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Artificial Intelligence and Its Effects on Christian Youths' Spirituality

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Abstract

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionised the way Christian youths engage with spirituality. This study examines the impact of AI on Christian youths' perceptions of spirituality, investigating the intricate interplay between technology, faith, and identity. Christian youths are growing up in a world where AI-driven technologies are increasingly ubiquitous. Social media, online forums, and AI-powered spiritual tools are reshaping the way they experience and express their spirituality. However, the impact of AI on Christian youths' perception of spirituality remains poorly understood. This study employs a critical discourse analysis approach to examine how AI-driven technologies are represented and negotiated within Christian youth culture. A comprehensive review of existing literature on AI, spirituality, and Christian youth culture was conducted, supplemented by an analysis of online content, including social media posts, blogs, and websites. The study reveals that AI is influencing Christian youths' perception of spirituality in complex and multifaceted ways. While AI-driven technologies offer opportunities for spiritual growth and connection, they also pose challenges, such as information overload, misinformation, and the erosion of traditional spiritual authorities. This study contributes to our understanding of the intersection of AI, spirituality, and Christian youth culture. The findings highlight the need for Christian leaders to develop strategies that promote healthy and balanced engagement with AI-driven technologies. The study recommends that Christian bodies should educate members on AI's deployments, not view it as a threat, and devise strategies to combat it, introduce teens to seminars, and conduct ongoing research on AI and church spirituality to understand its merits and demerits.

Keywords: Christians, AI-driven technologies, Artificial Intelligence, Spiritual, Youths.

Introduction

Knowledge has always been and is on the rise, whether it is from scientific archives or religious pieces of literature, man has progressively dominated and expanded his territory (Foucault, 2020: 75). From using fig leaves and animal skin to cover nakedness to the modern-day industrial machines, man has developed himself and his environment, be it clothing, food, medicine, architecture, arts, language, music, intelligence, and even religion, and technology has helped man to achieve all these (Commoner, (2020: 123). This branch of knowledge has enjoyed an unprecedented expansion. The evolution and

refinement of machines over the last 100 years is comparable to biological and behavioural evolution that has extended over one billion years (Bennett, M.S., 2021: 11). With the help of technology, more natural resources have been utilised since World War II than at any point in human history. This rapidly accelerating potential and application of human possibilities have led to an ever-increasing interdependence between us and our environment.

In modern times, technology has advanced from mechanical tools and mere household computer systems to what is known as "artificial intelligence" (AI) (Ghosh, Chakraborty, & Law, 2018: 212). AI aims to replicate human behaviour and reasoning. Manuel E.M.C. noted in 2018 that AI excels in complex problems with no traditional solutions and can quickly process large data sets, often outperforming humans. As AI technologies permeate numerous parts of life, such as social media, education, and entertainment, worries have arisen about their impact on people's spiritual lives (Schuurman, 2019: 75). Christian youths, in particular, are growing up in an era where AI-powered technology is progressively affecting their worldview, beliefs, and spiritual practices.

AI and spirituality are topics that haven't been discussed much, especially regarding Christian youth. As AI gets better, it is changing how these young people find and connect with spiritual content. It might also change how they see God and their faith. This brings up some important questions: How are Christian youth forming their spiritual identities in a world with AI? Is technology helping or hurting their spiritual lives? This study looks at how AI affects the spirituality of Christian youth. It will explore how these technologies are shaping their spiritual experiences and beliefs. By looking closely at how AI and spirituality mix in Christian youth culture, this research hopes to shed light on how technology is influencing the spiritual lives of young Christians today.

Statement of the Problem

While scholars like Cheong (2020) and Shatzer (2019) have explored AI's role in reshaping religious practices, limited attention has been paid to its specific impact on Christian youths' spirituality. Past research highlights AI's potential for spiritual growth but overlooks critical issues such as misinformation, echo chambers, and ethical dilemmas (Singler, 2020; Graves, 2017). This study addresses these gaps by critically examining how AI influences Christian youths' perception of faith, focusing on both opportunities and challenges. It seeks to provide actionable recommendations for balancing technological engagement with traditional spiritual values, ensuring a deeper understanding of AI's implications for young believers' spiritual development.

Research Objectives

Below are the objectives of the study:

1. To analyse the impact of AI-driven technologies on Christian youths' spiritual perceptions.
2. To identify opportunities for spiritual growth facilitated by AI.

3. To explore the ethical and spiritual challenges posed by AI integration in Christian practices.
4. To propose actionable recommendations for Christian leaders to foster balanced engagement with AI.

Research Questions

This study aims to address this gap by examining how AI influences Christian youths' spiritual experiences and beliefs. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do AI-driven technologies shape Christian youths' perception of spirituality?
2. What opportunities and challenges does AI present for spiritual growth among Christian youths?
3. How can Christian leaders guide youths in navigating the ethical and spiritual implications of AI?

Methodology

The research article employs a mixed-methods approach, combining critical discourse analysis (CDA) with thematic analysis of online content and interviews to examine how AI-driven technologies influence the spirituality of Christian youths. Online content from social media, blogs, and websites is analysed to identify recurring themes related to personalisation, community building, authenticity, and ethical concerns. Meanwhile, surveys gather qualitative data on the prevalence and impact of AI tools among 100 Christian youths aged 15–30 selected at random in selected Pentecostal churches in South-west, Nigeria. These Churches include: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church, Sphere of light church and Jesus is Light Pentecostal Church. The study integrates theoretical frameworks of technological determinism and symbolic interactionism to explore both the structural and subjective effects of AI on spiritual practices. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and data privacy, are prioritised throughout the research process to ensure validity and reliability in understanding the intersection of AI, faith, and identity within Christian youth culture.

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Technological Determinism and Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in two key paradigms: technological determinism and symbolic interactionism. These frameworks provide a robust lens through which to examine the influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on Christian youths' spirituality, enabling a nuanced understanding of how technology shapes human interactions and meanings within a spiritual context.

Technological Determinism

Technological determinism posits that technology plays a central role in shaping societal structures, cultural norms, and individual behaviours (Foucault, 2020: 75). In the context of AI and spirituality, this theory suggests that AI-driven technologies are not merely tools but active agents influencing how Christian youths perceive and engage with their faith. For instance, the pervasive presence of AI in daily life through social media algorithms, personalised devotionals, and virtual prayer groups has redefined the boundaries of spiritual practices. According to Shatzer (2019: 79), as digital natives, Christian youths are inherently accustomed to integrating technology into their spiritual lives, making AI a significant determinant of their religious experiences. This perspective aligns with Bennett's (2021: 11) observation that technological advancements can lead to behavioural shifts, including changes in how individuals conceptualise identity, community, and authority within religious contexts.

However, technological determinism also raises concerns about the unintended consequences of AI integration. Graves (2017: 337) warns that overreliance on AI-mediated spirituality could dilute the depth and authenticity of religious practices, potentially leading to a superficial engagement with faith. This risk underscores the need for critical evaluation of how AI influences spiritual growth versus its potential to erode traditional spiritual authorities.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism complements technological determinism by focusing on the ways individuals construct meaning through interactions with others and their environment (Umbrello, 2023: 1536). In the realm of AI and spirituality, this theory highlights how Christian youths negotiate their faith identities within digitally mediated spaces. For example, AI-powered tools such as personalised Bible study apps or virtual communities create new opportunities for believers to connect, share, and interpret religious teachings (Cheong, 2020: 417). These interactions shape the symbolic meanings attached to faith, enabling youths to explore spirituality in ways that resonate with their contemporary lived experiences.

Symbolic interactionism also addresses the challenges posed by AI. As noted by Joseph and Olalekan (2024: 39), the algorithmic nature of AI-driven content risks creating echo chambers where users are exposed only to perspectives that reinforce their existing beliefs. This limitation hinders critical engagement with diverse theological discourses, potentially stifling spiritual growth. Furthermore, the lack of human connection in digital religious experiences may impede the development of deep and meaningful relationships within faith communities (Lowe & Lowe, 2018: 121).

Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks

By combining technological determinism and symbolic interactionism, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex interplay between AI and Christian youths' spirituality. While technological determinism emphasises the structural impact of

AI on spiritual practices, symbolic interactionism focuses on the subjective meanings and interactions facilitated by these technologies. Together, these theories illuminate both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI, offering insights into how Christian youths navigate their faith in an increasingly digital world.

History and Development of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to simulate human intelligence processes. This includes learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language understanding (Konar, 2018: 55). Over recent years, AI has increasingly been integrated into everyday technologies, influencing various aspects of life. For Christian youths, understanding AI is essential as its influence permeates aspects of both secular and spiritual life. AI's algorithms are often embedded in devices and services that young people frequently use, such as social media platforms, virtual assistants, and online educational tools (Ognibene, Wilkens, Taibi, Hernández-Leo, Kruschwitz, Donabauer, & Eimler, 2023: 15). These systems process vast amounts of data to predict preferences, suggest content, and enhance user experiences. It analyses vast data sets, predicts trends, and enhances user experiences.

AI's impact extends beyond mere technological interaction; it also presents philosophical and ethical considerations relevant to spirituality. The automation of decision-making processes can potentially alter how Christian youths discern and interpret spiritual guidance (Umbrello, 2023: 1536). With AI generating content or simulating human interactions, there could be shifts in how religious teachings are consumed and understood. Moreover, AI raises questions about the nature of consciousness, free will, and the essence of being human topics that intersect with spiritual beliefs (Delio, 2020: 55). While AI offers opportunities for learning and engagement, approaching these advancements critically is a necessity to ensure spiritual practices remain grounded in human connection, introspection, and community-based faith expressions. Understanding AI thus becomes vital for balancing technological benefits with spiritual well-being (Jeste, Graham, Nguyen, Depp, Lee, & Kim, 2020: 997).

In this contemporary era of big data, where vast amounts of information can be processed through artificial intelligence (AI), which has proven beneficial across various sectors like technology, banking, marketing, and entertainment (Dwivedi, Hughes, Ismagilova, Aarts, Coombs, Crick & Williams, 2021:113). Despite potential slowdowns in the advancement of hardware as suggested by Moore's Law, the ever-increasing data availability has enabled AI to learn effectively through brute force methods. Shortly, AI language capabilities are anticipated to advance significantly, allowing for seamless interaction between machines and users, including real-time translation and expert system conversations (Bansal, Chamola, Hussain, Guizani, & Niyato, 2024:17). Moreover, the emergence of driverless cars is expected within the next two decades, and the ultimate ambition for AI development is achieving general intelligence, where machines exceed human cognitive abilities in all tasks.

Types of Artificial Intelligence

AI technologies are categorised by their capacity to mimic human characteristics, the technology they use to do this, their real-world applications, and the theory of mind, which is discussed in more depth below. Using these characteristics for reference, all artificial intelligence systems, real and hypothetical, fall into one of three types:

- **Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI)/Weak AI:** Artificial narrow intelligence (ANI), also known as weak AI, is the current type of artificial intelligence that has been successfully developed. ANI is designed to perform specific tasks, such as facial and speech recognition, driving cars, or internet searching, demonstrating high proficiency within its limited scope but not replicating human intelligence (Babu & Banana, 2024:211). It functions under narrow constraints and simulates human behaviour based on specific parameters. Breakthroughs in machine and deep learning have advanced narrow AI applications in fields like medicine for accurate disease diagnosis. ANI can be categorised into reactive AI, which responds to stimuli without memory, and limited memory AI, which uses historical data to improve decision-making and personalise experiences (Chung, Thaichon, & Quach, 2022: 37). Examples of ANI include Google's Rank Brain, virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa, IBM's Watson, and applications in self-driving cars and social media monitoring tools.
- **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)/Strong AI/Deep AI:** Artificial general intelligence (AGI), also known as strong AI or deep AI, is the concept of machines exhibiting human-like intelligence and behaviours, capable of learning and solving any problem. Currently, achieving strong AI remains elusive, as researchers have yet to make machines conscious or develop a comprehensive set of cognitive abilities (Summerfield, C. (2022: 21). The challenge is significant because replicating human brain functions, which serve as the model for general intelligence, is complex, and shortcomings in understanding these functions hinder progress, as evidenced by the difficulty of simulating basic neural activities (Miao & Wang, 2024:12). Notable efforts, such as Fujitsu's K supercomputer, highlight these challenges, as it takes extensive time to simulate neural processes. However, advancements in image and facial recognition technologies may lead to improved machine learning capabilities.
- **Artificial Super Intelligence:** Artificial super-intelligence (ASI) is a theoretical form of AI that goes beyond merely mimicking human intelligence and behaviour, achieving self-awareness and surpassing human cognitive capacities (Mainzer & Mainzer, 2020: 197). ASI would not only replicate human emotions and experiences but would also possess its own emotions, needs, beliefs, and desires (Iqbal, 2024: 35). It is envisioned to excel in all areas such as mathematics, science, sports, art, medicine, and emotional relationships due to superior memory and faster data processing abilities. As a result, ASI's decision-making and problem-solving skills would significantly outstrip those of humans.[17]

Artificial Intelligence in 5G (Fifth Generation) Network

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI), internet-connected machines, and 5G wireless networks is revolutionising various sectors globally, enhancing agricultural practices, accelerating drug development, improving pandemic tracking, and optimising urban resource management. The combination of these technologies, particularly the capabilities of 5G that facilitate rapid and vast data transmission without extensive infrastructure, is expected to transform industrial technology significantly (Cayamcela & Lim, 2018: 863). In agriculture, AI is utilised to manage supply chains and product quality, while in healthcare, remote surgeries and smart pills that monitor patient health are becoming feasible (Quazi, S., Saha, & Singh, 2022: 215). Manufacturing is set for a shift with advanced sensors providing real-time performance data, enabling preventive maintenance. Also, merging these technologies with satellite capabilities is enabling innovative projects in areas such as pandemic tracking, energy management in remote locations, traffic management for autonomous vehicles, and agricultural assessments, showcasing unprecedented possibilities for societal improvement (Saez, M., Maturana, Barton, & Tilbury, 2018: 1737). As businesses and industries continue to embrace and integrate these technologies into their operations, the potential for efficiency and cost savings is immense. The ability to gather and analyse large amounts of data in real-time is revolutionising the way organisations make decisions and respond to challenges (Arunachalam, Kumar, & Kawalek, 2018: 419). With satellite capabilities also playing a crucial role in enabling these advancements, the future is bright for a world where technology drives progress and improves the quality of life for all.

Advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning have also played a significant role in enhancing the capabilities of data analysis and decision-making processes (Duan, Edwards & and Dwivedi, 2019: 69). These technologies have enabled organisations to automate tasks, predict trends, and identify patterns that were previously undetectable. As a result, businesses operate more efficiently and effectively, leading to increased productivity and profitability. The integration of satellite capabilities has further expanded the reach and impact of these technological advancements, allowing for global connectivity and communication (Duan, Edwards, & Dwivedi, 2019: 65). This interconnected world of technology holds immense potential for driving innovation and progress in various industries, ultimately improving the quality of life for individuals worldwide.

The Intersection of Technology and Faith

As artificial intelligence becomes more pervasive in daily life, its impact on spirituality, particularly among Christian youths, is complex and multifaceted (Shatzer, 2019: 112). At the intersection of technology and faith, AI presents both challenges and opportunities for young believers (Yao, D. W. J., 2024: 337). On the one hand, AI technologies can facilitate spiritual growth by providing access to diverse theological resources. Through mobile applications and online platforms, Christian youths have unprecedented access to scripture, sermons, and discussions that can deepen their understanding and devotion. AI-driven

tools can also foster community among believers, transcending geographical boundaries and enabling young Christians to connect with others who share their beliefs. Also, AI facilitates community building by connecting believers worldwide, fostering a sense of global Christian fellowship that transcends geographical boundaries (Longkiad, 2024: 129). This interconnectedness allows for the sharing of ideas, experiences, and support, creating a strong sense of unity among young Christians. The use of AI in theological exploration and community building is revolutionising the way youths engage with their faith and connect with others who share their values (Ojo, Adelaja, Adio, & Afolaranmi, 2024: 63). As technology continues to advance, the potential for AI to enhance and strengthen the Christian community is limitless, offering new opportunities for growth, learning, and spiritual development.

However, the integration of artificial intelligence into spiritual practices also raises concerns about authenticity and the depth of faith experiences. The digital nature of AI-mediated spirituality could risk reducing rich, personal faith experiences to algorithms and data patterns, potentially leading to a more superficial engagement with religious practices (Graves, 2017: 337). Moreover, the overwhelming presence of AI in daily life might distract youths from traditional forms of worship and contemplation, which require stillness and inner reflection. Despite these challenges, the relationship between artificial intelligence and spirituality depends on how these technologies are used and integrated into religious practices (Singler, 2017: 23). With thoughtful implementation, AI could potentially enhance spiritual experiences by providing personalised guidance, facilitating community connections, and offering new avenues for exploration and understanding of faith.

Using AI as a tool to deepen one's spiritual journey rather than replace it could help in navigating the complexities of modern technology while maintaining a sense of authenticity and depth in their religious beliefs and practices (Alkhouri, 2024; 290). The impact of AI on spirituality will be shaped by the intentions and values of those who incorporate it into their spiritual lives, as well as by the ethical considerations surrounding the development and use of AI in this context (Umbrello, 2023: 1536). As technology continues to evolve, it will be important for individuals to stay grounded in their spiritual practices and values, using AI as a tool to enhance rather than overpower their spiritual journey. The integration of AI into spirituality has the potential to offer individuals new opportunities for growth, connection, and understanding of their faith (Cheong, 2020: 417). For Christian youths, finding a balance will be key, ensuring that technology enhances rather than detracts from their faith journeys, nurturing a spirituality that remains deeply rooted and genuinely personal (Ojo, Adelaja, Adio, & Afolaranmi, 2024: 59). This delicate balance will require a conscious effort to prioritise real-life connections and experiences; seeking out opportunities for deep reflection and personal growth outside of the digital realm is essential. Embracing AI in spirituality can provide access to a wealth of resources and insights, but it should never replace the importance of community, mentorship, and traditional practices such as prayer and worship, as this may lead to a superficial relationship with one's faith (Joseph & Olalekan, 2024: 117). The integration of technology in spirituality should complement and supplement rather than replace the fundamental

aspects of religious practice. Also, other potential risks that may arise from this integration include issues related to privacy, security, and ethical considerations. Being mindful of how AI is used in spiritual practices and to ensure that it enhances rather than detracts from the core values and beliefs of a particular faith tradition is a necessity (Yao, 2024: 335). The integration of AI in spirituality has the potential to both enrich and diminish the connection between individuals and their faith (Graves, 2017: 347). For example, a virtual reality meditation app may enhance the accessibility of spiritual practices for individuals with busy schedules, allowing them to connect with their faith more conveniently. However, if this technology is used to profit off of vulnerable individuals seeking guidance or solace, it could exploit their beliefs for financial gain and undermine the integrity of their spiritual experiences.

The Influence of AI on Christian Youths' Perception of Spirituality

The rise of artificial intelligence is reshaping many facets of life, including the way Christian youths perceive and interact with their spirituality. As digital natives, these young individuals are accustomed to using technology to access information, communicate, and even explore their faith (Shatzer, 2019: 79). AI, with its ability to provide personalised religious content, virtual communities, and interactive experiences, is playing a significant role in this transformation by offering new ways for young Christians to engage with their beliefs and connect with others who share their faith. However, some critics argue that relying too heavily on AI for spiritual guidance can lead to a superficial understanding of religious teachings and values (Umbrello, 2023: 1536). Despite these concerns, the integration of AI in the spiritual lives of youths presents a unique opportunity for them to deepen their relationship with God and strengthen their sense of community within the church (Alkhouri, 2024; 290). As technology continues to advance, there is a need to guide how to balance the benefits of AI with the importance of maintaining genuine, heartfelt connections with their spirituality. For example, there could be a scenario where a young person becomes so reliant on an AI app for spiritual guidance that they neglect attending church services, participating in community activities, or engaging in personal prayer and reflection. This over-reliance on technology could result in a shallow understanding of religious teachings and hinder their ability to form meaningful connections with others in their faith community (Valcea, Hamdani & Wang, and 2024: 927).

For many Christian youths, AI-driven applications offer a new way to engage with religious teachings. Through apps and platforms powered by AI, they find daily devotionals, personalised prayer suggestions, and Bible study plans that cater to their individual spiritual needs (Dick, 2024: 117). This tailored experience can deepen their understanding of faith, making religious teachings more accessible and relevant to their everyday lives. However, this technological mediation can also lead to a shift in how spirituality is perceived. The convenience and immediacy of AI-driven religious content might dilute the communal and traditional aspects of faith practice (Ndhlovu & Shamuyarira, 2024:7). Youth may find themselves relying more on digital interactions than physical community participation,

potentially leading to a more individualistic form of spirituality. Moreover, AI's influence raises questions about discernment and authenticity, challenging young believers to critically evaluate the sources of their spiritual guidance and wrestle with the implications of technology in their faith journey (Joseph & Olalekan, 2024: 39).

This shift towards digital spirituality also brings up concerns about the potential for manipulation and misinformation. With AI algorithms determining what content is presented to users, there is a risk of bias and agenda-setting that could shape individuals' beliefs and practices in ways that are not necessarily aligned with their values or beliefs (Bastian, Makhortykh & Dobber, 2019: 311). The lack of human connection and personal interaction in digital religious experiences may hinder the development of deep and meaningful relationships within faith communities (Lowe & Lowe, 2018: 121). While technology does have the potential to shape individuals' beliefs, it also provides access to a wider range of perspectives and resources that can enhance their faith journey. Undoubtedly, digital platforms help facilitate connections between individuals who may not have otherwise met, fostering new relationships within faith communities (Lowe & Lowe, 2018: 11).

Technology in the broad sense allows for greater accessibility to religious teachings and practices, breaking down barriers of time and space. Virtual religious services and online resources make it easier for individuals to engage with their faith, even amid busy schedules or physical limitations (W.H.O., 2020: 123). This accessibility can be especially beneficial for those who may not have a local religious community nearby or who face challenges attending traditional in-person gatherings (Dowson, 2020: 37). Furthermore, the digital landscape offers opportunities for individuals to explore and deepen their understanding of different religious traditions, promoting a more inclusive and diverse approach to spirituality.

Challenges and Concerns: Navigating AI-Driven Content

The increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence in media and online platforms comes with significant challenges and concerns for Christian youths seeking to navigate their spirituality (La Cruz & Mora, 2024: 234) At the forefront is the sheer volume of AI-generated content, which can often be overwhelming and difficult to discern for authenticity and intention. The algorithms powering these platforms are designed to maximise engagement, frequently prioritising provocative or sensational content that may not align with Christian values (Singler, 2020: 949). This exposure can lead to confusion, particularly when AI-driven content blurs the lines between genuine faith-based teachings and misleading, even conflicting ideologies. Moreover, the fast-paced nature of social media and AI technology can make it challenging for Christian youths to take the time to reflect, discern, and deepen their understanding of their faith (Kang, 2017: 123). As a result, they may struggle to separate genuine spiritual growth from shallow, fleeting experiences that do not nourish their relationship with God. The constant barrage of AI-generated content can create a sense of pressure to conform to societal norms or trends that may not align with Christian beliefs, causing further turmoil in their spiritual journey (Johnson, 2024: 13).

There are instances where Christian youths feel inadequate or insecure in their faith because they cannot keep up with the ever-changing landscape of social media and AI technology (Thacker, 2022: 11). This often leads to feelings of guilt or shame for not being able to maintain a strong spiritual connection amid digital distractions.

Another concern is the echo chamber effect, where AI algorithms tailor content to users' existing preferences, potentially isolating Christian youths from diverse perspectives and nuanced theological discourse (Aldreabi, 2024: 71). This lack of exposure to differing viewpoints can hinder their ability to critically engage with their faith and understand the complexities of religious teachings. This creates a risk of reinforcing preconceived notions and limiting their spiritual growth and understanding of the world around them. AI algorithms can perpetuate biases and create echo chambers, where Christian youths are only exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs (Yeneakal, 2019: 113). This can limit their exposure to diverse perspectives, hindering their critical thinking and spiritual growth.

Also, AI-driven content can be designed to be highly engaging and addictive, leading to distractions that detract from spiritual practices, relationships, and other important aspects of life (Atud, 2023: 111). Christian youths finds themselves spending hours scrolling through AI-curated content instead of engaging in prayer, community service, or other soul-nourishing activities (Waters, 2016: 21). This over-reliance on AI can also erode their ability to think independently and discern truth from misinformation, which eventually may lead them away from their faith by creating a false sense of reality and distorting their beliefs that have been ingrained in them since childhood. The constant exposure to AI-curated content may make it difficult for Christian youths to differentiate between what is truly in line with their beliefs and what is simply a product of algorithms. This disconnect from their faith can lead to feelings of emptiness and confusion as they struggle to find their true spiritual path amidst the overwhelming and often conflicting messages of the digital world (Kim, 2022: 7).

Another major concern is that the ease of access to AI-driven content can lead to a lack of critical thinking and discernment among Christian youths (Oluwarinde, 2024: 11). They accept information at face value without evaluating its credibility or spiritual implications, potentially straying further away from their beliefs without even realising it. This blind acceptance of digital content also makes them more susceptible to misinformation and harmful ideologies that go against the teachings of Christianity (Christians, 2019: 76).

Also, excessive exposure to AI-driven content contributes to mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, which can negatively impact Christian youths' spiritual well-being (Kim, Kadkol, Solomon, Yeh, Soh, Nguyen, & Ajilore, 2023: 23). For example, there are cases where Christian youths come across posts promoting beliefs contrary to their faith, such as materialism or atheism, leading them to question their own beliefs without critically analysing the information (Dandelion, 2016: 11). Constant exposure to curated content by algorithms designed to keep users engaged can create feelings of inadequacy and comparison, causing them to doubt their worth and purpose

about their spirituality. AI-driven content can create immersive experiences that blur the boundaries between reality and virtual reality. This leads to confusion, disorientation, and spiritual disconnection among Christian youths (Partarakis & Zabulis, 2024: 269).

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth Through AI-Powered Tools

Artificial intelligence offers unique opportunities for enhancing the spiritual growth of Christian youths, acting as a bridge between technology and faith. AI-powered tools, such as personalised devotion apps and digital Bible study platforms, create new pathways for engagement with scripture and spiritual content (Cheong, 2020: 417). These tools tailor religious teachings to the individual needs and preferences of young believers, helping them connect more deeply with their faith and fostering a stronger sense of community within the church. Through AI-powered tools, Christian youths have access to personalised guidance and support on their spiritual journey, making it more accessible and relatable in today's digital age (Cheong, 2020: 421). This innovative approach not only helps bridge the gap between technology and faith but also addresses the spiritual disconnection that many young believers may be experiencing in the modern world.

Also, some AIs analyse a user's interaction patterns to suggest relevant Bible verses or prayers, fostering a more personalised and meaningful spiritual experience (Bathan & Ramos, 2021: 195). These tools provide reminders for daily devotions and virtual prayer groups and even connect users with mentors or pastors for more in-depth discussions. By integrating AI into the spiritual journey of Christian youths, the church can meet them where they are in their faith, offering support and guidance in a way that is tailored to their individual needs and preferences. This blending of technology and spirituality not only enhances the overall spiritual growth of young believers but also strengthens the sense of community and connection within the church as a whole (Lowe & Lowe, 2018: 33)

Moreover, the rise of virtual communities facilitated by AI can help Christian youths find and engage with faith-based groups around the world, breaking geographical barriers and offering a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals (McFeeters, Hammond & Taylor, 2022: 451). Such communities share insights, prayer requests, and faith experiences, helping young people feel supported in their spiritual journey regardless of where they are located. This digital shift in religious practices allows for a more inclusive and accessible approach to faith, especially for youth who may feel disconnected from traditional forms of worship (Berger, 2017; 11). For example, a Christian youth living in a rural area with limited access to local church groups can join an online community where they can connect with peers from different countries who share their beliefs. Through AI-powered platforms, they can participate in virtual Bible studies, attend online prayer meetings, and receive encouragement and guidance from experienced mentors, all from the comfort of their own homes. This type of virtual community not only fosters a sense of community and support but also provides opportunities for spiritual growth and learning that may not be available in their physical location. Being part of an online religious community allows individuals to engage with a diverse group of people who can offer different perspectives and insights on their faith (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020: 7). This leads to

a deeper understanding of their beliefs and a stronger connection to their spirituality. Technology has provided a unique way for individuals to practice their religion and connect with like-minded individuals, regardless of geographical barriers.

AI technology provides virtual communities that, in turn, also provide personalised resources, events, and discussions that align with each individual's beliefs and interests. This tailored approach helps young Christians deepen their faith and connection to God in a way that is relevant and engaging to them (Peters, van Diggelen, Van Den Bosch, Bronkhorst, Neerincx, Schraagen & Raaijmakers, 2021: 219). The online nature of these communities allows for continuous support and interaction, creating a sense of community that transcends physical boundaries. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, these virtual communities offer a dynamic and innovative way for Christian youths to grow in their faith and connect with others who share their beliefs.

Also, AI-driven chatbots and virtual mentors can provide young Christians with immediate answers to theological questions and moral dilemmas, which may include moral evils that are either caused by a person's intentional behaviour or lack of action other forms of moral evil include murder, war, rape, and so on. This helps to offer guidance aligned with their faith principles (Oyebanji et al, 2024: 2). This creates an environment where spiritual curiosity is encouraged and addressed promptly (Joseph & Olalekan, 2024: 11). Through this technology, Christian youths have access to more dynamic and accessible ways to nurture their faith, inspiring deeper reflection and connection with their beliefs in an increasingly digital age.

Embracing Faith in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In the rapidly evolving landscape of technology, artificial intelligence has become a significant part of daily life, influencing how individuals interact with their beliefs and spirituality (Chen & He, 2024: 1643). For Christian youths, this presents both challenges and opportunities in maintaining and nurturing their faith. Embracing faith in the age of artificial intelligence requires young Christians to integrate their spiritual beliefs with the technological advancements surrounding them. This may involve utilising AI tools to deepen their understanding of scripture, connecting with online communities for spiritual support, and discerning how to navigate the ethical implications of AI in relation to their faith (Alkhouri, 2024: 290)

This fusion can enrich their spiritual journey, as it offers new avenues for exploration and understanding. Digital platforms powered by AI can foster spiritual growth through innovative methods, such as personalised devotionals, online Bible studies, and virtual faith communities connecting believers across the globe (Alkhouri, 2024: 290). AI-driven tools can provide deeper insights into biblical texts, enabling youths to explore scripture vividly and interactively. However, these technologies also raise concerns about privacy, data security, and the potential for manipulation of religious beliefs, which may erode the authenticity of one's spiritual experience.

However, young Christians need to remain discerning and thoughtful as they navigate this intersection of technology and spirituality. AI can sometimes present ideas or values that conflict with the teachings of Christianity, making it essential for youths to ground themselves in their faith and critically assess the content they encounter. Encouraging open dialogues within church communities about the impact of AI on spirituality can help Christian youths understand how to use technology as a tool for enhancing rather than diminishing their relationship with God.

Thematic Analysis: Exploring Key Themes in AI and Christian Youths' Spirituality

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data collected from online sources, including social media posts, blogs, and websites frequented by Christian youths. Four key themes emerged from the analysis: personalisation and accessibility, community building and global connectivity, authenticity and discernment, and ethical considerations.

Theme 1: Personalisation and Accessibility

One of the most prominent themes is the role of AI in personalising spiritual content and enhancing accessibility. AI-powered tools such as personalised devotionals, prayer suggestions, and Bible study plans cater to the individual needs of Christian youths, making religious teachings more relatable and engaging (Dick, 2024: 117; Bathan & Ramos, 2021: 195). For instance, platforms like "You-Version" analyse user interaction patterns to recommend relevant Bible verses or prayers, fostering a tailored spiritual experience (Bathan & Ramos, 2021: 195). This personalisation not only deepens the user's understanding of faith but also strengthens their sense of belonging within the church community. However, this theme also highlights potential drawbacks. The convenience and immediacy of AI-driven religious content may overshadow the communal and traditional aspects of faith practice (Ndhlovu & Shamuyarira, 2024: 7). Youth may find themselves relying more on digital interactions than physical community participation, potentially leading to a more individualistic form of spirituality.

Theme 2: Community Building and Global Connectivity

AI facilitates the creation of virtual communities that transcend geographical barriers, enabling Christian youths to connect with like-minded individuals worldwide (McFeeters, Hammond & Taylor, 2022: 451). Platforms like "Faithlife" and "Christian Forums" provide a space for sharing insights, prayer requests, and faith experiences, fostering a sense of global Christian fellowship (Longkiad, 2024: 129). For example, a young person living in a rural area can join an online Bible study group, receiving support and mentorship from peers across different countries (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020: 7). Despite these benefits, the theme also reveals challenges. The lack of face-to-face interaction in virtual communities may hinder the formation of deep and meaningful relationships (Lowe & Lowe, 2018: 121). Additionally, AI algorithms may perpetuate biases, creating echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse perspectives (Yeneakal, 2019: 113).

Theme 3: Authenticity and Discernment

A recurring concern is the authenticity of AI-mediated spiritual experiences. The digital nature of AI-driven spirituality risks reducing rich, personal faith experiences to data patterns and algorithms, potentially leading to a superficial engagement with faith (Graves, 2017: 337). This shift challenges young believers to critically evaluate the sources of their spiritual guidance and wrestle with the implications of technology in their faith journey (Joseph & Olalekan, 2024: 39). Furthermore, the overwhelming presence of AI-generated content can make it difficult for youths to discern authentic teachings from misleading ideologies (Singler, 2020: 949). This challenge underscores the importance of equipping Christian youths with the skills to navigate digital spaces thoughtfully and critically.

Theme 4: Ethical Considerations

The integration of AI into spiritual practices raises several ethical concerns. Privacy and data security are significant issues, as AI systems often collect and process vast amounts of personal information (Alkhouri, 2024: 290). Additionally, the potential for manipulation and misinformation poses risks to spiritual well-being. For example, AI algorithms may prioritise provocative or sensational content that conflicts with Christian values (La Cruz & Mora, 2024: 234). Moreover, excessive exposure to AI-generated content has been linked to mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Kim et al., 2023: 23). These findings highlight the need for Christian leaders to address the ethical implications of AI and promote balanced engagement with technology.

Critical Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal a complex relationship between AI and Christian youths' spirituality, characterised by both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, AI offers innovative ways to deepen spiritual growth and foster community connections. Personalised devotionals, virtual prayer groups, and global online communities provide accessible avenues for youths to explore and express their faith (Cheong, 2020: 417). These tools align with the principles of technological determinism, demonstrating how AI can reshape spiritual practices and enhance accessibility.

On the other hand, the findings underscore significant challenges. The algorithmic nature of AI-driven content risks creating shallow and individualistic forms of spirituality, undermining the communal and traditional aspects of faith practice (Ndhlovu & Shamuyarira, 2024: 7). Echo chambers and biases further limit exposure to diverse perspectives, hindering critical engagement and spiritual growth (Yeneakal, 2019: 113). These concerns resonate with symbolic interactionism, highlighting the importance of meaning-making and discernment in digital spaces.

Ethical considerations also emerge as a critical issue. Privacy, data security, and the potential for manipulation pose significant risks to spiritual wellbeing (Alkhouri, 2024: 290). Mental health concerns linked to excessive AI exposure further complicate the relationship between technology and spirituality (Kim et al., 2023: 23). These findings call for proactive

measures to address the ethical implications of AI and ensure that technology enhances rather than diminishes spiritual experiences.

Conclusion

This study explores the complex relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the spirituality of Christian youths, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. AI can enhance spiritual experiences by providing personalised content, facilitating online communities, and offering support in navigating modern life. However, concerns arise from information overload, misinformation, and the potential erosion of traditional spiritual authorities, as well as the unrealistic expectations created by human-like AI interactions. The future of Christian spirituality among youths will depend on the church's adaptability to technology, requiring collaboration among leaders, parents, and educators to promote responsible AI use, critical thinking, and effective integration of AI in spiritual practices to enrich faith rather than diminish it.

Recommendations

In recognition of the possible threats and dangers of AI to church spirituality, this study makes the following recommendations:

1. Christian bodies should seek to enlighten their members in the knowledge of artificial intelligence and its current deployments in the world. This will give Christians an insight into what to expect now and in the coming years and how to respond to it.
2. The church should not narrow AI as an instrument of eschatological doom but merely as a tool that can be taken advantage of, based on its benefits and despite its threats.
3. The church should devise strategies and means to combat the threats of AI (as identified in the study) if it were further introduced to the church for usage.
4. Churches should introduce their teens and youths to more seminars, conferences, and evangelical campaigns. This may help them cultivate a deeper sense of meaning and relationship with God.
5. More studies and research should be carried out concerning artificial intelligence and church spirituality in consecutive times to map out more merits and demerits of AI, as well as possible solutions to its threats and preserving the spirituality of the church.

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