

EXPLORING GENERATION Z'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELEVANCE OF THE GREAT MANDATE

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Received 02 September 2024 | Revised 15 October 2024 | Accepted 7 November 2024

doi: 10.63895/ij30321271.2025.v2.i1.pp01-07

Abstract

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) faces significant challenges in the context of generation Z. This study aims to examine the perceptions of Christian students regarding the relevance of the great commission in the generation Z environment. A survey was conducted among 101 Christian students aged 18-24. The data was collected using a questionnaire with three indicators of the perception of the great commission's relevance: understanding, application, and influence. Each indicator consists of ten questions with four options in the form of a Likert scale. The results indicated that there was a stronger understanding of the great commission than its application and influence in Gen Z's life. The study's findings indicated that while there was a robust theological grasp of the great commission, the primary challenge lies in its practical implementation to enhance its influence on Gen Z. To address this challenge, churches and educational institutions must adapt to the digital lifestyle of Gen Z.

Keywords: Great Commission; Generation Z; Church; Matthew 28:19-20.

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How to cite: Lumbantoruan, S. P. M. & Aruan, G. L. P. (2025). Exploring generation Z's perceptions of the relevance of the great mandate. *International Journal of Education, Humaniora, and Social Studies*, 2(1), 01-07.

Introduction

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20 contains the main mandate for every follower of Christ to preach the gospel, make disciples, and bring the nations to become disciples of Christ. This commandment is not only the core of Christianity's mission but also a strategic guideline for church ministry across generations (Sostenis Nggebu, Fenius Gulo 2023). In this context, the church has a great responsibility to ensure that every member understands and implements the Great Commission in their lives. However, with the emergence of the Gen Z generation, who live amidst the digital revolution and global culture, the church faces new challenges in bridging the relevance of the Great Commission to the spiritual needs of this generation (Gultom, 2022).

The Z generation, born between 1997 and 2012, is known as the digital-native generation that grew up in an era of information openness and rapid technological development. Their characteristics, which tend to be individualistic, critical of institutions, and prioritize personal experience, often confront the traditional approach of the church in delivering the gospel message. Research by Barna group (2018) shows that today's younger generation is more critical of institutional churches, prefers digital platforms as the main channel to explore faith, and has a more pluralistic view of religion (Boss, 2022). On the other hand, the Pew Research Center revealed that while Gen Z shows openness to spirituality, they often feel the church lacks relevance to the challenges

and issues they face. This creates an urgent need for churches and education to evaluate how students understand the relevance of the Great Commission in the context of Gen Z (Penny Rue, 2018; Tyson, et al. 2021).

This study focuses on analyzing Christian university students' perceptions of the relevance of the Great Commission in the context of the Gen Z generation. This study was conducted at a state university in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, which has a diverse group of Christian students in terms of age and background. The research method was conducted through a qualitative approach with a survey method using a questionnaire. The study was conducted in 2024, by placing a focus on how the perception of students as Gen Z understands, lives, and implements the Great Commission.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its in-depth exploration of the perceptions of Christian university students, which has not been widely studied in the context of the Gen Z generation. Previous studies have mostly highlighted young people's individual perceptions of the church or their relationship with spirituality. Research (Smith, 2022) shows that the younger generation has a tendency to prefer a personal approach to faith rather than being tied to church rituals and institutions. Many churches have difficulty reaching Gen Z due to different values and communication approaches, which are often perceived as irrelevant by this generation (Purwanto 2023; Cavett & Beach, 2024). Research Hia (2023) reveals that

church ministries that successfully reach Gen Z often involve digital platforms and community-based strategies.

However, the study did not specifically relate these findings to church members' perceptions of theological mandates such as the Great Commission. On the other hand, the results showed that although the younger generation has an interest in understanding their faith, they feel that the lack of open dialog within the church is an obstacle to being more actively involved (Pranoto, 2019). Research Nel (2019) stated that the congregation's collective perception of ecclesial mandates, such as the Great Commission, can influence the effectiveness of ministry programs to the younger generation.

However, this study focuses more on the administrative aspects of the church than on the deep theological dimension. Churches that adapt their theological approach to the cultural context of the younger generation succeed in increasing the engagement of congregation members across generations. This study adds a new dimension by exploring how university students as a whole perceive the relevance of the Great Commission in reaching and discipling the Z generation.

Thus, this study not only fills a gap in literature but also offers practical insights for churches to design ministry strategies that are contextual and relevant to today's generation. Different from previous studies, this research combines theological and social approaches to understand the congregation's perceptions holistically, providing a firmer foundation for designing a Great Commission-centered mission strategy in the Gen Z context.

The purpose of this study is to understand christian university students' perceptions of the relevance of the Great Commission and how the church and the world of education can effectively respond to the challenges of the Z generation. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of church services and the world of education, especially in presenting the Great Commission as a message that is relevant, transformative, and applicable in the lives of the Z generation.

The Great Commission in the Bible

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is at the heart of the mission of Christianity that Jesus directly commissioned to His disciples. In this command, Jesus mandated the disciples to “go” to all nations, “baptize” in the name of the Trinity, and “teach” them to obey His commands. Cho (2021) mentions that the Great Commission has a universal element, emphasizing that the gospel message must cross cultural, geographical, and social boundaries. This element not only shows the scope of the Great Commission but also emphasizes the importance of

gospel delivery as a mission that involves all followers of Christ.

The theological dimension of the Great Commission focuses not only on spreading the gospel but also on discipleship, which is building the character of Christ in believers. (Hutagalung, 2020; Hartono, 2018) emphasizes that discipleship is at the core of the Great Commission, which is not just about teaching doctrine, but also involves life transformation through teaching, example, and love. In this sense, the Great Commission serves as the church's collective calling to create communities that reflect the values of Christ.

In addition, the Great Commission includes social responsibility as a form of love for others. This interpretation is reinforced by (Cho, 2021), who points out that the Great Commission is not only oriented towards spiritual transformation but also brings real impact in society through the service of love, justice, and concern for social needs. Thus, the Great Commission provides a theological basis for holistic ministry that spans spiritual, moral, and social aspects.

Generation Z

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation to fully embrace the digital revolution. They are known as “digital natives” who have had unlimited access to technology and information from an early age. These characteristics shape Gen Z's personality very differently from previous generations, with values such as practicality, pluralism, and a tendency towards individualism (Cavett & Beach, 2024). In their daily lives, technology is not just a tool but an integral part of their identity.

Socially, Gen Z faces different challenges, including mental stress due to high social expectations and constant exposure to social media. These pressures affect how they view life, including spirituality (Boss, 2022). They are more critical of religious institutions but still seek meaning and direction through personal exploration of faith. This study shows that this generation has great potential to thrive in spirituality if approached in a relevant and contextualized way.

However, Gen Z's openness to spiritual values is often limited by the intergenerational gap in church communication and approach. Gen Z feels that the church lacks responsiveness to issues they consider important, such as social justice, environmental sustainability and inclusion (Boss, 2022). The church is therefore faced with the

challenge of understanding the needs and values of Gen Z if it is to effectively engage them in the church ministry.

The Great Commission in generation Z christian thought

For Generation Z Christians, the Great Commission is often understood as a difficult task to implement in the context of modern life (Purwanto, 2023). Smith (2022) found that most Gen Zs feel that traditional evangelism is less relevant in the digital culture they live in. They tend to avoid confrontational approaches, preferring relational and dialog-based ways to share their faith.

However, when churches provide relevant digital tools, such as social media platforms or interactive apps, their engagement increases significantly. Research by Lisaldy et al. (2023) and Priyono & Silalahi (2025) showed that the use of digital technology as a missional tool can bridge the gap between generations and enable Gen Z to live out the Great Commission in a culturally appropriate way. This suggests that church ministry strategies should adapt to the media and approaches familiar to this generation. Generation Z connects more easily with the Great Commission if churches integrate global issues relevant to them, such as environmental sustainability and social justice, into the mission message (Hartono, 2018). Thus, they not only see the Great Commission as a theological duty but also as a call to create real impact in their world. Therefore, a contextually relevant approach is essential in delivering the Great Commission to this generation.

Methods

This research method was a survey using a questionnaire. Data was collected from 101 students as respondents using Google Forms, which was conducted within two days. The questionnaire consists of three indicators, namely: understanding of the Great Commission, the application of the Great Commission in the Gen Z Era, and the influence of the Great Commission on life. Each indicator consists of 10 questions, with four answer options on a Likert scale, namely: strongly agree (SS), agree (ST), disagree (TS), and strongly disagree (STS). The data is presented in the form of a percentage of the total score by giving the answer score strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. The presentation of data was carried out descriptively in the form of quantitative data on the percentage of respondents' answer scores. Data analysis uses descriptive qualitative data analysis, by describing the percentage of answer scores on each indicator.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are described based on three indicators of the relevance of the Great Commission in the

life of Gen Z, namely: understanding of the Great Commission, the application of the Great Commission in the Gen Z Era, and the influence of the Great Commission on Life.

Description of Great Commission understanding

The percentage score of the Great Commission understanding data (indicator 1) is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Gen Z's perception of great commission understanding.

Question number	Respondent Answer Score (%)			
	SA	A	DA	SD
1	65.30	36.60	1	0
2	55.49	43.60	1	0
3	69.39	29.70	1	0
4	47.50	51.50	2	0
5	61.40	37.60	1	0
6	60.40	41.60	1	0
7	41.60	55.49	4	0
8	59.00	37.60	5	0
9	64.40	36.60	0	0
10	69.39	31.70	0	0
Average	59.39	40.19	1.6	0

From Table 1, the average score of respondents is 59.39% for “Strongly Agree” (SA), 40.19% for “Agree” (A), 1.6% for “Disagree” (DA), and 0% for “Strongly Disagree” (SD). This data shows that the majority of respondents showed a good understanding of the Great Commission, with 99.58% of the SA and SD categories combined. The highest SA score was recorded in question number 3 “The Great Commission is the responsibility of every individual Christian” and question number 10 “I believe the Great Commission requires concrete action from the congregation, including myself” at (69.39%), while the highest ST score was in question number 7 “The Great Commission remains relevant amidst modern challenges such as individualism” at (55.49%).

Generation Z Christians tend to have a high interest in mission-related issues, especially if they are delivered through narrative-based approaches or digital media (Hartono, 2018). This supports the high “Strongly Agree” scores on questions related to understanding the Great Commission. Smith's (2022) research also shows that young people have a good understanding of the spiritual mandate if it is introduced through direct involvement in the service community.

The high score in the Strongly Agree (SA) category (59.39%) indicates the church's success in building this understanding through participatory approaches.

However, the study (Toding & Selvi, 2023) highlights that while Generation Z has a good theoretical understanding of religious values, practical implementation is often a challenge. This is reflected in the Agree (A) score (40.19%), which indicates that some respondents may understand the Great Commission at a cognitive level but have not fully internalized it in their daily lives. Generation Z has a more individualistic spiritual understanding than previous generations (Wulur *et al.*, 2024). Although their understanding of the Great Commission is high, they tend to relate it to personally relevant values, such as social justice or environmental sustainability, rather than as a collective mission.

Description of the implementation of the Great Commission in the Gen Z era

The percentage score of the data on the Application of the Great Commission in the Gen Z Era (indicator 2) is described in Table 2.

Table 2. Description of data on perceptions of the application of the great commission in the Gen Z era

Question number	Respondent Answer Score (%)			
	SA	A	DA	SD
11	46.50	50.50	4	0
12	27.70	57.42	15.58	0
13	39.60	58.41	4	0
14	38.60	60.40	2	0
15	38.60	59.40	4	0
16	40.60	53.50	6.90	0
17	27.70	60.40	11.90	1
18	29.70	66.30	5.90	0
19	27.70	64.40	7.90	0
20	57.42	43.6	1	0
Average	37.41	57.43	6.32	0

From Table 2, the average score of respondents is 37.41% for “Strongly Agree” (SA), 57.43% for “Agree” (A), 6.32% for “Disagree” (DA), and 0% for “Strongly Disagree” (SD). This data shows that the majority of respondents feel that the application of the Great Commission in the Gen Z era is still relevant (Strongly Agree and Agree combined: 94.84%), although the percentage of “Strongly Agree” is lower than “Agree” question 20 “The church should play an active role in guiding Gen Z to understand and implement the Great Commission” showed the highest score for “Strongly Agree” (57.42%), while question 12 “Gen Z generation can understand the Great Commission well through social media” had the highest score for “Disagree” (15.58%). This finding may reflect that some respondents feel the church has not been fully effective in implementing the Great Commission in the digital era. The average score of the TS category (6.32%) indicates that there are a handful

of respondents who feel that the implementation of the Great Commission is less effective in the context of Generation Z.

Research performed by Smith (2022) showed that the values of mission and discipleship are still relevant among Generation Z, especially when churches use approaches that are relevant to their cultural context. According to Waruwu & Lawalata (2023) and Bosch (2011) the application of the Great Commission must be adapted to the changing cultural and social context. The high score of “Agree” indicates that congregants may see the relevance of the Great Commission when churches use approaches that fit the Generation Z mindset, such as the use of digital media or the delivery of messages with globally relevant themes. Other research by Hartono (2018) and Lisaldy *et al.*, (2023) revealed that Generation Z tends to judge the relevance of spiritual values based on how the teachings are applied in concrete actions, such as social justice, community service, and the use of technology. This explains the high percentage of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree,” as the church may have successfully translated the Great Commission into concrete actions that are relevant to this generation. Some Generation Z tend to be skeptical of religious institutions that fail to adapt to modern needs and mindsets (Mandala, *et al.*, 2024).

Description of the effect of the Great Commission on life

The percentage score of the data on the Effect of the Great Commission on Life (indicator 3) is described in Table 3.

Table 3. Description of data on perceptions of the effect of the great commission on life

Question number	Respondent Answer Score (%)			
	SA	A	DA	SD
21	48.5	50.50	2	1
22	59.4	39.60	1	0
23	61.4	37.60	1	0
24	52.5	47.50	2	0
25	54.5	44.60	1	0
26	55.49	43.60	1	0
27	58.41	41.60	2	1
28	57.42	41.60	3	0
29	54.50	42.60	4	0
30	44.00	56.00	1	0
Average	54.61	44.52	1.80	0.10

Based on Table 3, the average score of respondents' answers shows the following distribution of perceptions: 54.61% chose “Strongly Agree” (SA), 44.52% chose “Agree” (A), 1.8% chose “Disagree” (DA), and only 0.1% chose “Strongly Disagree” (SD). The high “SA” and “A” scores reflect that the majority of respondents have a positive view of the influence of the Great Commission in

their lives. The highest response for "Strongly Agree" was seen in question number 23 "The Great Commission helps me understand the importance of living as a witness for Christ" at (61.4%), while the highest response for "Agree" was seen in question number 30 "I feel called to be part of global missions in accordance with the Great Commission" at (56%). In contrast, the values for "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" were very small, with a combined total of less than 2%. This indicates that only a small percentage of respondents feel that the Great Commission is not relevant or impactful in their lives.

The high percentages in the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories indicate that the Great Commission is considered a relevant and influential guide in the daily lives of the congregation. This result is consistent with research (Hartono, 2018; Wulur *et al.*, 2024; Waruwu & Lawalata, 2023) which states that the majority of young Christians still see significant spiritual value in the Great Commission when integrated into the context of modern life. This study also shows that a community-based approach and active involvement in the church strengthen this perception. The theory of spiritual transformation (Masinambow & Nasrani, 2021; Toding & Selvi, 2023) states that deep spiritual experiences, such as understanding the Great Commission, can change a person's perspective and actions. In the context of this study, the high scores in the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories indicate that the Great Commission has become an integral part of the respondents' mindset and actions.

Generation Z is known as a generation that seeks immediate relevance in religious teachings, including the values contained in the Great Commission (Tyson *et al.*, 2021). The high percentage of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses in the data indicate that the Great Commission continues to have a spiritual appeal to them. This may be because the Great Commission offers practical guidance that can be applied in everyday life, such as building interpersonal relationships and making positive contributions to society. However, Generation Z also tends to judge the relevance of religious teachings based on how those values align with modern world challenges, such as social justice, sustainability, and equality (Tyson *et al.*, 2021; Boss, 2022). This suggests that the congregation's positive perception of the Great Commission, especially among the younger generation, may be supported by the church's efforts to convey the message of the Great Commission in a relevant context.

Generation Z often prioritizes individualism but still seeks out communities that support their personal growth (Smith, 2022). The high positive response to the "Strongly Agree" score for questions related to the influence of the Great Commission in their lives may reflect how

Generation Z Christian students view the Great Commission as a guide that is not only personally relevant but also supports community involvement.

A summary of the research results based on the answers of 101 Christian students who have studied the Christian Religious Education Course showing their perceptions of the relevance of the Great Commission to the lives of Gen Z, is presented in Figure 1.

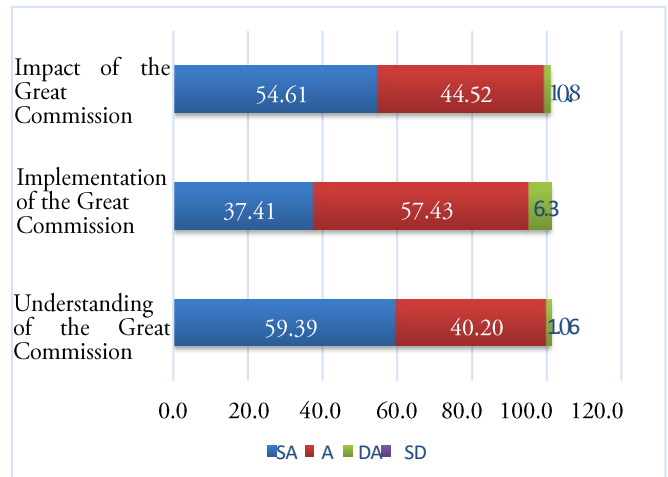


Figure 1. Recapitulation of Gen Z's perception of the relevance of the great commission

Based on Figure 1, it is obtained that although the respondents' understanding of the Great Commission is high (59.39% SS), the level of implementation is still lower (37.41% SS). This indicates that although Christian students understand the theological concept of the Great Commission, its implementation in the Gen Z era requires a more relevant and strategic approach. This gap reflects the need for a contextual practical approach, such as the use of social media and technology to apply the values of the Great Commission.

High understanding (59.39% SS) appears to directly contribute to the perception that the Great Commission has a significant impact on their lives (54.61% SS). This supports the theory that a good understanding of spiritual principles will influence one's attitude to life (Zebua *et al.*, 2024; Masinambow & Nasrani, 2021). Although the implementation of the Great Commission is lower compared to its understanding and influence, this finding suggests that more effective implementation can increase the influence of the Great Commission in everyday life. Previous studies have suggested that an action-based faith community approach is more effective in helping young people integrate spiritual values into their lives (Gettys & Plemons, 2018; Smith, 2022; Nagy, 2024).

Conclusions

From these findings, it is concluded that the theological understanding of the Great Commission is stronger than its application and influence in the lives of Gen Z students. However, although the theological understanding of the Great Commission is strong, the biggest challenge lies in its practical application in the Gen Z era. To improve implementation, churches and educational institutions need to adapt to the digital lifestyle of Generation Z. This can be done, for example, by designing social media-based service programs, online communities, and activities that are relevant to their interests. These findings emphasize the importance of innovative and contextual service strategies in reaching the Gen Z generation.

Acknowledgment

The authors are very grateful for the very supportive of student who involved in this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest in this research. All parties involved have given their consent and contributed without any bias or influence that could affect the research results.

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International Journal of Education, Humaniora, and Social Studies, March 2025 Volume 2 Number 1, pp 01-07

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