019). Religious belonging is frequently expressed through participation in Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies, while spiritual commitment may involve ancestral reverence, ritual observance, and personal spiritual experiences without formal identification with religious institutions (Nakayama, 2019). Survey evidence discussed by Nakayama (2019) indicated that 39% of Japanese respondents acknowledged believing in a religion, while 49% reported having no religious belief, although approximately 47% expressed belief in ancestral spiritual powers and 44% believed in an afterlife. Cavaliere (2019) established that religious and spiritual practices remain embedded in everyday Japanese cultural experiences, demonstrating that individuals may maintain spiritual commitments despite identifying themselves as nonreligious. Consequently, spiritual identity formation in Japan demonstrates that religious belonging and consistency of religious beliefs may be expressed through cultural continuity and traditional practices rather than formal religious identification alone (Cavaliere, 2019; Nakayama, 2019).

In Brazil, spiritual identity formation is influenced by religious diversification, changing patterns of religious belonging, and the continued importance of spiritual commitment in individual and community life (Borges, 2021). Religious belonging is demonstrated through identification with Catholic, Evangelical, Spiritist, and other religious traditions, while spiritual commitment is reflected in religious participation, personal decision-making, and adherence to religious values (Sá Martino, 2020). A nationwide survey involving 1,133 respondents established that 43.9%

identified as Catholic, 18.7% as Evangelical, 12.8% as spiritualist, and 11.9% as nonreligious, demonstrating considerable diversity in religious self-identification (Borges ., 2021). Furthermore, 66.5% of respondents reported that religious affiliation had a moderate or high influence on their decisions, while 62.7% acknowledged its influence on marriage decisions, suggesting that spiritual commitment continues to shape important aspects of social behaviour (Borges ., 2021). These findings demonstrate that spiritual identity formation in Brazil involves both religious diversification and continued adherence to spiritual values, although the consistency of religious beliefs over time requires further longitudinal investigation (Borges ., 2021; Sá Martino, 2020).

In Mexico, spiritual identity formation remains strongly associated with Catholic religious traditions, although modernization, religious pluralism, and changing cultural practices have influenced religious belonging and self-identification (Goodwin ., 2020). Religious belonging is commonly expressed through Catholic affiliation and participation in community religious activities, while spiritual commitment involves prayer, religious celebrations, and adherence to inherited religious values. Comparative survey estimates indicate that Catholic religious identification declined from approximately 78% in 1995 to 74.1% in 2020, suggesting gradual diversification of religious identities rather than the complete abandonment of established religious traditions. Goodwin . (2020) emphasized that cultural values are shaped by social and institutional contexts, providing a useful framework for understanding how religious self-identification and spiritual commitment may evolve within societies experiencing cultural transformation. Consequently, spiritual identity formation in Mexico illustrates the interaction between inherited religious belonging, personal spiritual commitment, and changing religious identification, although affiliation statistics alone cannot establish the consistency of religious beliefs (Goodwin., 2020).

In Kenya, spiritual identity formation is strongly influenced by religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs, with Christianity and Islam playing significant roles in shaping individual and community identities (McKinnon, 2020). Religious belonging is demonstrated through church and mosque membership, participation in religious activities, and attachment to faith-based communities, while spiritual commitment is reflected in prayer, worship attendance, and adherence to religious teachings. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019), approximately 85.5% of Kenya's population identified as Christian, 10.9% as Muslim, and 1.6% as having no religion, demonstrating the widespread prevalence of religious affiliation in the country. McKinnon (2020) examined religious identification across five sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya, and highlighted the importance of distinguishing religious affiliation from institutional membership when interpreting patterns of religious belonging. Consequently, spiritual identity formation in Kenya remains closely connected to religious institutions and community traditions, although the consistency of religious beliefs and intensity of spiritual commitment require additional individual-level investigation beyond religious affiliation statistics (McKinnon, 2020).

In Nigeria, spiritual identity formation is significantly influenced by Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religious traditions, which shape religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and the continuity of religious beliefs across generations (McKinnon, 2021). Religious belonging is expressed through participation in churches, mosques, and traditional religious communities, while spiritual commitment is reflected in worship, prayer, religious

education, and adherence to faith-based moral principles. McKinnon (2021), using 11 nationally representative surveys conducted between 1990 and 2018, established that Christian identification reached approximately 69% among adults in the mid-1990s before declining proportionately, while Muslim identification increased from approximately 25% toward 50% over the period examined. The study further revealed that most surveys recorded no more than 4% of respondents identifying with traditional religions or having no religion, indicating the continued prominence of Christianity and Islam in religious self-identification (McKinnon, 2021). These findings suggest that spiritual identity formation in Nigeria is characterized by strong religious affiliation and the intergenerational transmission of religious traditions, although changing demographic patterns do not necessarily demonstrate changes in individual spiritual commitment or consistency of religious beliefs (McKinnon, 2021).

Digital religious engagement is conceptualized as the extent to which individuals utilize digital technologies and online platforms to participate in religious activities, access spiritual information, interact with religious communities, and develop their spiritual identities (Campbell & Connelly, 2020). Online worship participation, involving livestreamed religious services, virtual prayer meetings, and online religious ceremonies, is likely to strengthen religious belonging by facilitating continuous interaction with faith communities regardless of geographical location (Hutchings, 2011). Religious social media exposure, characterized by the frequency of encountering religious teachings, inspirational messages, scriptural interpretations, and faith-related content on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, may enhance spiritual commitment by reinforcing religious knowledge, personal devotion, and engagement with spiritual practices (Peterson, 2020). Digital religious discussions, encompassing participation in online theological debates, religious discussion forums, and faith-based WhatsApp groups, may influence religious self-identification by enabling individuals to articulate, question, and negotiate their religious identities through interactions with other believers (Hutchings, 2011). Collectively, these dimensions suggest that digital religious engagement provides opportunities for individuals to develop stronger connections with religious communities, deepen their spiritual commitments, and construct religious identities within increasingly interconnected digital environments (Campbell & Connelly, 2020; Peterson, 2020).

Engagement with religious influencers, conceptualized as the frequency and intensity of interactions with religious leaders, faith-based content creators, and digital spiritual mentors through following, commenting, sharing, and participating in online religious teachings, may influence the consistency of religious beliefs by reinforcing established religious values and providing guidance on religious practices (Marei, 2024). Religious influencers can shape how followers interpret religious doctrines and express their spiritual identities, although exposure to conflicting teachings may also encourage individuals to reconsider previously held beliefs (Marei, 2024). Conceptually, online worship participation is primarily associated with religious belonging, religious social media exposure with spiritual commitment, digital religious discussions with religious self-identification, and engagement with religious influencers with consistency of religious beliefs, although these relationships may overlap and require empirical verification (Hutchings, 2011; Peterson, 2020). Campbell and Connelly (2020) emphasized that digital religious practices increasingly connect online and offline religious experiences, suggesting that spiritual identity formation may depend on the quality, frequency, and perceived authenticity of digital religious interactions. Therefore, digital religious engagement can be hypothesized to

influence spiritual identity formation through its four dimensions, with the strength and direction of these relationships potentially varying according to individuals' religious backgrounds, digital literacy, and existing spiritual commitments (Campbell & Connelly, 2020; Marei, 2024).

Problem Statement

Digital technologies have increasingly transformed religious participation, communication, and identity development, particularly among Generation Z, whose everyday experiences are closely connected to social media, smartphones, and online communities. Traditionally, spiritual identity formation was largely influenced by physical worship attendance, family religious socialization, religious education, and interactions with established religious leaders; however, digital platforms now provide additional spaces for religious learning, worship, discussion, and self-expression. In Kenya, this transformation raises important questions about how young people develop and maintain spiritual identities while interacting with diverse religious teachings, beliefs, and communities through digital media. Digital religious engagement may create opportunities for spiritual learning, religious belonging, and commitment, but it may also expose young people to conflicting religious interpretations, fragmented religious authority, and superficial forms of participation. Consequently, understanding whether digital religious engagement strengthens or weakens spiritual identity formation among Generation Z has become an important issue for religious institutions, educators, families, and policymakers.

Although these figures represent subscriptions rather than unique individuals or Generation Z users, they demonstrate the expanding technological environment in which digital religious engagement takes place. Increased connectivity provides opportunities for young Kenyans to participate in livestreamed worship, follow religious influencers, access religious teachings, and interact with faith-based communities through social media platforms. However, the growing availability of digital religious content does not necessarily establish whether such engagement strengthens religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, or consistency of religious beliefs.

The central problem is that despite the increasing accessibility and use of digital platforms for religious participation in Kenya, the relationship between digital religious engagement and spiritual identity formation among Generation Z remains insufficiently established within the reviewed empirical literature. Specifically, limited integrated evidence has been identified concerning how online worship participation, religious social media exposure, digital religious discussions, and engagement with religious influencers collectively relate to religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs. While existing studies have examined online worship, digital religious communication, and youth spiritual growth, their findings are often restricted to particular religious denominations, geographical settings, or individual forms of digital participation (Ganiel, 2021; Kiruja et al., 2025). Furthermore, the extent to which digital religious engagement encourages sustained spiritual commitment rather than temporary online participation remains inadequately understood. This knowledge gap makes it difficult for religious institutions, educators, and youth development practitioners to determine how digital platforms can be used effectively to support meaningful spiritual identity formation among young people in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch (1974) to explain how individuals actively select media platforms to satisfy information, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity needs. The theory emphasizes that media audiences are active participants whose engagement is motivated by specific psychological and social needs. Anwar and Mujib (2022) demonstrated its applicability to religious social media consumption, particularly spiritual enlightenment and religious information seeking. In this study, the theory explains how online worship participation and religious social media exposure may influence spiritual commitment among Generation Z in Kenya.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) to explain how individuals develop their identities, values, and sense of belonging through membership in social groups. The theory maintains that group identification influences self-perception, attitudes, and behaviour. Lüders. (2022) established that digital platforms facilitate collective identity formation by enabling individuals to connect with like-minded communities and reinforce shared beliefs. This theory is relevant because it explains how digital religious discussions and participation in online faith communities may influence religious belonging and religious self-identification among Generation Z in Kenya.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1986) and emphasizes observational learning, modelling, self-efficacy, and reciprocal interactions between individuals, their behaviour, and their environments. The theory explains how individuals acquire attitudes, values, and behaviours by observing influential role models. Campbell and Evolvi (2020) examined how digital environments reshape religious practices and authority, providing contextual support for applying social learning concepts to digital religion. This theory explains how engagement with religious influencers may shape spiritual commitment and consistency of religious beliefs among Generation Z in Kenya.

Empirical Review

Kimmons (2017) investigated religious self-identification, religious expression, and civility among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints using Twitter. The researchers employed a quantitative digital data-mining approach involving approximately 201,107 Twitter accounts and 1,542,229 tweets to examine patterns of religious identification and communication within online environments. The study demonstrated that social media provides an important platform for investigating how individuals publicly express religious identities and negotiate religious communication within digital communities. The findings highlighted the significance of online religious expression in understanding the relationship between digital communication and religious self-presentation. The study supports the need for religious organizations to understand digital expressions of faith and suggests that researchers should examine how online interactions relate to religious identity beyond formal institutional membership. However, the research concentrated on Twitter-based religious expression rather than the broader relationship between digital religious engagement and spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya.

Starr (2019) investigated the role of online religious communities in Christian deconversion and the development of secular identities in the United States. The researchers adopted a qualitative case-study approach by examining religious exit narratives posted between 2005 and 2017 in an online forum for former Christians. The findings revealed that religious deconversion involved interconnected intellectual, emotional, and social processes through which participants questioned established beliefs, reconsidered religious affiliations, and developed alternative identities. The online community provided opportunities for individuals to discuss religious doubts, receive emotional support, and prepare for interactions with religious family members and communities outside digital environments. These findings suggest that religious organizations should recognize the influence of digital discussions on belief formation and provide supportive environments where young people can critically engage with religious questions. Nevertheless, the study primarily examined religious disengagement among former Christians rather than how online worship, religious influencers, and social media exposure collectively shape spiritual identity formation among Kenyan Generation Z.

Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) investigated internet-based Islamic learning practices in Indonesia, focusing on the relationship between social media, religious populism, and religious authority. The study examined how digital communication technologies facilitate religious knowledge acquisition and influence the authority of traditional religious teachers and institutions. Through an empirical examination of online Islamic learning practices, the researchers established that digital platforms provide alternative avenues for accessing religious teachings and interacting with religious information beyond conventional educational institutions. The findings indicated that internet-based religious learning contributes to changing patterns of religious authority, allowing digital religious actors to participate in the interpretation and dissemination of religious knowledge. The findings support the recommendation that religious educators should strengthen digital religious literacy and guide young believers in critically evaluating online religious teachings. However, the study focused on Islamic religious learning in Indonesia and did not directly establish how exposure to digital religious content influences religious belonging, spiritual commitment, and consistency of religious beliefs among Generation Z in Kenya.

Ferguson (2021) examined how Jewish and Muslim communities perceive social media and its influence on religious belonging, community relationships, and religious morality. The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach involving 52 in-depth interviews with 29 Jewish and 23 Muslim participants drawn from religious communities in Houston and Chicago. The findings revealed that social media strengthened access to religious information and facilitated connections within religious communities, although participants also expressed concerns about weakened interpersonal relationships, distractions, and exposure to content conflicting with religious values. The study further established that digital platforms expanded opportunities for religious interaction beyond physical congregations while creating challenges for maintaining meaningful religious relationships and moral commitments. The findings suggest that religious institutions should adopt digital communication strategies that complement face-to-face religious engagement while encouraging responsible online behaviour and religious learning. Nevertheless, the research concentrated on religious minority communities in the United States, leaving unanswered questions about how digital religious engagement influences spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya.

Ganiel (2021) examined how Christian religious leaders adopted online ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic and whether digital worship could create opportunities for religious participation and revitalization. The study employed a mixed-methods approach involving an island-wide survey of 439 religious leaders and 32 follow-up in-depth interviews to investigate experiences with online worship services, religious communication, and community participation. The findings revealed that the proportion of participating faith communities providing online worship increased from 56% before the pandemic to 87% during the pandemic, demonstrating the rapid adoption of digital religious practices. The study further established that religious leaders viewed online worship as an opportunity to reach wider audiences, sustain religious connections, and encourage participation among individuals who might not regularly attend physical religious services. Ganiel (2021) suggested that religious institutions should invest in online ministries, encourage lay participation, and integrate digital religious services with conventional worship practices to strengthen religious engagement. However, the study concentrated on religious leaders' experiences rather than directly measuring how online worship participation influences religious belonging, spiritual commitment, and religious self-identification among Generation Z in Kenya.

Mónika (2021) investigated trends in online religious practices in Hungary during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on digital media adoption, religious communication, and generational differences in online religious participation. The study examined how religious institutions transferred worship activities to digital environments and how online communication technologies transformed the presentation and experience of religious services. Using an analysis of digitally mediated religious practices and their presentation, the research explored the organization of online religious activities, visual communication, and differences in digital participation across generations. The findings demonstrated that religious institutions increasingly utilized digital platforms to maintain contact with believers, while livestreaming introduced new possibilities for religious interaction and participation through camera perspectives, audiovisual presentation, and digitally mediated experiences. The study highlighted the importance of adapting religious communication strategies to different generations and considering how digital technologies influence the quality of religious participation. Nevertheless, the research did not directly measure the relationship between digital religious engagement and the four dimensions of spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya (Mónika, 2021).

Piela and Krotofil (2021) investigated changes in religious participation, spiritual practices, and religious identity among Muslim women during and after Ramadan 2020, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach using 34 open-ended online surveys completed by Muslim women to examine their experiences with online religious communities, individual prayer, and digitally mediated religious interaction. The findings revealed four patterns of religious experience, including positive adaptation to socially distanced worship, dissatisfaction with disrupted religious practices, continuity of existing religious isolation, and appreciation of online religious connections. The study further established that some participants experienced greater independence in their religious practices while maintaining meaningful spiritual connections through online religious communities, demonstrating that digital engagement could reshape religious belonging and self-identification. The findings suggest that religious institutions should provide inclusive digital worship opportunities and recognize the diverse spiritual needs of individuals who experience barriers to

conventional religious participation. However, the research focused on Muslim women's experiences during the pandemic rather than examining the combined influence of online worship participation, religious social media exposure, digital discussions, and religious influencers on spiritual identity formation among Kenyan Generation Z

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gap

Previous empirical studies have examined different aspects of digital religious engagement, including religious expression on social media, online religious learning, digital worship participation, and religious identity construction, without comprehensively examining their combined relationship with spiritual identity formation. Kimmons. (2017) focused on religious self-identification and expression through Twitter, while Starr . (2019) investigated online religious discussions and Christian deconversion. Similarly, Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) examined internet-based Islamic learning and religious authority, whereas Ganiel (2021) concentrated on online worship participation and religious community engagement. Although these studies provide valuable insights into digital religious practices, they do not collectively establish how online worship participation, religious social media exposure, digital religious discussions, and engagement with religious influencers relate to religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs. The present study seeks to address this conceptual gap by examining digital religious engagement as a multidimensional independent variable and spiritual identity formation as a multidimensional dependent variable among Generation Z in Kenya.

Contextual Research Gap

Existing studies have largely examined digital religious engagement within specific religious traditions, institutional settings, or exceptional circumstances rather than the everyday digital religious experiences of Generation Z. Ferguson. (2021) investigated social media engagement among Jewish and Muslim communities, while Piela and Krotofil (2021) examined Muslim women's religious experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Ganiel (2021) explored online religious participation from the perspectives of religious leaders, whereas Mónika (2021) investigated digitally mediated religious practices and generational differences during the pandemic. These studies provide useful insights into religious adaptation to digital environments but offer limited evidence concerning how Generation Z independently engages with online religious content, participates in digital faith communities, and negotiates spiritual identities in ordinary social circumstances. Furthermore, their findings may not adequately reflect the

experiences of Kenyan Generation Z, whose religious identities develop within a context of diverse Christian denominations, Islam, indigenous cultural influences, and expanding digital communication. The present study seeks to address this contextual gap by focusing specifically on Generation Z and examining how their everyday digital religious experiences relate to spiritual identity formation within Kenya's contemporary sociocultural and religious environment.

Geographical Research Gap

The reviewed empirical literature demonstrates a geographical concentration of digital religion research in developed economies and selected Asian countries, with limited representation of Kenya and the wider sub-Saharan African region. Kimmons . (2017), Starr . (2019), and Ferguson .(2021) conducted their studies in the United States, while Ganiel (2021) examined online religious participation in Ireland and Mónika (2021) investigated digital religious practices in Hungary. Similarly, Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) conducted their research in Indonesia, whereas Piela and Krotofil (2021) examined Muslim women's religious experiences primarily in the United States and the United Kingdom. Although these studies contribute to understanding digital religious engagement across different geographical settings, their findings may not be directly generalizable to Kenya because of differences in religious composition, cultural traditions, digital access, and patterns of youth religious participation. In particular, none of the seven reviewed studies directly investigated the relationship between digital religious engagement and spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya. The present study therefore seeks to address this geographical gap by generating Kenya-specific empirical evidence on how digital religious engagement relates to religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs among Generation Z.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Digital religious engagement has emerged as an important aspect of contemporary religious experiences, particularly among Generation Z, whose spiritual interactions are increasingly mediated through digital technologies. The reviewed literature demonstrates that online worship participation, religious social media exposure, digital religious discussions, and engagement with religious influencers provide opportunities for religious learning, community interaction, and spiritual expression (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Ferguson ., 2021). However, these digital interactions may also expose young people to conflicting religious teachings, changing religious authority, and individualized interpretations of spiritual beliefs, potentially influencing their religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020; Piela & Krotofil, 2021). Although previous studies have examined various dimensions of digital religious practices, limited integrated empirical evidence has been identified within the reviewed literature concerning their relationship with spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to address the identified conceptual, contextual, and geographical research gaps by examining how digital religious engagement relates to spiritual identity formation among Kenyan Generation Z. The findings are expected to contribute to digital religion scholarship, inform religious institutions and policymakers, and provide practical insights into promoting meaningful digital religious participation and sustainable spiritual identity development among young people in Kenya.

Recommendations

Theory

The study on Digital Religious Engagement and Spiritual Identity Formation among Generation Z in Kenya is expected to contribute to theoretical knowledge by extending the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory to contemporary digital religious experiences. Specifically, the study will provide a conceptual basis for explaining how online worship participation, religious social media exposure, digital religious discussions, and engagement with religious influencers relate to religious belonging, spiritual commitment, religious self-identification, and consistency of religious beliefs. While Uses and Gratifications Theory explains the motivations underlying digital religious participation, Social Identity Theory provides insights into how online religious communities shape individuals' sense of belonging and religious identification, whereas Social Cognitive Theory explains how religious influencers and digital role models may reinforce or transform spiritual beliefs (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Lüders ., 2022). The study is therefore expected to contribute to the development of an integrated conceptual framework that connects digital religious practices with multidimensional spiritual identity formation within the Kenyan sociocultural context. It is recommended that future researchers adopt and empirically test this integrated theoretical framework across different religious communities, age groups, and geographical settings to establish its applicability and explanatory strength.

Practice

The study is expected to provide practical insights for religious institutions, spiritual leaders, educators, parents, and digital religious content creators seeking to strengthen spiritual identity formation among Generation Z in Kenya. Religious institutions should develop structured digital worship programmes, interactive online faith communities, and youth-oriented religious content that encourage meaningful participation, religious belonging, and sustained spiritual commitment. Religious leaders and digital influencers should prioritize credible religious teachings, responsible online communication, and opportunities for constructive religious discussions to help young people develop informed religious identities and critically evaluate conflicting spiritual information. Educational institutions and religious organizations should also incorporate digital religious literacy into youth mentorship programmes to equip Generation Z with skills for evaluating online religious content, identifying misinformation, and engaging respectfully with diverse religious perspectives (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020; Ferguson ., 2021). The study's unique practical contribution will be the development of evidence-informed recommendations for digital religious engagement strategies that respond to the spiritual needs, communication preferences, and religious experiences of Generation Z in Kenya, while complementing rather than replacing conventional religious participation.

Policy

The study is expected to inform the development of policies and institutional guidelines that promote responsible digital religious engagement, youth spiritual development, and inclusive participation in online religious environments. The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, the Ministry of Education, religious umbrella organizations, and relevant stakeholders should consider incorporating digital religious literacy, online safety, and responsible

content creation into existing youth digital citizenship initiatives. Policymakers should encourage collaboration between religious institutions, educational organizations, and digital platforms to address religious misinformation, online harassment, discriminatory religious content, and the exploitation of young people's spiritual vulnerabilities while safeguarding freedom of religion and expression. Furthermore, religious regulatory and umbrella organizations should develop voluntary ethical guidelines for religious influencers and online faith communities, emphasizing transparency, accountability, respectful interfaith engagement, and the protection of young users' personal information. The study's unique policy contribution will be to provide Kenya-specific empirical evidence that can inform inclusive digital religious engagement guidelines, balancing technological innovation, religious freedom, youth protection, and cultural diversity without imposing restrictions on legitimate religious expression.

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