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Conceptualisation of ideal church leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0

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The church is facing new challenges in the Society Revolution 5.0 era that require the adaptation of leaders to the development of digital technology without neglecting spiritual values. Ideal church leaders need to have a character in harmony with the teachings of the Bible and are also required to integrate technology into ministry, evangelism and discipleship. Therefore, this research aimed to analyse the literature and the perspectives of experts on church leadership, digitisation of service and the influence of Society 5.0 on ecclesiology using a descriptive qualitative method. The results showed that church leadership adaptive to digital transformation could expand ministry reach, form a virtual faith community and increase active congregation participation. However, several challenges should be a serious concern, including low digital literacy and the risk of dehumanisation. The discussion showed the importance of a balance between the use of technology and the maintenance of deep spiritual relationships. Digital ministry was not only a tool but also an integral part of the future church's strategy.

Contribution: Future research is recommended to explore empirical models of digital leadership training based on spirituality and contextualisation of church missions in the digital space.

Keywords: church leadership; Society 5.0; digital ministry; digital transformation; church ministry; spirituality.

Introduction

The concept of Society 5.0 originates from the Japanese government's vision of a super-smart society that integrates cyber and physical spaces to address social challenges through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and big data analytics (Cabinet Office of Japan 2018). In the context of church leadership, Society 5.0 presents both opportunities and tensions, as leaders are challenged to balance technological innovation with spiritual depth and ethical responsibility (Heifetz & Linsky 2002; Ritzer 2020). This study conceptualises ideal church leaders who can navigate the complexities of digital transformation while maintaining theological integrity and moral authority.

A fundamental challenge in contemporary church leadership is the low ability of leaders to understand, master and effectively integrate technology into ministry practices. Kapucu (2020) and Crumpton (2018) reported that low digital literacy among church leaders was a major inhibiting factor in using technology as a strategic tool to support evangelism, discipleship and pastoral care. In the digital era, the church is required to be physically present and also show active participation in digital spaces where social interactions take place intensely. This weakness becomes even more complex when many church leaders have a limited or even erroneous understanding of the meaning and implementation of the Great Commission in a digital context. Boaheng (2021) and Tagwirei (2024) reported that many leaders failed to contextualise the command of Jesus into a ministry strategy relevant to the needs of the times. This condition hinders evangelism and discipleship from experiencing real transformation in a rapidly developing digital culture.

Crumpton (2018) and Gultom and Paat (2022) reported that most churches had no strategic planning for building communicative, interactive and relationship-oriented digital services. The lack of education and training on the use of technology in the context of service causes many activities to be passive, non-innovative and failing to reach congregation groups living in the digital ecosystem, specifically the younger generation. Additionally, the absence of a systematic digital communication framework has a direct impact on weak spiritual formation, pastoral

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services and ongoing discipleship. In the long term, this condition causes a decrease in the active participation level of the congregation in church life and a weak attachment to the faith community as a whole. Ronda, Gumelar and Wijaya (2024) reported that churches unable to adapt to social and digital changes experienced a decrease in relevance, specifically in the eyes of the digital generation who demanded responsive, open and contextual services.

The inability to build an inclusive and innovative service method makes the presence of churches increasingly marginalised in modern society. Therefore, this research aimed to explore and formulate a church leadership strategy that can integrate strong faith values, adaptive technological capabilities and contextual understanding of contemporary needs. The research is expected to build a missionary, transformative and relevant leadership model amid the challenges of the Society 5.0 era. Based on the developing phenomena and previous results, this research aims to answer the main question regarding the concept of ideal church leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0 era. A literature review method was adopted from various scientific sources and interviews to obtain a practical perspective. Three aspects were covered, namely (1) theoretically, expanding understanding of the relationship between church leadership, the Great Commission and technology integration; (2) practically, formulating service strategies relevant to digital culture; and (3) and experimentally, developing and testing an adaptive and integrative church leadership model according to contemporary demands.

Theoretical framework

The theory of Leadership on the Line by Heifetz and Linsky (2002) was adopted as the main framework for analysis in the Society 5.0 era. This theory shows the importance of leaders' flexibility and adaptive abilities in addressing changing social, cultural and technological dynamics. In the context of church, leaders must respond to the challenges of digitalisation and social media without neglecting Christian moral values and ethics. Therefore, wisdom is needed to enable leaders to bridge the spiritual needs of the congregation with the reality of an increasingly digitised world.

Effective leadership is essential to the success of organisations, including churches, because it inspires and guides members towards a common goal. Organisations tend to become stagnant, passive and at risk of failure without good leadership. Therefore, leaders who can move the team to continue progressing and developing are needed (Winingsih & Sulistiono 2020). Church leadership faces significant changes because of advances in technology, information and social structures. The digital era brings new opportunities and challenges, including the use of AI to improve organisation services and efficiency. In this context, church leaders are expected to understand these developments in response to the congregation's needs and face the challenges of the future effectively (Calp & Bütüner 2022). In the Society 5.0 era, Christian leadership faces new challenges and opportunities through advances in the Internet and advanced technology. Digital platforms enable the spread of the gospel, church management and community building across geographic boundaries. AI and IoT support promote a more personalised method of ministry and strengthen leaders and congregation relationships, as well as open up opportunities for innovation in church ministry and mission (Hutchings 2010). This research showed that church leaders in the Society 5.0 era needed to make effective use of technology to improve connectivity and congregation engagement. The capabilities of technology allow for the delivery of teachings, coordination of activities, and the formation of an inclusive community. Technology opens up wide access, specifically for the millennial generation. Adaptive leadership maintains the relevance of the church, strengthens communication and addresses digital challenges by being witnesses, worshippers and servants of Christ in the digital space ethically and lovingly (Gultom et al. 2022; Ronda et al. 2024).

Technology-adaptive church leadership in the Society 5.0 era demands leaders who are proficient in digital technology and online community management. The church needs to maintain public trust, promote active participation of the congregation and use technology to strengthen social roles. The sustainability of a church depends heavily on its ability to respond to change in a collaborative and relevant manner (Romanelli 2016). Mauro Romanelli confirmed that technology was important in changing the culture and management of the church through increased knowledge and active participation. In the context of digital ministry, the church needs to implement open management with the congregation as a partner in building social value. Technology strengthens connections, promotes congregational contributions, as well as supports sustainable and relevant ministry in the digital age (Romanelli 2019).

Pastor Kunle Badmos (2014) stated that the church, as a community of the same religious ideology, should connect the interests of its organisation with the needs of the members. Effective church leadership should reflect the teachings of the Bible through exemplary behaviour and character for the congregation. The presence of social media has a significant positive impact, allowing for wider interaction and strengthening a sense of community. Therefore, church leaders need to make strategic decisions regarding the selection of digital platforms, member education, policy communication, online fellowship forums, counselling services and publication strategies. The collective use of social media can support ministry and strengthen relationships in the church community. This opinion was affirmed by Laura Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri (2019) that digital technology had revolutionised organisations, just as the printing press changed history. The shift requires leaders to develop a collaborative and integrated environment. In the context of church, qualified leaders are essential to advance the mission by using technology strategically. Qualified leaders play a role in shaping digital culture by engaging the congregation and society, integrating faith with technology and navigating

ethical issues of digital media. With digital tools, leaders can improve communication, outreach and participation in decision-making, shaping inclusive and faith-based leadership. Furthermore, Manda et al. added that leadership that directs the application of technology appropriately promotes productivity, innovation and competitiveness (Manda & Abidin 2023).

Considering the urgency of church leadership in the Society Revolution 5.0 era, ideal leaders should have biblical character and example, as well as empower technology to effectively support missionary ministry, evangelism and pastoral counselling. Digital technology should be used for information access, programme promotion, management and church transformation to remain relevant. Leaders should continue to learn, adapt to the times and still hold the values of faith. In the digital age, leaders who understand AI and can connect human and technological interactions will lead the church to a greater competitive advantage (Judijanto, Asfahani & Krisnawati 2022). Furthermore, developing exemplary leaders is a complex challenge in a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment. Kapucu (2020) stated that many leaders were struggling with technology skills, thereby causing difficulty in navigating digital disruption effectively. Accelerated globalisation has also reduced human participation and triggered the threat of dehumanisation. Society 5.0 was conceptualised as a response to balancing technological advances with human values. In this context, organisations, including churches, need leaders who are innovative, adaptive and creative in responding to social and digital challenges. Leaders are required to acquire technological skills, modify leadership behaviour and maintain human values. This will ensure relevance and meaningfulness, providing answers amid the backdrop of changing times and rapid technological developments.

Perceptual research is essential to understand the congregation's perspective on ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era in order to implement the mandate and responsibilities of the Kingdom of God. By leveraging theories, opinions and perspectives from the congregation, observers and church activists, a more profound understanding of effective church leadership qualities can be developed. The investigation will show two key opinions as those related to technology, church members and church leaders.

According to Phillip Steven Woodruff (2024), the post-pandemic congregation wants greater participation in the community of believers. This congregation considers physical worship important and also views the benefits of virtual participation that need to be recognised by the local church. Many believe that virtual conventions are still legal despite technical challenges. Therefore, pastors should be able to integrate digital technology in a balanced manner in worship, instil a culture of excellence, connect the digital congregation with fellowship, as well as combine spirituality and faith growth. Digital technology should be used to expand the reach of services, including those who are not familiar with technology.

The perspective of church leaders on the use of technology in ministry is consistent with Valerie E. Crumpton's (Crumpton 2018) assertion that many leaders feel well positioned but often lack readiness for the digital age. Therefore, church leaders need to learn and adopt a responsive digital leadership style to keep the church relevant to the contemporary generation. This change allows the church to reach more people without abandoning its core faith and mission. Leaders at all levels need to adapt to global change and understand the needs of congregations, specifically in online ministry, as well as have the technology, ministry and management skills to develop programmes that support spiritual growth appropriately and sustainably. This perspective shows that ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era should integrate digital technology with spiritual leadership in response to the needs of the congregation in the post-pandemic era. Leaders are required to appreciate the role of virtual worship, build a strong quality of worship and establish connections between digital congregations and faith communities. The use of technology should be directed to expand services, including reaching those who are not familiar with the digital world. Additionally, leaders need to be responsive to the dynamics of the times and generational differences as well as master technology and ministry skills to keep the church relevant and support the sustainable growth of faith.

Research methods and design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach integrating a systematic literature review and qualitative interviews. A total of 818 Scopus-indexed articles on church leadership, digital transformation and Society 5.0 were initially identified. Following predefined inclusion criteria – peer-reviewed, English-language and relevant to leadership in digital contexts – 15 articles were selected for in-depth coding. The selection rationale emphasised conceptual depth and relevance rather than quantity, consistent with recommendations for qualitative synthesis (Flick 2021).

Qualitative interviews involved 28 theology students from a Methodist church. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent for the inclusion of their identities in the study. Thematic coding was conducted using NVivo, distinguishing codes (specific labels for meaningful statements) and categories (broader clusters synthesising codes), as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019). Codes were derived from multiple sources and then aggregated into categories, which were further synthesised into overarching themes addressing the research question: *What are the characteristics of ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era?*

This research commences with a literature search using the keyword 'Church Leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0 Era' in the Scopus-indexed journal for the period 2010–2025. From a total of 818 articles, only 15 passed the rigorous screening process, as shown in Figure 1. The Undermind software was used, and discussions were carried out with experts to

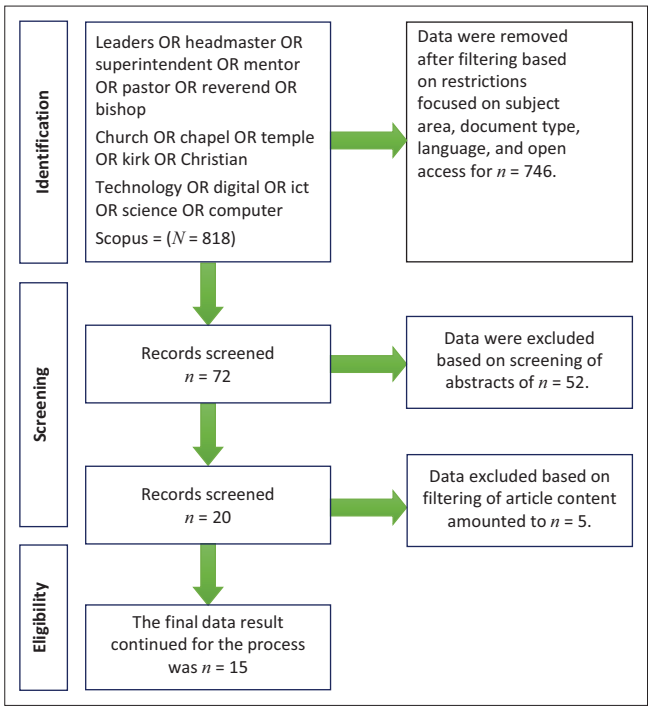

FIGURE 1: Stages of selecting eligible Scopus articles.

deepen the topic 'Conceptualisation of Ideal Church Leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0'. The main focus was directed at the implementation and ethical assessment of AI technologies' use, such as chatbots and predictive analytics, in church leadership. A total of 30 related articles were found to be published between 2017 and 2024, with the dominance of 2023 and 2024, but only 15 were considered worthy. To enrich the data, interviews were conducted with two groups of students from Statistics (17) and Entrepreneurship classes (11). All data from journals, electronic articles and interviews were analysed theologically and interdisciplinarily to formulate the concept of ideal church leaders in the context of Society 5.0.

The results were analysed through four main stages with the help of NVivo software, namely: (1) data import, namely entering data from internal and external sources into NVivo; (2) coding, in which informants' responses were analysed and coded systematically as a basis for answering research questions; (3) visualisation, namely making a graphical representation of data coded to see patterns and relationships; and (4) drawing of conclusions, which was carried out based on validated results. Internal sources in the form of interview data were stored offline to maintain confidentiality, while external sources included electronic journals and data from Scopus. The visualisation step described the architecture of the code being developed, showed the interconnections between the codes and corroborated the insights gained from the sources studied (Farquhar, Michels & Robson 2020). The conclusions were drawn up according to the dominant order of code confirmation in the last stage. According to Moon (2019), coding in NVivo was considered to have strong validity when corroborated by at least three different data sources, thereby improving the reliability and precision of analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Lintas Budaya Batam and the Internal Review Board of the Bantam Intercultural Theological College on 20 June 2025 (No. 35/S-PEP/STT-LB/V1/2025). All participants provided informed consent for the inclusion of their identities in the study.

Results

The information necessary to effectively answer the research questions was collected, with coded data representing the results from 2010 to 2025. Further analysis was carried out based on the 58 data sources used, ensuring that the coding standards remained relevant and consistent. The dataset consisted of 15 Scopus-indexed journals (Addo 2021; Baiardi, Mendes & Rodrigues 2013; Campbell 2023; Chan & Di 2024; Foot & Go 2024; Hancock 2019; Kang et al. 2019; Magezi 2015; Makhutla 2021; Naidoo 2023; Naidoo, Israel & Naidoo 2021; Pieterse 2016; Rankin 2024; Resane 2017; Sedra 2004; Stanton 2019) and 15 online journals (Cheong 2020; Graves 2023, 2023b; Herman & Hermanto 2023; Hirome 2024; Joseph & Olalekan 2024; La Cruz & Mora 2024; Onyeukaziri 2024; Oyasor 2024; Locke 2024; Saragih 2023; Simmerlein 2024; Stoddart 2023; Tridente 2024; Umbrello 2023). Other characteristics of the data included results from 17 individuals from Statistics class (Alfredo Purba, Anggi Hasiholan Panjaitan, Anggun Prasetia Sianipar, Elsa Adelia Sitorus, Gracio Raphael Lorenz Marpaung, Shirley Scott, Irene Silito, Jon Andi Pardared Damanik, Jonathan Prawira Ginting, Lisda Patria Br Tampubolon, Mary Magdalene Tampubolon, Mega Angelita Siregar, Rachel Permatasari, Rebekka Simanjuntak, Sepatya Purba, Teger Alenka Atanta and William Berman Halomoan Dongoran) and interview with 11 individuals from Entrepreneur class (Eli Silvia Purba; Eremy Ronaldo Pandapotan Manurung; Stuart Scott, Scott; Jhonatan G.E. Pinem; Masniari Hutauruk; Melki Apriadi Sitorus; Michelle Dinda Selomita Siregar; Nicholas Togatorop; Rachel A.L. Siahaan; Yoel Wesley Tambunan and Zella Natasya Marbun).

The research problem was addressed by raising the question, 'What is the concept of ideal church leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0 era?' This question showed the perspective that church leaders functioned as spiritual teachers and guides as well as facilitators who connected faith with technology. Therefore, in this digital era, church ministry could not be separated from technology as a tool of service without eliminating the essence of spirituality. In this context, the church and its leaders should have a clear concept for building a healthy ecosystem of ministry, including the use of digital media and virtual ministry methods as well as the active participation of the congregation in maintaining and strengthening Christian values in an ongoing manner.

In qualitative research, reliability was ensured through the application of a rigorous coding method. Triangulation was used to ensure validity, where data were collected from various sources by different methods until it reached a saturation point. This coding process was carried out iteratively to improve data accuracy (Sugiyono 2010). Consistent with the perspective of Rooshenas et al. (2019), the validity of the data could be ascertained when the coding was verified through a minimum of three sources. As shown in Figure 2, each coding in this research had been corroborated more than three times, thereby increasing its validity (Natow 2020). The coding verification procedure was carried out by consulting many sources, including Scopus journal articles, Internet journals and interview results. The resulting coding was of high validity, had been supported by several sources and was stated in code form as an answer to research questions.

Data were filtered with a minimum occurrence threshold of 10 to simplify the code visualisation. This decision was based on overwhelming support for these words. Therefore, there was a need to simplify and focus the description on concepts that would be explained more broadly in response to the research question (Figure 3). The relationship between the research title and the data is illustrated in Figure 4.

The data selection process is summarized in Table 1, while the data reduction procedure is detailed in Table 2. The results of the theme analysis of the data are displayed in Table 3.

The analysis revealed three central thematic clusters:

- **Ethical leadership and spiritual integrity:** Church leaders must demonstrate moral character, biblical grounding and pastoral care (Smith 2017). Technology should serve spiritual goals rather than replace contemplative practices. This cluster emphasises the core spiritual and ethical responsibilities of church leaders. Leaders must model biblical values while demonstrating ethical decision-making in organisational and pastoral contexts (Smith 2017). The integration of Scripture with practical leadership frameworks ensures moral authority and trustworthiness.
- **Digital literacy and innovation:** Leaders require knowledge of AI, IoT and digital communication platforms to enhance ministry efficiency and community engagement (Castells 2010; Ritzer 2020). However, technological adoption should be contextualised to local resources and congregation capacity. In the Society 5.0 era, digital literacy is essential for leaders to leverage AI, IoT and social media responsibly. Leaders must innovate without compromising spiritual depth, ensuring technology enhances rather than replaces ministry (Castells 2010; Ritzer 2020). Data-informed strategies allow leaders to better meet congregational and societal needs.
- **Inclusion and community responsiveness:** Leaders need adaptive strategies that address diversity, equity and vulnerability, mitigating risks such as the digital divide and unintended surveillance (Van Dijk 2020). Leadership in diverse and digitally divided contexts requires adaptability and inclusivity. Leaders must address equity, cultural sensitivity and participatory governance while empowering volunteers and ensuring access to digital ministry (Van Dijk 2020). This cluster highlights the balance between technological innovation and human-centred pastoral care.

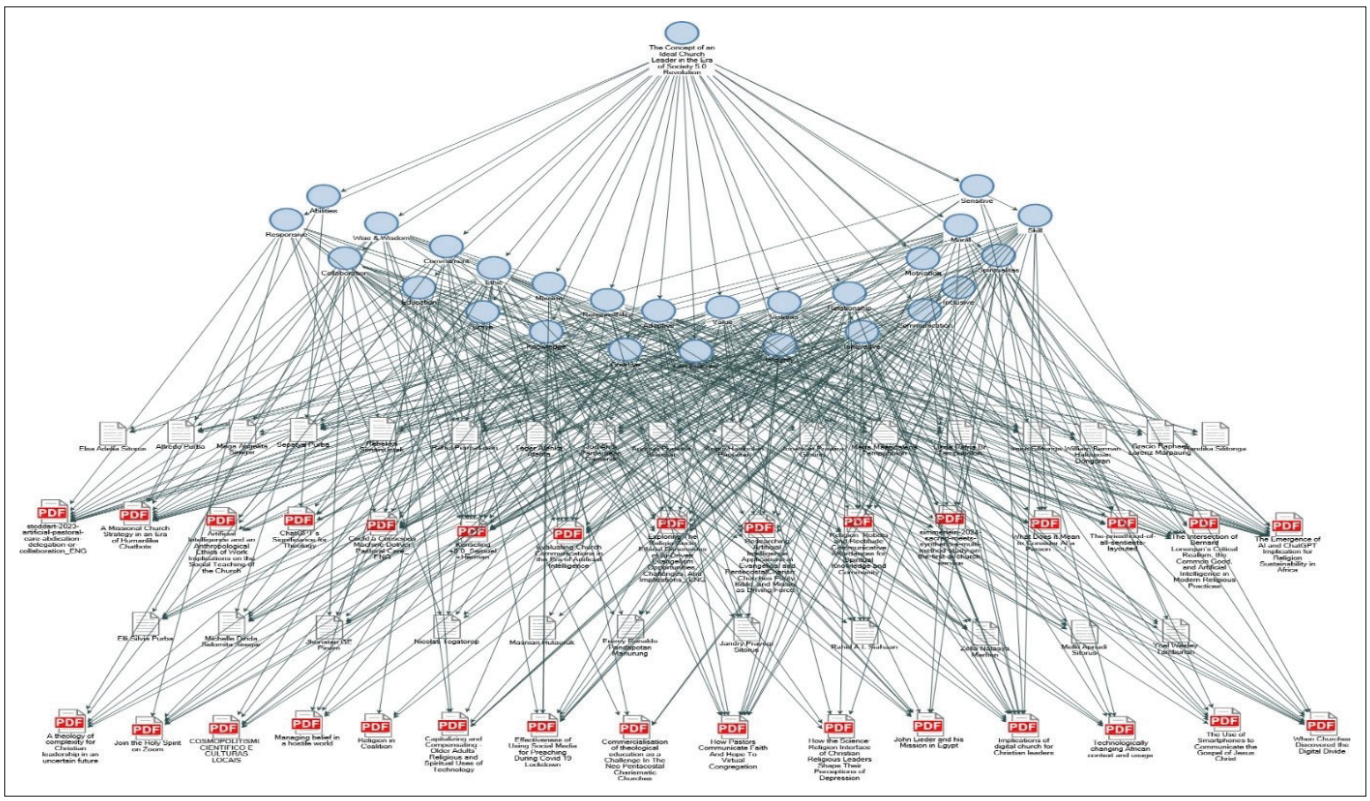

FIGURE 2: Data validity.

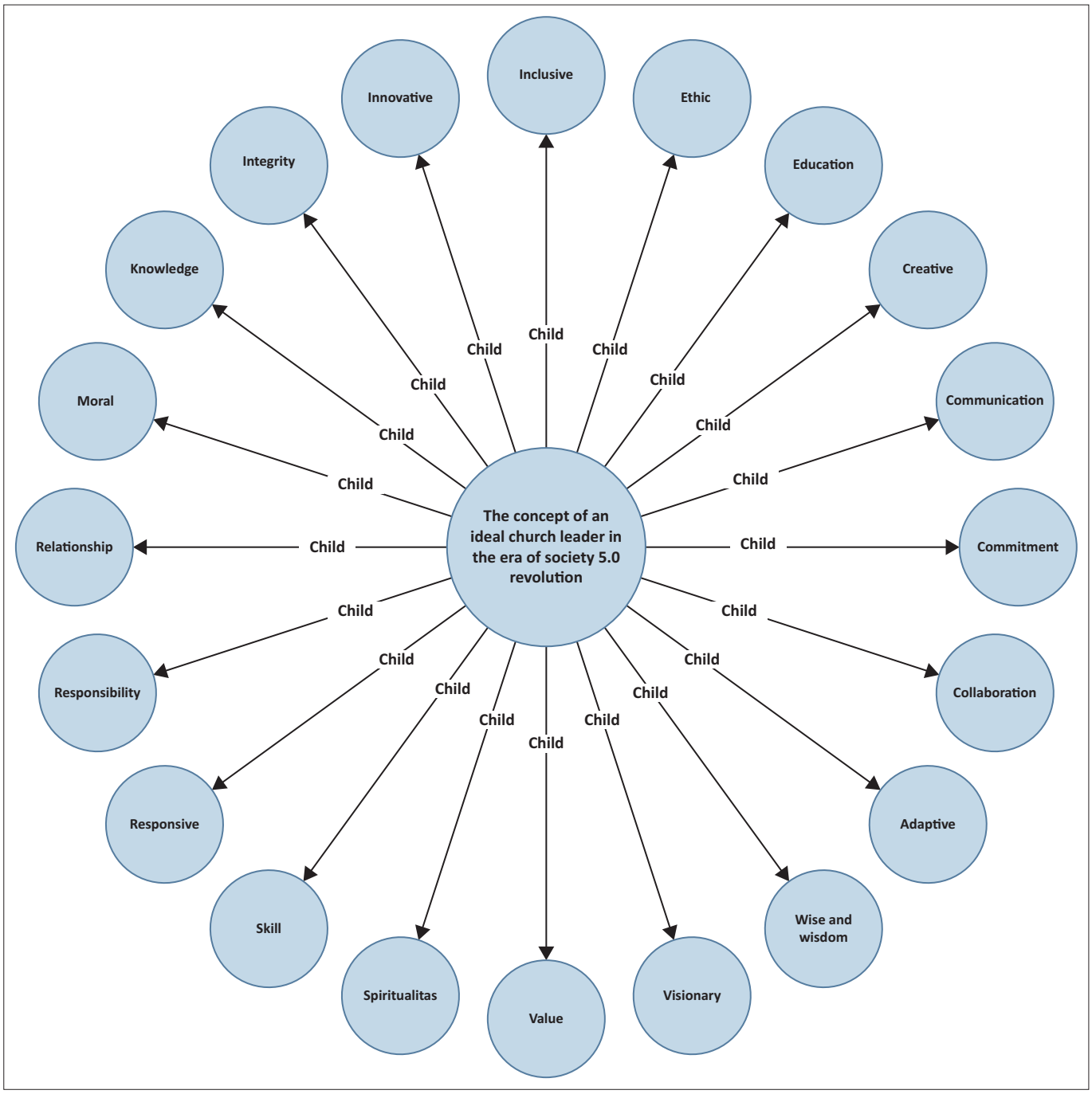

FIGURE 3: Coding results for research questions.

The study highlights that ideal leaders integrate these dimensions rather than prioritising one over the others. Synthesising codes into categories confirmed that the identified characteristics addressed the research question comprehensively.

Discussion

The coding that discussed the research investigation 'How to Conceptualise the Ideal Church Leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0 Era?' generated 20 categories of encoding, summarised as follows.

Firstly, in the Society 5.0 era, church leaders should adapt to technology to enhance ministry efficiency, broaden outreach and sustain spiritual engagement (Campbell 2023). However, limited Internet, low digital literacy, financial constraints and resistance to change hinder transformation (Hlavac & Buller 2020; Petrová, Špatenka & Koch 2022; Turluev & Mutsurova 2021). These challenges offer opportunities for digital ministry innovation (Naidoo et al. 2021). Leaders should creatively bridge the digital gap to reach and engage congregations effectively. Scripture reminds us that *all things come from God (Jn 1:3), He makes new ways (Is 43:19) and He blesses those who trust in Him (Pr 3:5–6)*.

Secondly, in the Society Revolution 5.0 era, church leadership should focus on collaboration, specifically in addressing the integration of AI into religious practices (Hirome 2024;

TABLE 1: Presentation of results.

Description	Sum
Number of Scopus journals available for processing	818
Number of online research meanings available for processing	30
Number of interview results available for processing	28
Coding	
In-process coding is unnecessary and validated on RQ	-
Coding in Scopus journal is unnecessary and unconfirmed in RQ	803
Coding in online journals is unnecessary and unconfirmed in RQ	15
The amount of coding in the interview results is irrelevant and confirmed	-
Count of data sources with pertinent and validated raw coding	58†

RQ, research question.

†, Of the 818 Scopus articles, 15 were selected, 30 online articles were selected, and interviews were conducted with 28 individuals, resulting in a total of 58 processed, relevant, and validated data sources, that were used in the coding process to answer the research questions.

TABLE 2: Data reduction procedure for research inquiries.

Information	Data source			
	Journal Scopus	Journal Online	Interview 1 Statistical	Interview 2 Entrepreneur
Amount of data processed at the beginning	818	30	17	11
Irrelevant code	803	15	-	-
Unconfirmed Encoding	-	-	-	-
Total amount of data processed	15	15	17	11

TABLE 3: Thematic clusters.

Theme	Leadership characteristics points	Supporting evidence or literature
Ethics and spiritual integrity	• Biblical grounding in decision-making • Moral courage and ethical consistency • Pastoral care and empathy • Integrity in financial and organisational management • Spiritual mentorship for congregation	Smith (2017), Heifetz and Linsky (2002), Campbell and Tsuria (2019)
Digital literacy and innovation	• Understanding AI and IoT applications in ministry • Competence in social media and digital communication • Ability to design online worship or education programmes • Innovating ministry approaches to engage youth • Data-driven decision-making for community programmes	Castells (2010), Ritzer (2020), Bada (2021)
Community and inclusion	• Addressing the digital divide and ensuring accessibility • Promoting equity and diversity in leadership • Responding to vulnerable populations' needs • Encouraging participatory decision-making • Conflict resolution and mediation skills • Building collaborative networks with local organisations • Cultural sensitivity and interfaith awareness • Adapting leadership style to congregation size and context • Fostering volunteer engagement and empowerment • Evaluating community impact and feedback mechanisms	Van Dijk (2020); Campbell and Tsuria (2019); Heifetz and Linsky (2002)

Note: Please see full reference list of this article, Heryanto, H., Pramono, R., Sijabat, M. & Siallagan, T., 2025, 'Conceptualisation of ideal church leaders in the Society Revolution 5.0', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 81(1), a10880. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10880, for more information.

AI, artificial intelligence; IoT, internet of things.

Joseph & Olalekan 2024). AI presents complex challenges that require interdisciplinary and organisational cooperation (Gargiulo et al. 2023; Xu & Dainoff 2023). The collective human–agent method balances human and AI roles in decision-making (Ramchurn, Stein & Jennings 2021), with AI acting as a partner to analyse problems, design solutions and conduct reflective evaluations (Seeber et al. 2020). Church leaders also need to ensure that the use of AI is consistent with spiritual and ethical values. Biblically, collaboration is shown in the unity of the early church (Ac 2:44–47), the body of Christ analogy (1 Cor 12:12–27), Solomon's wisdom (1 Ki 3:9–12), Jesus sending His disciples in pairs (Lk 10:1–2) and the communal leadership of Nehemiah (Neh 2:17–18).

Thirdly, the concept of church leadership in the Society 5.0 era demands a strong commitment to biblical principles when using technology. Dedicated leadership is essential to fulfil the challenges of modern times, as shown by the small church community that maintains faith amid adversity (Pieterse 2016). This commitment reflects Paul's fortitude (2 Cor 11:23–28) and Joseph's wisdom in facing difficult times (Gn 41:38–40). Besides being adaptive, leaders should also be wise in managing uncertainty (Stanton 2019). In the socio-political field, church commitment to building a moderate-progressive coalition shows the contribution of religion to social justice (Hancock 2019), in harmony with the transformative ministry of Jesus (Mt 9:10–13).

Fourthly, the concept of church leadership in the Society 5.0 era focuses on the importance of effective communication to convey biblical values, build relationships and make appropriate use of technology. Wise communication set an example for contemporary church leaders; this includes Moses when delivering the word of God (Ex 3:10–12) and Paul in the pastoral letters (Phlp 1:3–7). In the digital age, communication should be empathetic and relevant, following the example of Jesus, who used parables to reach out to different groups (Mt 13:10–17). Church leaders need to develop open dialogue, build spiritual attachment and strengthen communities through technology (Kang et al. 2019; Magezi 2015; Naidoo 2023).

Fifthly, church leaders are required to be creative in using technology to increase the effectiveness of ministry. Creativity is the key to facing future uncertainty and maintaining the existence of leadership (Stanton 2019). God inspired the creation of new things (Is 43:19), just as Noah built the ark innovatively (Gn 6:14–22). In the midst of challenges, such as technology gaps, digital unpreparedness and resistance to change (Campbell 2023), church leaders are required to devise new methods of reaching out to congregations. Jesus set an example through the use of parables to enable different groups to understand the message (Mt 13:10–17), and Paul adapted the method of evangelism while speaking on the Areopagus (Ac 17:22–23). This type of creativity needs to be applied in the context of contemporary church ministry.

Sixthly, ideal church leaders should integrate strong theological education with a deep understanding of digital technology. Leaders are expected to use technology wisely to support relevant and effective ministry. Furthermore, church leadership education should focus on adaptive evangelism that preserves the gospel's purity (Mtw 28:19–20) as well as promotes flexibility and inclusivity in engaging diverse

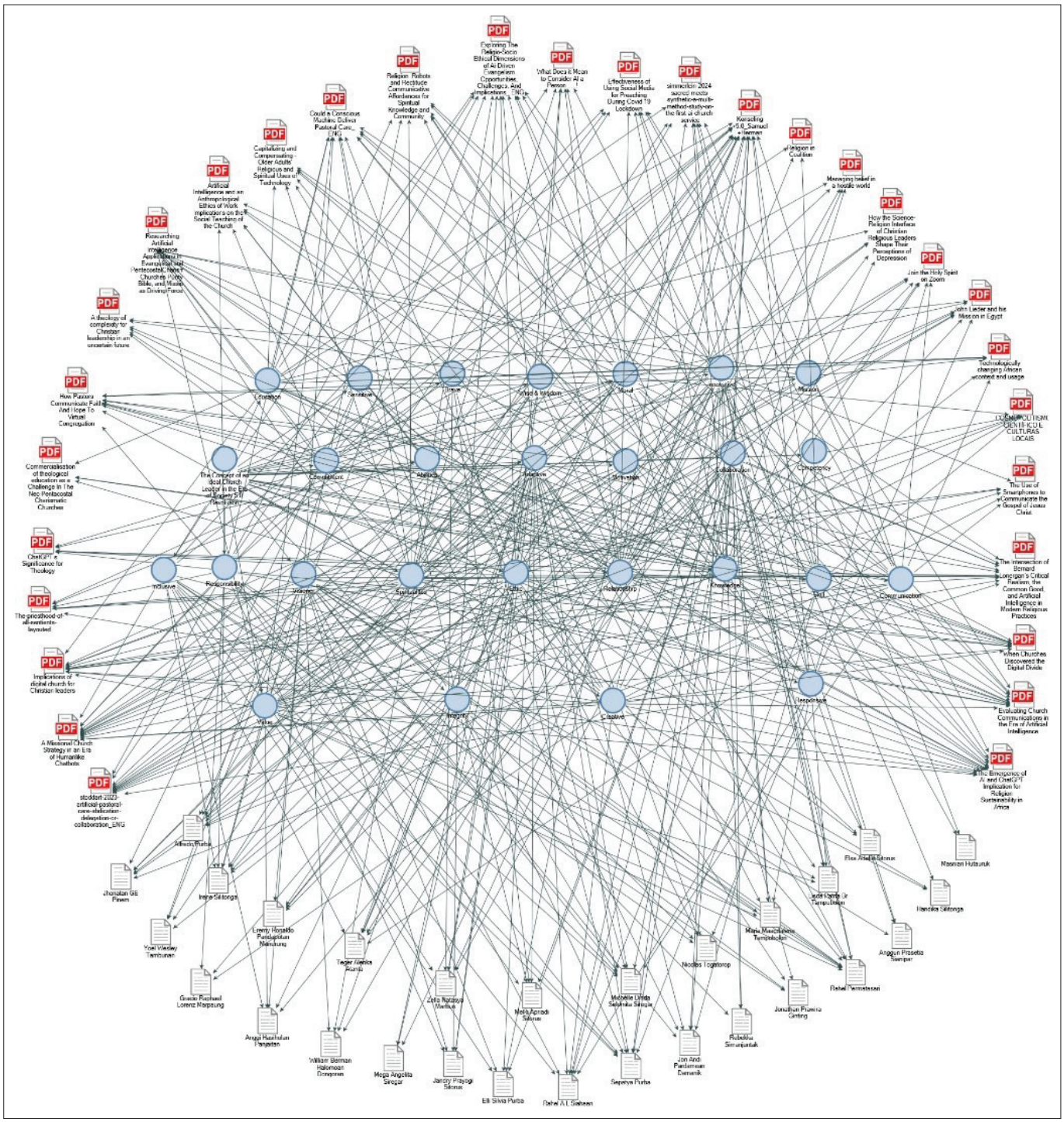

FIGURE 4: The relationship of title to research data.

communities (1 Cor 9:22). The awareness of social changes and digital transformation should also be enhanced (Sedra 2004), enabling leaders to embrace innovation without compromising faith identity (Rm 12:2). Leaders can expand outreach, strengthen church engagement and uphold biblical authority in a digital age with wisdom and understanding (Pr 4:7) (Magezi 2015; Rankin 2024).

Seventhly, the ideal church leaders are individuals who have high moral integrity and can use technology wisely in ministry. Leadership ethics should be grounded in contextual evangelism that adapts the gospel delivery to culture and technology, without sacrificing the truth of God's word (Mt 28:19–20; 1 Cor 9:22). Wisdom is important to stay true to the theological principles and values of Christian faith when using AI and digital innovation (Graves 2023a; Roma 12:2; Sedra 2004; Yakobus 1:5). Leaders can expand the ministry and deepen the spiritual growth of the congregation with wisdom (Pro 4:7).

Eighthly, inclusion is an important need for church leaders in the Society 5.0 era. Church leaders should build inclusive

communities that use technology to expand the reach of ministry in a relevant and comprehensive way. Pastoral guidance should be responsive to social and digital changes, following the commandment of Christ to shepherd the sheep with love and sincerity (1 Pt 5:2–3). Leaders should also be open to engaging congregations from diverse backgrounds in ministry, reflecting love and unity in Christ (Gl 3:28) as well as accepting one another as Christ has received us (Rm 15:7). The inclusion principle requires leaders to provide access to learning technologies, such as AI-based chatbots, while maintaining theological values and service ethics (Herman & Hermanto 2023; Hirome 2024).

Ninthly, church leaders in the Society 5.0 era should be able to innovate by using technologies such as social media, AI and digital platforms to improve ministry and expand the reach of the gospel (Joseph & Olalekan 2024; Makhutla 2021). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has proved the importance of adjusting digital strategies in ministry. Based on 1 Corinthians 9:22, church leaders need to adjust methods of ministry to ensure the gospel is accepted by all, ensuring the focus is on Christ (Col 3:17). Innovation is not only technical but also includes digital devotionals, online guidance and daily prayer across regions (Herman & Hermanto 2023). However, physical relationships are still important for building a community of faith (Heb 10:25). Church innovation should integrate technology, spirituality and social engagement to remain relevant and transformative (Rankin 2024).

Tenthly, the ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era are those who have high integrity, uphold honesty and have a strong moral character in the face of technological and social transformation. In digital ministry, integrity and ethics are the keys to maintaining the purity of teachings and authentic spiritual authority (Joseph & Olalekan 2024). The use of AI in ministry should remain subject to theological principles and not replace a true pastoral role. The word of God shows the importance of rejecting the falsification of doctrine for the truth to be sincerely practised (2 Cor 4:2). Church leaders should also be role models in transparency and wisdom, maintain close relationships with the congregation and ensure technology supports the value of gospel truth (Rankin 2024). Similar to the teachings of Paul, church leaders are to exemplify truth and be role models in all aspects of life (Tt 1:7–9). This integrity ensures that the church remains light and salt amid a changing world.

Eleventhly, in the Society 5.0 era, church leaders should make knowledge the main foundation, with a deep theological understanding and the ability to adapt to changing times. Leaders should hold to pure Christian teachings, be uninfluenced by secularism (2 Tm 2:15, 3:16–17) and guide the church in truth (Tt 1:9) (Resane 2017; Stanton 2019). Besides the theological aspect, digital literacy is also essential for leaders to use social media and online platforms to expand the reach of gospel ministry (Addo 2021; Makhutla 2021). There should be comprehensive theological, technological, social and scientific insight to lead relevantly and wisely.

Twelfthly, church leaders should uphold ethical values as a spiritual foundation in leadership. Strong morality is necessary to bridge the progress of science with theological teachings without sacrificing faith (Baiardi et al. 2013). Proverbs 4:23 shows the importance of guarding the heart as a source of life, while Titus 1:7–9 affirms that church leaders should live honestly, blamelessly and in truth. History proves that moral integrity builds the trust of the congregation and becomes a guide amid the challenges of the times. Therefore, Christian ethical values should be the basis for responsible and visionary leadership (Sedra 2004).

Thirteenthly, church leaders in the Society 5.0 era should build strong relationships, both with the congregation and external stakeholders. In the face of rapid social and technological change, cross-generational and community cooperation is essential (Kang et al. 2019). Leaders need to leverage technology for inclusive and adaptive communication, maintaining a balance between moderate and progressive values in social service (Hancock 2019). Biblical values should also be conveyed to the community (Mt 5:16), engaging in a loving dialogue without losing the identity of faith (Cols 4:6), as well as bearing peace and justice as ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20).

Fourteenthly, church leaders are required to be responsible for the ministry by integrating spiritual and technological values. The duties now include evangelism and spiritual formation in a digital world while ensuring that the use of technology, including AI, is consistent with theological principles and pastoral ethics (Naidoo et al. 2021; Raka 2024). There is a need to develop relevant and thoughtful mission strategies in addressing challenges, such as chatbots in service (Hirome 2024) and avoiding dependence on technology while maintaining the spiritual authority of the church (Kuburan 2023b; Stoddart 2023). According to the word of God (2 Tm 3:16–17), leaders should lead with wisdom as well as be examples of love and humility (1 Pt 5:2–3). This responsible leadership keeps the integrity of the ministry relevant, contextual and deeply rooted in Christian faith amid the progress of the times.

Fifteenthly, contemporary church leaders should quickly adapt to technology to improve the quality of ministry without sacrificing biblical values. Similar to the missionaries of the past who remained theologically steadfast but culturally flexible (Sedra 2004), contemporary church leaders should leverage digital media and online platforms to keep congregations engaged, as the African Pentecostal church did during the COVID-19 pandemic (Addo 2021). There should be sensitivity to read the challenges of the times, readiness to adopt new methods of ministry and steadfastness to maintain the core of Christian teaching. Paul adjusted the method used to reach more people without altering the gospel (1 Cor 9:22);

church leaders also need to be contextually relevant while remaining steadfast in faith.

Sixteenthly, church leaders are required to have high competence and proficiency in using technology for ministry. There should be an understanding of the relationship between faith and science to help the congregation adapt technological advances to spiritual values (Baiardi et al. 2013). Mastery of social media and digital platforms has become an important skill, proving effective during the pandemic in maintaining congregation engagement (Makhutla 2021). Additionally, leaders should be able to reach various generations, including the digitally active elderly (Kang et al. 2019), and have a deep theological understanding to avoid aberrations because of the commercialisation of theological education (Resane 2017). Based on these expectations, contemporary church leaders need holistic skills, including technological, social, theological and leadership, to keep ministry relevant, inclusive and faithful to the truth of God's Word (Col 3:16).

Seventeenthly, church leaders should possess strong spirituality and a deep spiritual life to face modern technological challenges. Leadership should be rooted in spiritual values and theological integrity to prevent technology from replacing authentic spiritual experiences (Jn 4:24). Leaders should also preserve doctrinal purity, serve with sincerity, avoid worldly gain (1 Pt 5:2) and guard against secularism that distorts the ministry's calling (Resane 2017). Although digital platforms help reach physically limited congregations (Naidoo et al. 2021), leaders should uphold gospel purity and spiritual authority (Sedra 2004) as well as recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in digital worship (Addo 2021).

Eighteenthly, church leaders should integrate spiritual values with technological advances to develop relevant and far-reaching ministries. The ideal church leadership reflects a balance between faith, science and technology without losing its spiritual essence (Baiardi et al. 2013). The use of digital platforms should still maintain the presence of the Holy Spirit, such as in online worship during the pandemic (Addo 2021), and must not replace pastoral authority and spiritual depth (Rankin 2024). Therefore, church leaders should guide the church with wisdom from God (Pr 2:6) and do all things for honour and gratitude (Col 3:17).

Nineteenthly, in the Society 5.0 era filled with technological changes, church leaders are required to have a clear, innovative and digital-based vision of the future. This vision should focus on transforming the ministry that remains faithful to theological and spiritual values while leveraging social media and digital technology to expand the reach of the gospel and increase congregation participation (Makhutla 2021). Understanding digital church impact shows that technology enhances faith experiences and pastoral authority without replacement (Rankin 2024). Following a vision centred on the Great Commission (Mt 28:19–20), leaders are called to reach out to souls, build vibrant spiritual communities and share the gospel in a relevant way (Naidoo 2023).

Twentiethly, church leaders are required to be wise in balancing technology and spiritual values. This wisdom is important for enabling a response to the challenges of the times with a ministry strategy that remains faithful to the principles of faith (Stanton 2019). Furthermore, church leaders should have a strong theological foundation and use technology effectively to expand the ministry and nurture spiritual relationships, including with older adults who are becoming more digitally active (Kang et al. 2019). True wisdom in leadership should come from the fear of God (Pr 9:10), allowing leaders to combine traditional values with innovation, maintain ministry effectiveness and sustainably strengthen the spiritual growth of the congregation.

The findings illustrate the dual challenge of Society 5.0: leveraging digital tools while preserving the core spiritual mission of the church. While digital literacy is necessary, uncritical adoption risks ethical compromise, superficial engagement and spiritual distraction (Campbell & Tsuria 2019). Integrating Scripture with leadership theory (Heifetz & Linsky 2002) provides moral grounding, but selective or superficial use of biblical texts must be avoided.

This study also identifies practical constraints. Small congregations or resource-limited contexts cannot implement comprehensive digital strategies without external support, requiring adaptable and scalable models of digital ministry (Bada 2021). Future research could pilot empirical frameworks for technology-integrated leadership training that measure both spiritual outcomes and congregational well-being.

Conclusion

This study conceptualises the characteristics of ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era, synthesising insights from literature and empirical data into three primary thematic clusters: Ethics and spiritual integrity, digital literacy and innovation and community and inclusion. Ethics and spiritual integrity emphasises that leaders must model moral courage, pastoral care and biblical grounding in decision-making. These qualities provide moral authority, sustain trust within the congregation and ensure that technological innovation does not compromise spiritual values. Digital literacy and innovation highlights the importance of leaders' competence in AI, IoT and digital communication platforms. Leaders must leverage technology thoughtfully to enhance ministry effectiveness, engage youth and optimise organisational processes while avoiding uncritical technology adoption. Community and inclusion underscores the need for adaptive, participatory leadership that addresses diversity, equity and the needs of vulnerable populations. Leaders must foster inclusivity, mitigate digital divide effects and build collaborative networks to strengthen congregational and community resilience.

This framework integrates ecclesiology, leadership theory and digital sociology, offering a multidimensional model for understanding contemporary church leadership. It contributes to literature on technology-integrated leadership

and provides a foundation for future theoretical development in faith-based digital transformation. Church leaders and denominational organisations can use these clusters to design leadership training programmes, assess existing leadership capacities and implement context-sensitive digital initiatives. Emphasis on ethical integrity and community responsiveness ensures that technological adoption aligns with pastoral objectives.

Further studies should explore empirical validation of this framework in diverse cultural, denominational and geographic contexts. Longitudinal research could evaluate the spiritual and social outcomes of technology-integrated leadership, while pilot programmes could test scalable models for small or resource-limited congregations.

In conclusion, ideal church leaders in the Society 5.0 era balance moral integrity, technological competence and community-centred responsiveness, ensuring that innovation serves rather than replaces spiritual and pastoral mission. This conceptualisation provides both a theoretical and practical roadmap for churches navigating the challenges and opportunities of a digital, rapidly transforming society.

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Authors' contributions

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