



Becoming a Church That Is Heard: A Mission Paradigm for Generation Z Hungry for Meaning

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Abstract. This article explores the paradigm of church missions in reaching Generation Z, known as the digital generation hungry for meaning. The main challenge faced is the irrelevance of traditional, institutional, and dogmatic missionary approaches, which fail to address the emotional and spiritual needs of Generation Z. The aim of this research is to identify and propose more participatory and dialogical missionary methods, as well as leverage digital technology to build authentic communities. The method used is qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical approach, involving literature review and narrative analysis. The main findings indicate that the church needs to transform from merely delivering messages to listening and guiding, and creating interactive spaces that allow Generation Z to actively engage. Thus, the church can become a community that is inhabited, not just a place that is visited, where each individual feels accepted and has space to grow in faith. In conclusion, to remain relevant in the digital age, the church must adopt a new mission paradigm that focuses on consistent and meaningful presence in the lives of Generation Z, so that it can become a voice that is heard and provides hope and meaning in their lives.

Keywords Generation Z; Mission Paradigm; Church; Digital; Community; Meaning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, often referred to as the iGeneration, is a generation that has grown up and developed in a highly dynamic digital environment. Generation Z lives in a world flooded with information, rapid technological developments, and social media culture, which has shaped their way of thinking and behaving from an early age. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2020, the 10–24 age group (Gen Z category) accounted for around 25% of Indonesia's total population, making them the largest generation that will shape the future of the nation. (BPS, 2020).

However, amid this high connectivity, Generation Z also faces serious psychosocial challenges. Many members of Generation Z experience loneliness, identity crises, and anxiety about the future. According to research by Aisyah (2024) in the Journal of Empathy, despite being active in the virtual world, Generation Z still experiences emotional loneliness and often feels misunderstood by those around them. In such situations, many of them seek escape or even emotional relief through interactions with chatbots or artificial intelligence (N, 2024) hal 55-68. In the context of religious life, this challenge is also present. Churches, as spiritual and social institutions, are often seen as irrelevant to Generation Z due to their traditional, dogmatic, and

less dialogical approaches. As outlined by Aritonang (2023), churches, especially those in Indonesia, tend to maintain an institutionalistic mission pattern and place too much emphasis on formal structures without touching on the authentic relational dimension with the congregation, particularly in this case, Generation Z. (C. Aritonang, 2023) hal 33-47. Such conditions undoubtedly demand a paradigm shift in church mission services. In the journal *Predica Verbum* by Manarung (2023), it is emphasized that an effective mission paradigm for the Z church or digital generation is one based on participation, dialogue, cultural context, and the use of relevant communication technology. The church must dare to transform from merely “delivering” to “listening,” from merely “teaching” to “guiding rationally.” (D. Manurung, 2023) hal 101-115. Furthermore, research by Toding (2022) also shows that digital media such as podcasts, spiritual reflection videos, and online discussions have proven to be meaningful spiritual bridges for Generation Z. The digital space can become a “New Altar,” a place where spiritual encounters occur in a more contextual and relevant form without losing the meaning and truth of the Gospel. (M. A. Toding, 2022) hal 89-104.

By understanding this context, the article “Becoming a Church That Is Heard: A Mission Paradigm for Generation Z Hungry for Meaning” aims to pave the way for transformation: the church must be present in the lives of Gen Z, both digitally and relationally, providing space for dialogue, living out love and meaning, and inviting them not only to come but also to experience and become part of an authentic community of love.

2. METHODS

The researchers in this study used qualitative research methods, which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), are naturalistic studies that aim to interpret phenomena or events that occur and are conducted using various existing methods. According to Erickson (1968), qualitative research seeks to discover and provide a narrative description of the activities carried out and the impact of those actions on their lives. (Albi Anggito dan Jhon Setiawan, 2018) hal 7- 8.

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach. The descriptive-analytical method is a statistical technique used to analyze data by describing the collected data as it is, without drawing general conclusions or generalizations. (Sugiyono, 2015) hal 83. The researcher also used two techniques to collect data: library research, which is a data collection method focused on searching for data and information through documents, including written documents, photos, images, and electronic documents that can support the writing process and internet research in finding information in the form of supporting materials for theory and research, (Sudaryono, 2016). to explore what it means to be a

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Gen Z: Digital, Critical, and Hungry for Meaning

Who is Generation Z?

Generation Z, often referred to as Gen-Z, is a group that has been connected to technological developments since birth, with many aspects of their growth driven by technology and the internet. Members of Generation Z were born between 1995 and 2012. Advances in technology and the rapid spread of information via the internet have had a significant impact on their lives. They are accustomed to communicating through their smartphones, accessing information about various issues from the outside world via the internet, playing digital games, and even shopping online using their devices.

Research conducted by Turner (2015) shows that 60% of Generation Z respondents begin their social interactions online, 50% prefer to communicate online rather than face-to-face, and 70% feel more comfortable interacting with friends online. This generation is often considered highly dependent on technology, unlike previous generations who were more inclined to read and obtain information from books. Visual information and images on the internet are considered more appealing and easier to digest by Generation Z (Ismail and Nugroho, 2022). In addition to living in an era of advanced technology, Generation Z also exists in an environment that offers freedom of expression. This makes them known in Indonesia as active, adaptable, creative, and skilled in utilizing digital technology. (Farah Fauziah Fitri, 2023) hal 40-41.

What are the characteristics of Generation Z?

There are several characteristics of Generation Z, namely (Yuli Kristiyowati, 2021) hal 2-4:

- 1) Figital. Figital in this context means that Generation Z does not limit their activities between physical reality and the digital world. Technological developments in the era of Generation Z are very rapid, and rightly so. All information is easily accessible and usually available through various applications or websites. Although it is true that the digital world can reduce direct interaction with people around them, Generation Z does not seem to mind this too much.
- 2) Hyper-customization. Hyper-customization in this context means that Generation Z does not want to be labeled or grouped into specific categories. They strive to highlight their strengths and uniqueness as part of their identity, rather than basing it on religion, ethnicity, or race. Generation Z prefers to customize their identity to appear distinct in

the eyes of society.

- 3) Realistic. Influenced by their parents (Generation X), who often felt dissatisfied with a reality that did not align with their dreams, Generation Z's way of thinking has become more moderate in terms of their expectations for the future. This does not mean they are skeptical, but rather that they have a realistic outlook. Therefore, Generation Z prioritizes practical learning over theoretical learning.
- 4) Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). As a digital generation, Generation Z actively gathers important information deemed useful for their work from the internet. They worry about falling behind on information that could negatively impact their performance. Their high curiosity also makes them restless if they don't receive the latest news.
- 5) Weconomist. Generation Z is one of the generations familiar with the term collaboration, especially in an economic context. Known as the Sharing Economy or Weconomist, they have a significant influence on the digital industry market.
- 6) Do It Yourself (DIY). Generation Z is classified as a self-reliant digital generation. Self-reliant in this context means they no longer need guidance or assistance when learning something new. By simply searching for tutorials on YouTube, they can solve problems. It's that easy for them. However, the strong individualistic nature of Generation Z sometimes leads them to be perceived as lacking the ability to work in teams.
- 7) Motivated. It is true that Generation Z is a pragmatic generation without overly ambitious aspirations, but they want to make a positive contribution to their environment using the technology they currently possess. They may be willing to go the extra mile to help those in need. (Lingga Sekar Arum, dkk, 2023) hal 64-66.

Why are they called the Meaning-Hungry Generation?

Generation Z is called the meaning-hungry generation because they were born into a modern world with rapid technological advances and instant social and emotional gratification, as a result of which Generation Z often questions inherited structures and values. Additionally, Generation Z is exposed to information from a young age, such as social media and the internet, which they have been exposed to and used since childhood. They are also less satisfied with jobs that merely provide financial compensation, preferring instead work and a life that aligns with their values and life goals. Furthermore, they seek communities and safe spaces to explore their identity and become their authentic selves. They also want to live not just to exist, but to live a life that is meaningful, purposeful, and serves as a useful tool and motivation to live with full awareness and conviction. (Galih Sakitri,

2023)

The Old Mission Paradigm That Is No Longer Effective

David J. Bosch, in his important book *Transforming Mission*, emphasizes that the church's perspective on mission does not arise suddenly or remain static, but is the result of deep theological reflection and adaptation to context. He introduces the idea of a mission paradigm, which is a framework that influences how the church understands, carries out, and experiences mission during a particular period. In church history, Bosch notes that many mission paradigms have emerged and changed in response to theological developments, social changes, and challenges within the church environment. The old mission paradigm, which was often institutional, Eurocentric, or focused on mass expansion and conversion, is increasingly seen as ineffective in a rapidly changing world. Missions that were once one-sided and did not take local contexts into account are now seen as no longer appropriate, especially in the age of globalization and digitalization. Bosch himself emphasizes that without deep theological reflection, missions lack purpose; conversely, without the practice of missions, theology loses its meaning. Therefore, the church cannot continue to rely on old approaches but must continually renew its mission paradigms to remain relevant and transformative. (David J. Rosch, 2022) hal 285-296.

In his work titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn explains that knowledge does not develop in a straight line but through paradigm shifts—drastic changes from old ways of thinking to new ones—as a response to crises and the limitations of old paradigms in addressing challenges. Bosch then adapts this principle to the context of mission: change in mission is not merely a technical adjustment, but also a comprehensive renewal in the way the church views the world, understands the gospel, and serves others. (Kung, 1997) hal 33-36.

The challenge that demands a new paradigm is also evident in the church's efforts to reach Generation Z. This generation has grown up amid rapid developments in technology and information. Their way of thinking is more practical, digitally oriented, and heavily influenced by social media and global trends. The old mission paradigm, which relies on conventional methods such as one-way lectures and rigid liturgical activities, is no longer effective in reaching them. A church that fails to adapt will be left behind, perceived as irrelevant to their lived experiences. Generation Z needs a church that is present in both the digital space and daily life. They are not only seeking theological answers, but also authentic communities, inclusive relationships, and spaces to express their spirituality. Therefore, the mission paradigm must shift: from an approach that relies on institutional authority to one

that emphasizes participation, creativity, and interpersonal relationships. (Rahmawati, 2018) hal14.

In this digital age, information can be used to revitalize the church's mission in appropriate ways. The church needs to utilize technology to spread the gospel, build solidarity, and provide young people with meaningful spirituality. A more interactive, reflective, and participatory approach is needed in the development of the faith of the younger generation. The church is not just a building for weekly worship, but a living community that provides space for spiritual growth, social concern, and personal transformation. Therefore, the old mission paradigm, which is institutional and irrelevant, must be abandoned. The church must dare to reevaluate its approach, creating a new mission paradigm that is relevant, dialogical, and grounded in the realities of the times, so that it can remain a light and salt in a constantly changing world. (Moses Palmero Hasibuan, 2020) 47-48.

Mission in the Digital World Present in the Space and Language of Generation Z

The digital era has certainly changed the way Generation Z thinks, understands, accesses, and responds to spirituality. As a generation born and raised amid advances in information technology, Generation Z is accustomed to a fast pace, instant gratification, high visualization, and communication that is brief but dense with meaning. The Church, as the body of Christ, is called not only to remain silent but to be present in a contextual way within the space and language of Generation Z. Missionary service is no longer limited to the pulpit and church halls but has expanded to platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and podcasts, which have become part of Generation Z's daily life.

The digital world, as a dynamic social space, offers great opportunities for the church's mission, but it also challenges the church to adapt to the context and be able to shift from old patterns and learn to present the gospel in a creative, relevant, and transformative way without losing the truth and meaning of the gospel. In this context, the approach to mission must transform from merely delivering digital content to creating a digital presence that fosters encounters and relationships. The church must not only speak in the language of theology but also understand the narratives, visual language, and engagement dynamics that characterize the digital world. (Kristanto, 2021) hal 110-123. There are several things the church must do when it wants to reach Generation Z in their world, which is the digital world that is ingrained in them.

The church must become a "digital presence," not just "digital content."

Generation Z is not just looking for information about faith, but also seeking authentic

encounters, even in the digital world. Generation Z is more interested in churches or communities that live out their faith in relatable ways, not just delivering one-way content. Therefore, churches cannot simply upload sermons or Bible verses in visual formats; they must actively and consistently engage as a responsive, welcoming, and dialoguing digital presence. Churches are called to be present not as formal institutions in the digital world, but as pilgrimage companions who understand the daily dynamics of Gen Z: memes, short videos, visual language, short stories, and informal yet meaningful language. Churches are not merely present on social media but live out social media as a participatory and contextual mission space.

A New Language of Faith: Narrative, Visual, and Personal

Generation Z is shaped by the narratives they consume on social media such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, podcasts, etc. They learn through stories, not commands. Therefore, the approach to mission in the digital world must move away from a monologue style of teaching and replace it with a narrative of faith that touches their personal, authentic, and emotional sides. Generation Z prefers digital mission content that presents stories: testimonies of faith, spiritual struggles, or daily reflections that are not preachy but show that God is present in everyday life. Short video formats (Reels, TikTok), dialogic podcasts, and reflective infographics are some of the new forms of language that bring the Gospel closer to Gen Z in their own world. (M.A.Toding, 2022) hal 89-104.

Interactivity as a Feature of Digital Mission

If the old approach to mission was one-way communication (from the pulpit to the congregation), the digital world demands two-way communication. Generation Z wants to be involved, to participate, not just receive. They want to ask questions, give feedback, voice their concerns, and even contribute to the form of ministry itself. Therefore, the church must create interactive spaces: online discussion forums, Q&A columns on Instagram, live streams with interactive reflection sessions, and even safe digital spaces for those experiencing a crisis of faith or mental health. Mission is no longer just about delivering the Gospel, but about building empowering spaces for dialogue.

Consistency, Creativity, and Ethical Sensitivity

The church's presence in the digital world should not be seasonal or merely a project. Generation Z values consistency and authenticity. The church's digital mission must certainly

be managed responsibly, with creative content planning that maintains spiritual depth. However, more than that, the church must also be sensitive to digital ethics issues such as privacy, data security, and media literacy. Not all digital spaces are safe, and not all forms of faith expression are suitable for all platforms. This is where it is important for the church to equip its digital ministers with communication theology, media ethics, and digital cultural literacy so that they are not only tech-savvy but also wise and integrity-driven in their mission. (Harefa, 2020) hal 67-69. **Becoming a Community That Is Lived In, Not Just Visited**

In this fast-paced, interconnected, and sometimes confusing digital age, the Church faces a major challenge in remaining a relevant and meaningful space. For Generation Z, a generation born and raised in an era of unlimited information flow and surrounded by diverse choices of identity and values, the Church's presence can no longer be limited to being merely a place for weekly worship services. They are no longer interested in a ceremonial form of Christianity that focuses solely on Sunday worship, holiday celebrations, and the Eucharist, or that prioritizes church roles and activities alone. In their view, the church should not merely be a place visited according to a worship schedule but must become a community that is inhabited a spiritual home where they can dwell, feel accepted, known, and shaped.

Being a community that is inhabited means building deep relationships, not just functional ones. The church is no longer understood as a building or an agenda, but as a living and growing ecosystem of faith alongside its members. In such a community, faith is not just taught but lived out not just preached but experienced. Generation Z wants to see how the teachings of Jesus Christ are lived out in the daily lives of believers in the way they treat one another, face difficulties, serve others, and relate to those who are different. They seek a community that reflects love, accepts them unconditionally, and offers a consistent presence where they are not judged by performance or background, but loved as they are. Additionally, they desire genuine intimacy—not superficial or ordinary relationships, but connections that allow space for vulnerability, honesty, and growth. In a world often filled with social pressure, demands for achievement, and anxiety, Generation Z longs for a place where they can pause, breathe deeply, and grow in a faith that offers hope. A church that is a community is one that is not only present in the schedule but is integrated into life, where it not only invites people to come but is willing to walk with them through every season of life. (Group, 2018) hal 19-25.

The community inhabited by this generation is one that opens space for everyone to play a role. Generation Z wants to be heard, involved, and invited to think together, not just

be an audience from the pulpit. They value openness and honesty, and the church needs to provide a space for their active involvement in community life. Here, the paradigm of mission shifts from an institutional approach to a relational approach, where mission is no longer a program offered to outsiders but a shared life that invites people into the authentic narrative of the Gospel. (James Emery White, 2017) hal 45. Being a community that is inhabited means enriching the life of the congregation not only through structured programs or weekly liturgy, but through natural and meaningful daily relationships. A living church is not one that merely appears active on the calendar of events, but whose presence is truly felt in the lives of its congregation and is present in intimate and simple spaces and in small groups that can build closeness, in social services that touch the real lives of those who are marginalized, and in honest conversations at the dinner table, in the churchyard, or even in the digital world, which is now part of the lives of Generation Z.

Communities like this do not treat the Gospel as something abstract or distant from reality, but as something that can be felt and experienced in a tangible way. The Gospel is not merely proclaimed from the pulpit, but lived out in the daily witness of God's people through the way they support, forgive, encourage, and embrace those who are lost. In this context, mission is no longer understood as a task carried out by certain individuals, but as a way of life lived by the entire community. When the Church becomes a truly inhabited community, it offers the world especially Generation Z a meaningful alternative to life: a life that is not merely about pursuing achievements, but is rooted in love, hope, and true fellowship. Thus, such a community is not merely a place to learn about Christ but a place to experience Him directly in daily life. (Andrew Root, 2021) hal 40-53. The mission paradigm for Generation Z demands that the Church move away from old patterns emphasizing evangelization projects or one-sided, instantaneous preaching, and focusing solely on attendance numbers. Such an approach is no longer effective for a generation shaped by digital experiences, who value dialogue over dogma, personal experiences over one-way presentations, and active engagement. Mission, in the eyes and needs of Generation Z, is not something done to others but something lived out together with others. Therefore, mission is no longer a short-term project but a relational journey a journey that creates space for listening, understanding, sharing wounds and hopes, and growing together in the knowledge of Christ.

In this sense, mission becomes a consistent and wholehearted presence in others' lives, not just a presence when "mission" begins or programs are implemented. A church that understands this will shift its focus from statistical achievements to deep discipleship from inviting people into the church building to becoming a church that goes into the midst of

young people's lives, accompanying them at their points of search, questions, and even doubts. This is the transformative form of mission where the Gospel is lived out through mutually building relationships that reflect God's patient, hopeful, and non-coercive love. When the church truly becomes a community, it is not just a place for weekly gatherings but a spiritually and emotionally safe haven. It becomes a space where Generation Z can bring their entire being including their wounds, questions, and deepest longings without fear of judgment or rejection. The Church no longer merely invites them to "attend," but welcomes them to stay, grow, and experience authentic and meaningful life in fellowship with Christ and one another. Here, the Church becomes a voice that is heard, not because of the loudness of its voice or the modernity of its methods, but because its presence is real and its love is truly felt. (Alan J. Roxburgh, 2015) hal 18-23.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the article "Becoming a Church That Is Heard: A Mission Paradigm for Generation Z Hungry for Meaning" emphasizes the importance of the church transforming itself in order to face the challenges faced by Generation Z. This generation, which grew up in the digital age and is inundated with information, often feels lonely and searches for meaning in their lives. Therefore, the church must shift its mission approach from traditional and institutional methods to more participatory, dialogical, and contextual approaches. The church must be present in digital and relational spaces, creating authentic and inclusive communities, and using technology to build deep relationships with young people. By understanding the characteristics and needs of Generation Z, the church can become a place not only visited but also inhabited, where each individual feels accepted and has space to grow in faith. The church's mission must focus on consistent and meaningful presence, making the Gospel part of everyday life, and building mutually supportive relationships. In this way, the church can become a voice that is heard and relevant in an ever-changing world, providing hope and meaning for Generation Z.

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