



# Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen (JUPAK)

Vol. 6 No. 2 (June 2026) p. 19-28

Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen (JUPAK)

e-ISSN 2775-4006

<https://ejurnal.sttkadesiyogyakarta.ac.id/index.php/jupak>

p-ISSN 2774-9355



<https://doi.org/10.52489/jupak.v6i2.355>

## Teachers' Strategies for Shaping the Character of Generation Z Amidst an Instant-Grind Culture: A Case Study of Christian Students in Indonesia

**Santiyani Debrina Lekalong**

*Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Paulus Medan, [debielekalong@gmail.com](mailto:debielekalong@gmail.com)*

### Recommended Citation

Turabian 8<sup>th</sup> edition (full note)

Santiyani Debrina Lekalong. "Teachers' Strategies for Shaping the Character of Generation Z Amidst an Instant-Grind Culture: A Case Study of Christian Students in Indonesia". *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen (JUPAK)* 6, no. 2 (June 04, 2026): 19-28, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.52489/jupak.v6i2.355>

American Psychological Association 7<sup>th</sup> edition

(Lekalong, 2026, p. 19)

Received: 27 April 2026	Accepted: 26 May 2026	Published: 04 June 2026
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For more information, please contact [debielekalong@gmail.com](mailto:debielekalong@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This study explores how popular culture influences Generation Z's understanding of Christian values, a generation raised in the digital age with unlimited information access. Generation Z possesses unique traits, including strong technological skills, multitasking abilities, and quick reactions to social issues. However, they also tend to be individualistic, less independent, and have limited social skills. Popular culture, heavily influenced by mass media and digital trends, significantly shapes the identity and values of Generation Z. This culture often promotes individualism, materialism, and hedonism, which conflict with Christian values like love, humility, and service. Consequently, Generation Z may struggle to understand and apply Christian values in their lives. The study employs a literature review method to gather information from various sources regarding the impact of popular culture on Generation Z's grasp of Christian values. Findings suggest that popular culture can obscure their understanding of these values, leading them to prefer spectacular and emotional spiritual experiences over a deeper understanding of doctrine. Therefore, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a crucial role in assisting Generation Z in comprehending and embodying Christian values. PAK must adopt relevant and engaging strategies, utilizing digital media and interactive learning methods. Additionally, it should foster critical thinking skills, enabling Generation Z to differentiate between Christian values and those that conflict with them.

**Keywords :** Christian Values, Generation Z, Popular Culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, is a group distinct from previous generations. They have grown up in a fast-paced digital age and have extensive access to information. Furthermore, they are also a key part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Whilst technological advancements and the availability of information bring many conveniences, they also present moral challenges. Generation Z tends to experience a decline in moral values influenced by popular culture and social media, which often highlight a consumerist and glamorous lifestyle (Frastati, 2024).

Today, they make up the majority of Indonesia's population. Having been exposed to technology from birth, they have great potential to become a high-calibre workforce. However, their distinctive traits, such as individualism and a tendency towards self-centredness, can pose challenges in terms of cooperation and social interaction. Furthermore, the strong influence of popular culture can obscure their understanding of Christian values, which are rooted in the teachings of the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ (Hamatara, 2018).

It is therefore important to understand the characteristics of Generation Z, the influence of popular culture on them, and how Christian values can serve as a guide in facing the challenges of the modern age. Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a vital role in helping Generation Z to become more critical, to distinguish between right and wrong, and to integrate Christian principles into their daily lives.

## METHOD

This study employs a literature review method to gather information from various sources on the influence of popular culture on Generation Z's understanding of Christian values. The literature review was conducted to analyse various studies, articles and relevant sources that discuss the influence of popular culture on Generation Z's understanding of Christian values.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Understanding Generation Z

Playing a key role in driving change in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The characteristics that have emerged in this digital environment give rise to different patterns of behaviour and present moral challenges. Several studies suggest that Generation Z tends to experience a decline in moral standards, influenced by social media which often promotes a consumerist and glamorous lifestyle, where values such as financial success and popularity are prioritised over personal integrity or social contribution (Frastati, 2024).

Thus, it can be concluded that Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is a dominant group in Indonesia with great potential to become excellent human resources in realising the country's progress. Known for their ability to use technology, multitask, and respond to social issues, they also face moral challenges caused by the influence of social media and consumer culture. With these unique characteristics, Generation Z plays a crucial role in the changes occurring in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, making the understanding and development of positive values essential to directing their potential towards a more constructive path.

Generation Z has distinctive characteristics that set it apart from previous generations, although variations can be influenced by the context of the country and culture. In general, this generation is known for being highly tech-savvy and having a high level of ambition, with most of its members having entered the workforce or pursuing higher education. They also tend to be more daring in taking risks compared to the millennial generation, but on the other hand, they show a relatively lower level of independence, thus still needing support from their surroundings. In addition, Generation Z has a strong need to connect socially through digital communication, which results in a relatively high intensity of online interactions. However, this condition also affects direct social skills, such as listening ability, participating in conversations, as well as managing conflicts and problem-solving, which tend to be less developed. However, they show a preference for working independently, which becomes one of the distinguishing characteristics compared to the millennial generation (Sawitri, 2021).

One of the characteristics of Generation Z is their focus on themselves and difficulty in collaborating with others. They often disguise their individualism as a form of independence and ambition. The culture of individualism has become a dominant characteristic among Generation Z, where they tend to prioritise themselves more than previous generations. This may be due to their growth amidst technological advancements that enable instant connections with the world. They are often given the freedom to explore

personal interests and aspirations. One aspect that reflects this individualism is their tendency to prioritise independence and freedom in decision-making (Wulur et al. 2024).

Common characteristics of decadent behaviour observed in Generation Z include the influence of instant culture and a lack of commitment to long-term values. One striking example is their habit of pursuing popularity on social media through shallow or controversial content, in order to gain attention and recognition from others. This often sacrifices aspects of morality, where ethics and responsibility in communication or interaction are frequently overlooked. Moreover, the phenomenon of "cancel culture" prevalent among Generation Z reflects a tendency to judge others quickly and without in-depth analysis, which may indicate a weakening of empathy and a broader understanding of differing opinions or behaviours (Frastati 2024).

Generation Z is often associated with an increasing individualistic attitude, which places emphasis on personal achievement and individual freedom. Although this attitude can encourage independence and innovation, there is a risk that responsibility towards society and community is neglected. In many situations, the moral decline of this generation is not merely a violation of conventional values, but also a rejection of norms that are considered to hinder individual freedom, including in terms of opinions and behaviour. The way people see themselves and their principles shows how the culture of individualism influences them. Generation Z is encouraged by this culture to explore their personal identities, identify their own interests and talents, and pursue happiness according to their own preferences. This shows that people have the autonomy and freedom to determine their own lives. They tend to seek freedom in decision-making, including in matters of religion and spirituality, by establishing their beliefs based on their personal understanding and experiences (Hikma et al., 2024).

Generation Z is often associated with an increasing individualistic attitude, which places emphasis on personal achievement and individual freedom. Although this attitude can encourage independence and innovation, there is a risk that responsibility towards society and community is neglected. In many situations, the moral decline of this generation is not merely a violation of conventional values, but also a rejection of norms that are considered to hinder individual freedom, including in terms of opinions and behaviour. The way people see themselves and their principles shows how the culture of individualism influences them. Generation Z is encouraged by this culture to explore their personal identities, identify their own interests and talents, and pursue happiness according to their own preferences. This shows that people have the autonomy and freedom to determine their own lives. They tend to seek freedom in decision-making, including in matters of religion and spirituality, by establishing their beliefs based on their personal understanding and experiences (Hikma et al., 2024).

## **Popular Culture in Christian Values**

Culture can be defined as a process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development. Furthermore, culture also reflects the "worldview" of a particular society, period, or group. The term "pop" comes from the word "popular," and popular culture is understood as a commercial culture that is powerless, a product consumed en masse. This makes pop culture

a package of "lifestyle ideology" that encourages society to continuously consume luxury products in the current industrial era. According to Raymond Williams, there are four criteria for defining popular culture based on the meaning of the word "popular," namely: (1) widely liked by people; (2) a type of low art; (3) created to please people; and (4) culture created by people for themselves (Lola, 2019).

The term "popular culture" (culture popular) in Latin literally means "the culture of the people" or society. This explains why many cultural scholars view lived culture and various cultural artefacts found in the daily lives of most people. Hebdige provides an example by considering popular culture as a collection of artefacts, such as films, tapes, television shows, transportation, clothing, and others. Pop culture is always changing and emerging in unique ways in different places and times. With globalisation, pop culture offers something new to Indonesian society. The high curiosity within humans is the main factor that makes urban society adopt a consumerist attitude. Pop culture poses a threat to the strengthening of national identity in urban communities, especially among teenagers, because it can erode traditional reference frameworks such as ethnicity, religion, tribe, culture, and national values. In today's modern society, popular culture has become an important part, and mass media plays a significant role in shaping and influencing this culture (Susanti et al. 2024).

Whereas in Christian Religious Education, it is an important aspect of every Christian individual's experience, rooted in the belief that God is the primary source of knowledge and truth. The focus of this education is not only on the understanding of God but also on the application of that belief in everyday life. CRE is organised with an orientation towards Christian values, so all learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom, take place in the school, church, or home environment, and are based on Christian teachings. The main goal is to help individuals grow spiritually, follow and obey Jesus Christ, and develop good moral qualities. Building character from an early age can help someone become intelligent, competitive, resilient, patient, cooperative, ethical, and hard-working. In addition, this education also emphasises the values of Pancasila, such as love for the homeland, prioritising science and technology, as well as faith and obedience to God Almighty. Thus, Christian Religious Education plays an important role in shaping individual character through the teaching of values such as integrity, discipline, responsibility, hard work, and respect (Hamatara, 2018).

In the life of Christian faith, Christian values contain moral messages related to spirituality and wisdom. One of the important values that need to be applied in daily life is the value of religiosity. When we discuss Christian values, we refer to Galatians 5:22-23, which describes the fruit of the Spirit that forms the foundation of spiritual and ethical character. This verse explains the values that were also taught by Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Paul clarifies these values according to Jesus' teachings.

Applying Christian values in daily life not only helps individuals draw closer to God but also strengthens relationships with others and creates a better society. Values such as love, forgiveness, humility, justice, and integrity serve as important guidelines in facing the challenges of modern times. By embodying and applying these values, every Christian can make a significant positive impact, both for themselves and for their community and

surroundings. Therefore, it is very important for each individual to actively strive to apply the teachings of Christ in their daily actions (Berutu et al, 2024).

## **The Challenges of Christian Religious Education in Facing the Influence of Popular Culture**

Christian Religious Education in the current era of moral crisis faces various complex challenges. Some of these include the influence of secular culture, technological advancements, identity crises, peer pressure, minimal church involvement, as well as mental and emotional issues, and a lack of understanding of the Bible. To address the moral crisis among teenagers, Christian education must develop responsive and relevant strategies. Currently, Christian religious education is facing various challenges involving technological dynamics, religious pluralism, moral changes, and the influence of popular culture (Andrian, 2024).

Christian Religious Education currently has to face the individualistic attitudes that are developing among teenagers. This attitude reflects a life orientation that is more focused on personal interests, self-exploration, and individual freedom. When this individualistic attitude becomes excessive, a view of moral relativism may emerge, where teenagers see values as something relative and dependent on each individual's perspective. This can lead to difficulties in establishing objective moral standards. To address this challenge, Christian Religious Education needs to develop a learning approach that can accommodate individualistic attitudes while still emphasising the importance of objective moral values. Strategies such as character building, the development of empathy, and the teaching of Christian values relevant to daily life can help mitigate the impact of such individualistic attitudes (Desvi et al, 2024).

Christian Religious Education (CRE) faces many challenges due to the strong influence of popular culture on Generation Z. Mass media and digital trends, which often dominate popular culture, offer worldviews that may conflict with Christian principles. Generation Z grows up in this environment and is exposed to various lifestyles and ideologies that can blur their understanding of their identity and faith as Christians. How can Christian Religious Education (CRE) remain relevant and appealing to Generation Z, who are accustomed to fast and dynamic digital content, is one of the main challenges. Traditional teaching centred on lectures and memorisation may no longer capture students' attention. Furthermore, individualistic, materialistic, and hedonistic lifestyles are often seen in popular culture. This can disrupt Christian values such as love, service, and humility (Mambu, 2014).

Another challenge is how CRE can help Generation Z develop critical thinking and the ability to distinguish between Christian values and conflicting values. Generation Z needs to be equipped with a strong understanding of their faith so that they are not easily influenced by popular culture. This requires a CRE approach that not only focuses on teaching doctrine but also on character formation and deep spiritual development. In addition, CRE must face the challenge of using digital media wisely. Social media, for example, can be an effective tool for spreading Christian messages, but it can also present misleading information and inappropriate content. Therefore, CRE needs to help Generation Z develop digital media literacy and the ability to use social media responsibly. Finally, CRE must collaborate with

families and church communities to create an environment that supports the formation of Generation Z's Christian identity. Consistency between the values taught in the church, home, and social environment is crucial to help Generation Z understand and apply their faith in daily life (Frastati, 2024).

### **The Influence of Popular Culture on the Understanding of Christian Values for Generation Z**

Culture is fundamentally a good thing because it is a gift from God to humans created in His divine image. However, culture often goes against God's will after humanity fell into sin. Christian values are beginning to be neglected in society due to the influence of popular culture. Many Christians prioritise spiritual experiences that are considered extraordinary, such as the ability to communicate with spirits. They also choose shallower teachings about the principles of Christian faith rather than deeper ones. Religious practices became entirely practical, and Christians were more likely to acknowledge God's sovereignty only when their prayers were fulfilled. Moreover, the church is increasingly able to accept bad behaviour, with some even focusing on the accumulation of wealth. The focus of Christian ideology has shifted from theocentric to anthropocentric and from theological to pragmatic in popular culture. In popular culture, Christianity has become merely a sensation, not a profound identity (Susanti et al. 2024).

The influence of popular culture on the understanding of Christian values among Generation Z is a complex phenomenon, involving various social and cultural aspects. Popular culture, defined as the worldview and cultural artefacts widely consumed by society, has a significant power in shaping the identity and values of the younger generation, including Generation Z. This generation, which grew up in the digital era with unlimited access to information and entertainment, is highly susceptible to the influence of popular culture that often contradicts Christian values. Popular culture, driven by mass media and the entertainment industry, often promotes an individualistic, materialistic, and hedonistic lifestyle. Values such as material success, physical appearance, and instant gratification become priorities, while Christian values like humility, service, and love are often ignored or belittled. Generation Z, who are exposed to these messages from an early age, may struggle to understand and apply Christian values in their lives. Moreover, popular culture often presents a secular and relativistic worldview, which contradicts Christian beliefs about absolute truth and divine authority. Generation Z, accustomed to a plurality of views and values, may find it difficult to understand and accept Christian teachings that are considered exclusive and dogmatic, and question the relevance of Christian values in the fast-paced and complex modern world (Istiqomah and Widiyanto 2020).

Christian values, rooted in the teachings of the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ, play an important role in shaping a person's identity and character, especially among Generation Z living amidst the dominance of popular culture. These values are not just theological doctrines, but also practical guidelines for living a meaningful and positively impactful life. One of the core Christian values is love, which is manifested in respecting and caring for others, regardless of their background or social status. This love is not merely an emotional feeling, but also a commitment to serve and sacrifice for others, as exemplified by

Jesus Christ. In addition to love, other Christian values include joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These values, known as the fruits of the Spirit, shape a strong spiritual and ethical character, helping individuals face life's challenges wisely and responsibly (Hamatara 2018).

The value of religiosity, which emphasises a personal relationship with God, is also an important component of Christian values. Religiosity is not just about ritual practices, but also about deep spiritual experiences that influence every aspect of life. In the context of Generation Z, Christian values can serve as a moral compass that guides them in facing the influences of popular culture. These values help them develop critical thinking, distinguish between right and wrong, and make wise decisions. However, the application of Christian values in daily life is not always easy, especially amidst the strong pressures of popular culture. Generation Z needs to learn to integrate Christian values with their identity as unique and relevant individuals in the modern world (Susanti et al. 2024).

The influence of popular culture can also affect the religious practices of Generation Z. They might be more interested in spectacular and emotional spiritual experiences rather than deep doctrinal understanding and theological reflection. This leads to religious practices becoming more practical and superficial, with a focus on personal benefits and instant gratification. Moreover, popular culture can blur the Christian identity of Generation Z. They might view Christianity merely as one lifestyle choice among many others, rather than as a profound and comprehensive identity that influences every aspect of their lives. They often find it difficult to integrate their Christian identity with their identity as members of Generation Z, who are digitally connected and influenced by popular culture. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) faces a significant challenge in helping Generation Z understand and apply Christian values. CRE needs to develop relevant and engaging approaches for Generation Z, using digital media and interactive learning methods. Additionally, CRE must also help Generation Z develop critical thinking skills and the ability to distinguish between Christian values and conflicting values (Hijrah, M., Cahyani, W. S., & Sakka 2023).

## CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to understand how popular culture influences the understanding of Christian values by Generation Z. With unlimited access to information and entertainment, the generation growing up in the current digital era is very vulnerable to the influence of popular culture, which often contradicts Christian faith. The media and entertainment industry push popular culture towards materialism, individualism, and hedonism. While Christian values such as love, humility, and service are often neglected, values like material success, physical appearance, and instant gratification take precedence. Generation Z, who have been exposed to these messages from an early age, may find it difficult to understand and apply Christian principles in their lives. Spectacular and emotional spiritual experiences are more appealing to them than a deep understanding of doctrine. Religious practices have become more pragmatic and superficial, centred around personal gain and quick happiness. Generation Z might see Christianity merely as an additional lifestyle choice rather than a profound identity that influences their entire lives, as popular culture does. As members of Generation Z who are digitally connected, they may find it difficult to identify themselves as

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Christians. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) faces a significant challenge in helping Generation Z understand and apply Christian values. CRE needs to develop relevant and engaging approaches, using digital media and interactive learning methods. Additionally, Christian Religious Education (CRE) must help Generation Z develop critical thinking and the ability to distinguish between Christian values and conflicting values. Families and church communities also play an important role in supporting the formation of Christian values among Generation Z. Consistency between the values taught in church, home, and social environments is crucial to help them understand and apply their faith in daily life. By understanding and applying Christian values, Generation Z can become positive agents of change in society, making a good impact on themselves, their communities, and the world.

## BIODATA



Santiyani Debrina Lekalong, S.Ag Born in Morba on September 11, 2000. She completed her undergraduate degree at STT BMW Medan in 2024 and is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree at STT PAULUS Medan. In addition to writing books and articles, I am also involved in church ministry as a youth mentor and in mass worship services.

## Santiyani Debrina Lekalong, S.Ag

Surel: [debielekalong@gmail.com](mailto:debielekalong@gmail.com)

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