

Faith, Culture, and Youth: Digital Tools for People and the Planet



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Background

The Faith for Earth Coalition Youth Council launched an initiative titled "Faith + Youth: Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development," in line with the theme of International Youth Day this year.

Digital technologies play a key role in advancing sustainable development, influencing 70% of the 169 SDG targets (UNDESA, 2024).

This brief highlights how youth across diverse faith and cultural communities use digital tools to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and drive collective action toward the SDGs. Our findings emphasize the importance of digital tools in **fostering resilience** by connecting youth and by providing support during crises, **building communities** by strengthening bonds and promoting mental and emotional well-being, and **engaging in social and environmental action** with an emphasis on intergenerational collaboration centring environmental sustainability and social justice.

Key questions

- How do global youth leverage faith and cultural traditions to foster a sense of, hope, stability, and resilience in the face of global change?
- In what ways can digital tools impact these efforts, enabling or disabling young people to convene, act collectively, and build strong and peaceful communities on and offline?
- How are youth using digital technologies to spearhead initiatives for social good and climate action in their faith and cultural communities?
- How can digital tools facilitate intergenerational collaboration for sustainable development within communities of faith and culture, and what are the benefits, challenges, and effective strategies for such initiatives?

Join the Faith for Earth Coalition Youth Network

Survey Results

The impact of digital tools

Findings from our research so far suggest that digital platforms importantly expose youth to diverse perspectives on climate change and social issues, helping them think about solutions relevant to their regions.

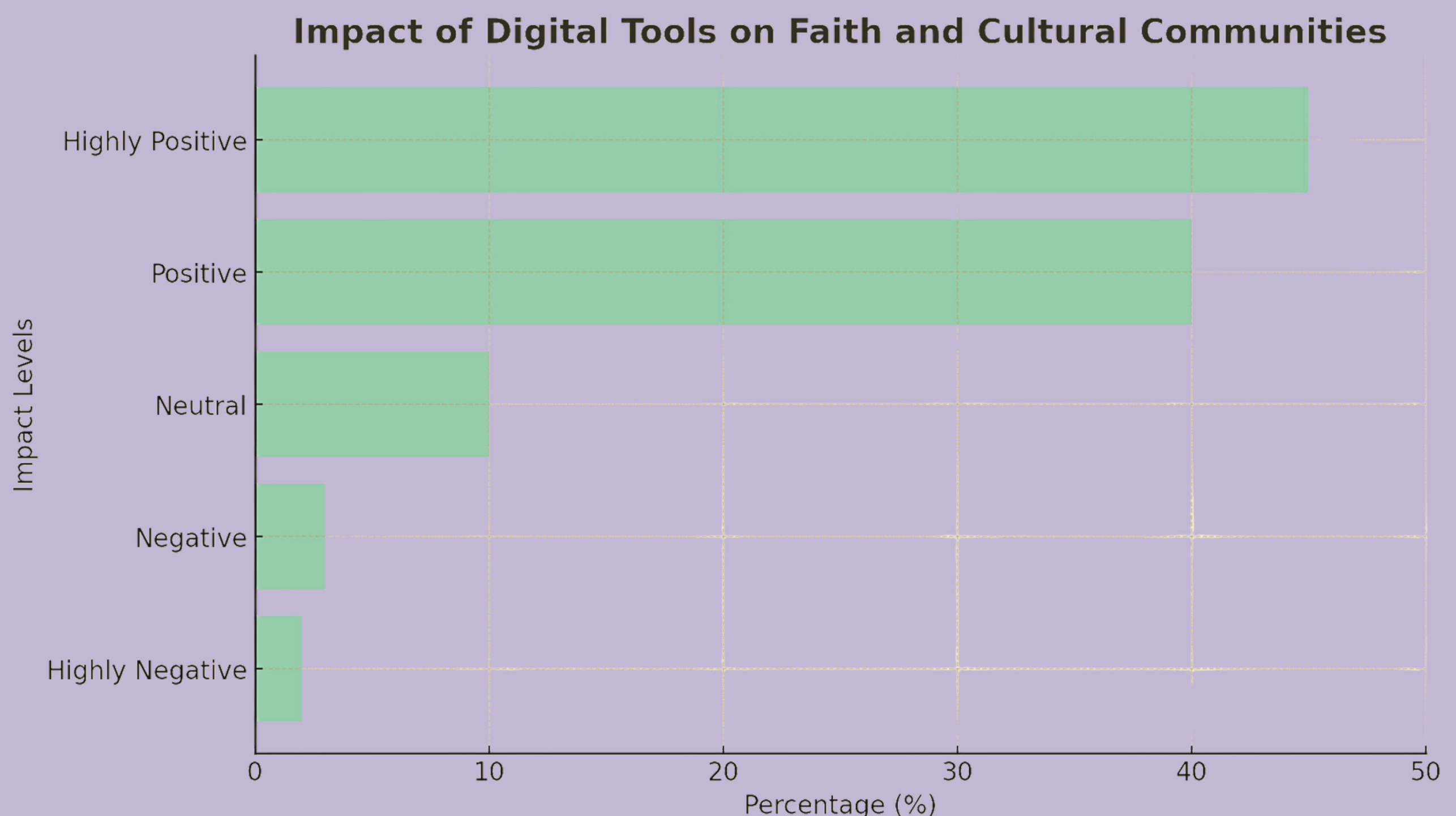
Interestingly, 45% of our global youth respondents rated digital tools as impacting their faith and cultural communities highly positively, with 40% citing them as positive and only the remaining 15% falling in the neutral, negative or highly negative categories.

Finding: Youth report that digital platforms expose them to diverse perspectives on climate change and social issues, helping them think about solutions for their regions:

"Digital spaces and technologies allow for greater connectivity and emotional resilience amid a myriad of climate challenges and losses that our community members are facing."

– Madeline, North America, Adamah Jewish Youth Climate Movement, age group 19-24.

Learn more about the Faith for Earth Coalition Youth Council, read the [Action Plan](#)



Innovative Digital Engagement in Faith-based Sustainable Development Initiatives



Ummah for the Earth Alliance

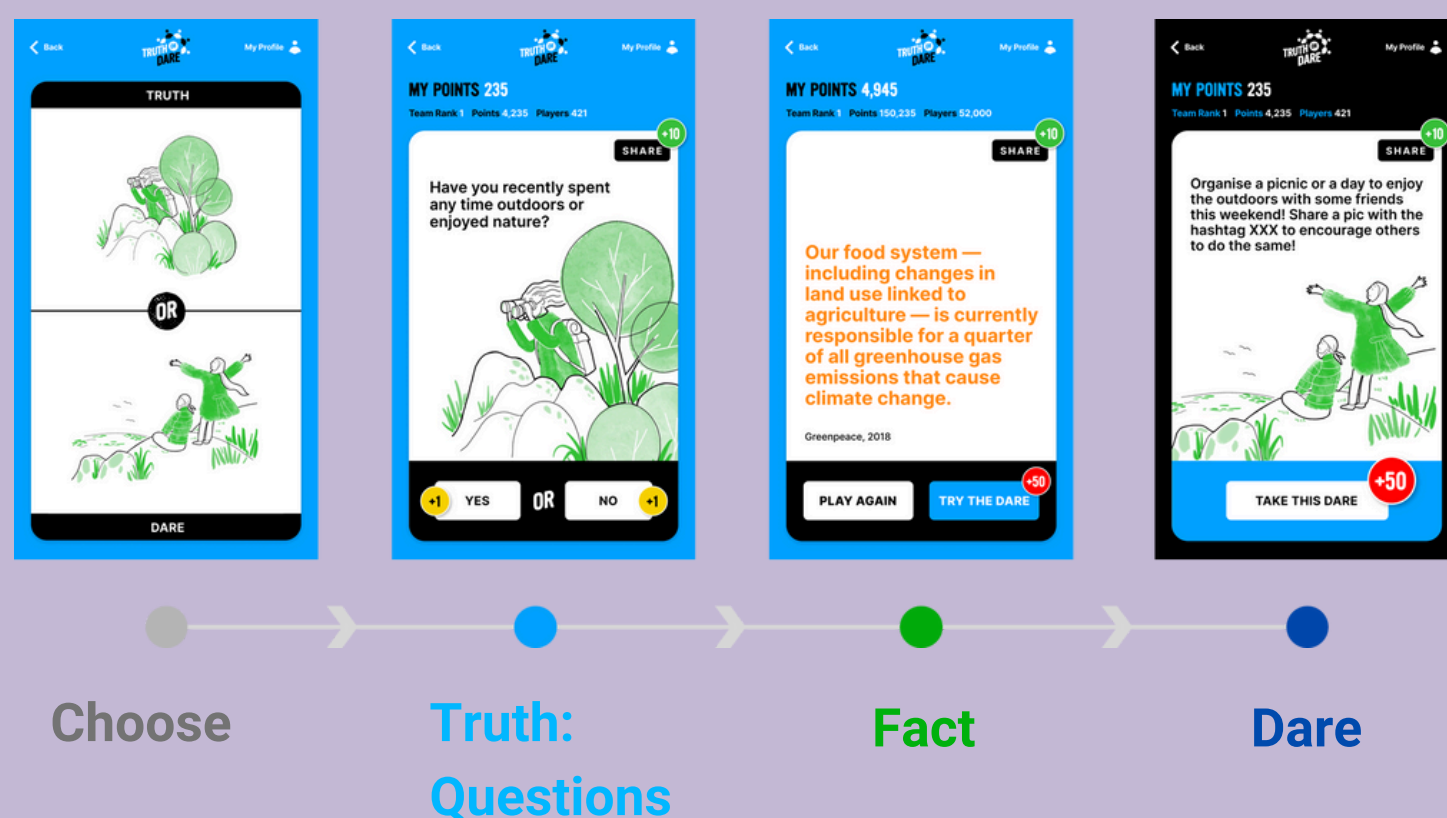
Since its creation in 2020, the Ummah for Earth Alliance has been steadily expanding with **22 organisations** worldwide and 5 individual allies.

Focusing on empowering communities and local environmental initiatives, this Alliance sheds light on **the intersection between Islamic faith and climate action**, and encouraging and helping Muslims and others to raise their voices for the well-being of our common home.

Truth-or-Dare 2.0

Truth-or-Dare is a fun and interactive team-based game offered during the Holy Month where players are rewarded points for answering questions, sharing content, registering to take dares and daring others to join the action!

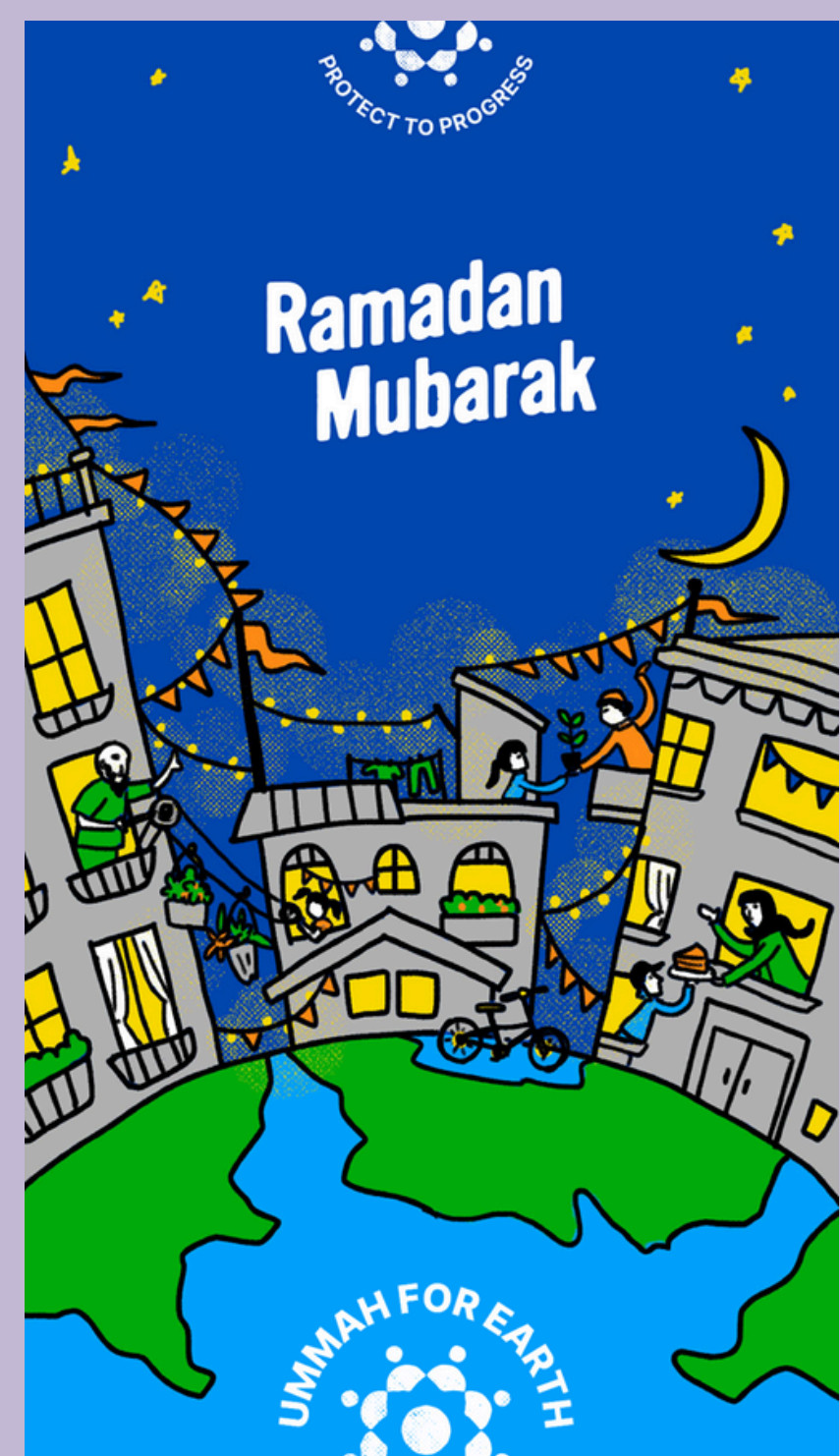
The aim was to encourage young urban Muslims to take advantage during the Holy Month to develop new sustainable eco-habits that they can maintain after Ramadan



Finding: Innovative digital initiatives such as social media campaigns and online games during cultural/religious events have successfully engaged youth in sustainability efforts:

"Ummah4Earth created an online game during Ramadan that allowed youth to select a team leader (this was a social media influencer). Each team gained points when they committed to and showed proof of living in a sustainable way during the month of Ramadan."

– Ines, Europe, Global One 2015, age group 25-30



Survey Results

Preferred tools

Youth respondents highlighted the importance of digital platforms in connecting them with others facing similar challenges, that would otherwise be out of reach of their community, fostering a sense of belonging and empowering them to take action for people and the planet.

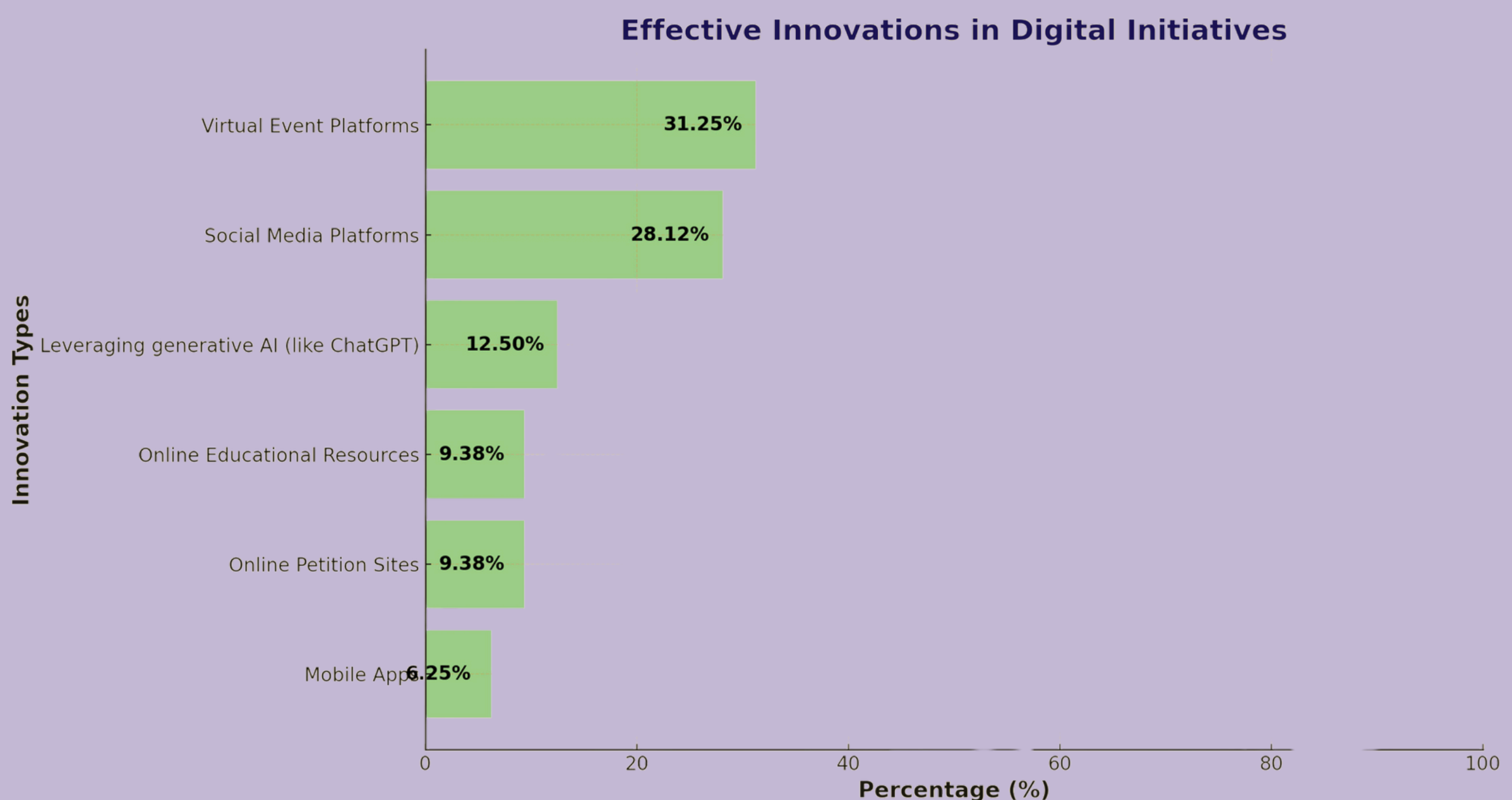
These digital pathways can be as simple as pop-up notifications and content uploaded on social media, like the thought of the day by Sadhguru Whispers, which helps set a positive, productive, and holistic tone for the day, or as comprehensive as immersive virtual reality (VR) mindfulness programmes like ZenVR.

As for favoured tools, 31% of our respondents suggested virtual event platforms as the most effective digital tools for advancing the SDG's in their communities, followed by social media platforms at 28%, leveraging generative AI like ChatGPT at 13% and then others like online educational resources, petition sites, and mobile apps following behind.

Finding: Digital platforms are essential tools for youth resilience, providing education, emotional support, and crisis response capabilities:

“Digital platforms have offered me opportunities to stay resilient amidst global crises. Seeing how others navigate these situations guides and motivates me in my community.”

- Samuel, Africa, Eclectic Love Non-profit, age group 25-30



Building Resilience through Digitally Supported Faith and Cultural Practices



Digital tools advance youth climate and social goals as well as personal connections to faith and cultural communities for communal resilience and well-being.

Many youth emphasized that values-based principles such as compassion, justice, and community service inspire young people to engage in social and environmental causes. And cultural traditions, with their deep-rooted practices and communal bonds, offer a sense of identity and belonging, crucial in times of global change. Further, youth groups within religious and cultural organizations act as support networks, enabling young individuals to share experiences, seek guidance, and collectively navigate uncertainties. And digital tools now facilitate this all.

Adamah cultivates **vibrant Jewish life in deep connection with the Earth**, catalyzing culture change and systemic change through **Community Building, Jewish Environmental Education, Leadership Development, and Climate Action** through immersive experiences. Two Youth Empowerment programs, JYCM and Adamah on Campus live this out.

Adamah aims to:

- Build Jewish youth chapters in every context are mobilizing their synagogues, schools, institutions, and communities to fight for climate justice;
- Ensure that climate justice is a visible, central tenet expressed within Jewish religious values, cultural traditions, social activities, and historical existence.
- Develop a series of comprehensive and specific policy, monetary, and social changes in the country around which the Jewish community directly built power; and
- Mobilise the public to highlight to governments and institutions directly responsible for the crisis to enact bold structural changes that combat climate change.

Shamati Climate Emotional Resilience Initiative was started by Adamah in January 2024 seeking to create a body of resources, professional development offerings, and field leadership that leads the Jewish community in meeting this moment, and the intersecting issues that stem from the climate crisis.

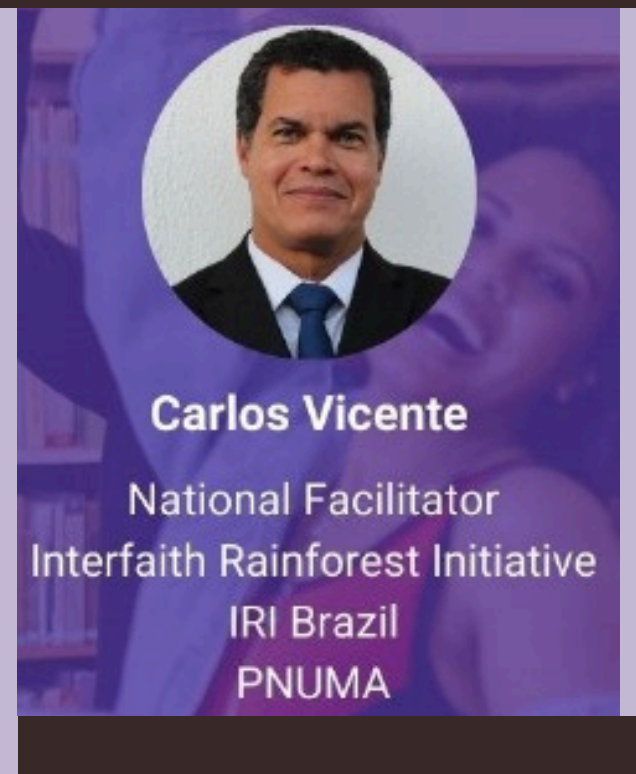
Using Innovative Digital Pathways (Virtual Reality) for Sustainable Development - Environmental Awareness

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) is a platform with a presence in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, DRC and Indonesia to support religious leaders to expand their contribution to the preservation of climate balance, the conservation and sustainable use of forest and the protection of the rights of indigenous and local communities.

They produced "Amazônia Viva", a virtual reality film that immerses viewers in the Tapajós River region of the Brazilian Amazon, unveiling one of the most important ecosystems on the planet bringing the Amazon closer to the people worldwide.

The film is one of the main tools for raising awareness, training and engaging religious leaders and communities, as well as the general public about preserving the Amazon and defending the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Protecting critical ecosystems in Latin America, Africa and Asia depends on strong support from the population to elect government officials with the same goal for protection and conservation, and to make ethical decisions when consuming products and services.



Modern scientific knowledge that is creative, incorporating image, sounds and musicality can reform our understanding and connection with nature.

The film also allows direct contact with indigenous people, presenting them as holders of valuable knowledge related to biodiversity that is fundamental to the quality of life, including people who live in cities.

There is interest from a range of groups in the film, presenting the challenge on how to scale up awareness to schools, libraries, and other informal education forums.

"In our Buddhist community, there are new initiatives to use virtual reality (VR) to connect, learn and convene together. Currently, we have an app in Meta that is called ZenVR So we practice meditation together there...People can just use their glasses to learn it from Buddha."

- Bhikkhu ("Buddhist monk") Vasu,
Latin America, United Religions
Initiative (URI) / Arizona Faith Network
(AFN)

Survey Results

Bridging generational gaps

Digital tools enable intergenerational mentorship and reverse mentorship, and foster collaborative efforts. Elders can impart traditional knowledge and values, while youth often bring in fresh perspectives and technological expertise.

The innovations that come from this mentorship affect positive changes with an understanding of values-based motivations, and with institutional support.

Over 70% of the youth respondents highlighted technological literacy as the most significant challenge to intergenerational collaboration, followed by communication style differences and resistance to new tools.

But, youth groups have demonstrated some successful strategies. For example, by facilitating dialogue via hybrid approaches, strategically selecting modes of communication, and virtually engaging youth in traditionally inaccessible policy-making spaces.

Finding: Technological literacy differences and resistance to new digital tools by older generations are significant challenges. However, youth are proposing solutions such as digital literacy training and inclusive virtual workshops.

"Encouraging mentorship programs, hosting intergenerational virtual workshops and meetings has been helpful to ensure no one is left out of these conversations."

– Ines, Europe, Global One 2015, age group 25-30.

Youth respondents emphasize that beginning connection and collaboration through a mode that will reach older generations is necessary for effective engagement for example, using formal letters of invitations or emails before moving to other platforms, such as social media and virtual meetings.



Enhancing Youth Access and Intergenerational Collaboration

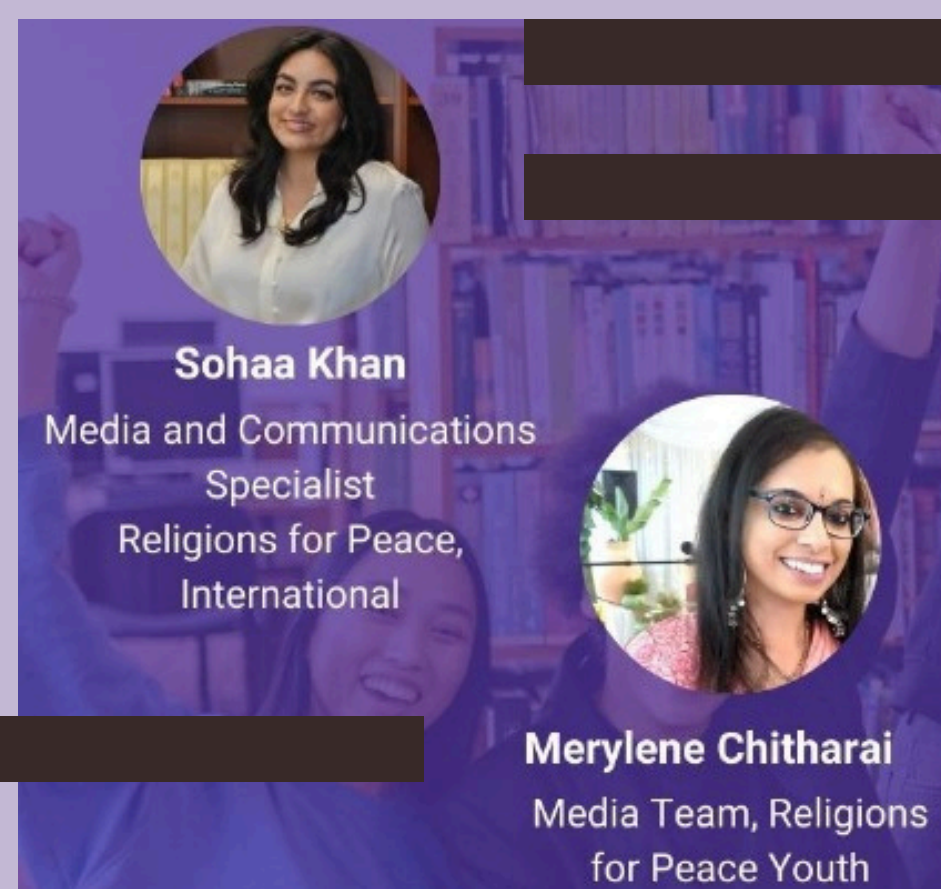
Religions for Peace (RfP) provides a platform not only to religious leaders but to youth as well, establishing youth networks within its Interreligious Councils or IRCs.

RfP proposes solutions and collaborates with others through regional and national IRCs leveraging virtual and in-person convenings. Some effective strategies that have helped to bridge intergenerational gaps, include inclusive design thinking workshops that ensure digital platforms are user friendly and accessible to all ages, which help in fostering effective intergenerational collaboration and trainings for people of all ages.

This builds trust between different generations through open communication and shared goals, which is essential in a successful intergenerational engagement.

Virtual meetings need to be inclusive and ensure that there is diverse participation, and access resources more effectively.

Some challenges that hinder effective youth participation in decision making processes include limited access to resources such as internet, trainings, equipment and information, time differences, and securing funding for their participation.



“[We need] Timely discussion. The new generation is open to working together with like-minded people regardless of faith, age, or expertise. Digital pathways make that even simpler. Excited to explore more possibilities with fellow youth on this discussion.”

- Maryam, Africa, UN HABITAT, age group 19-24

Bridging the gap between youth and older generations can be challenging, often leading to tensions when sharing decision-making power, or in navigating new or unfamiliar topics/spaces.

Despite the challenges, youth involvement and has fostered global networking, providing greater support for their initiatives, and further Religions for Peace has been successful in promoting youth leadership with an intergenerational partnerships.

Conclusion

Digital tools are not just important to advance youth, climate and social goals, but for also **personal connection to faith or cultural communities**, which we know to enhance individual and communal resilience and well-being.

Actionably, what are these top digital pathways?

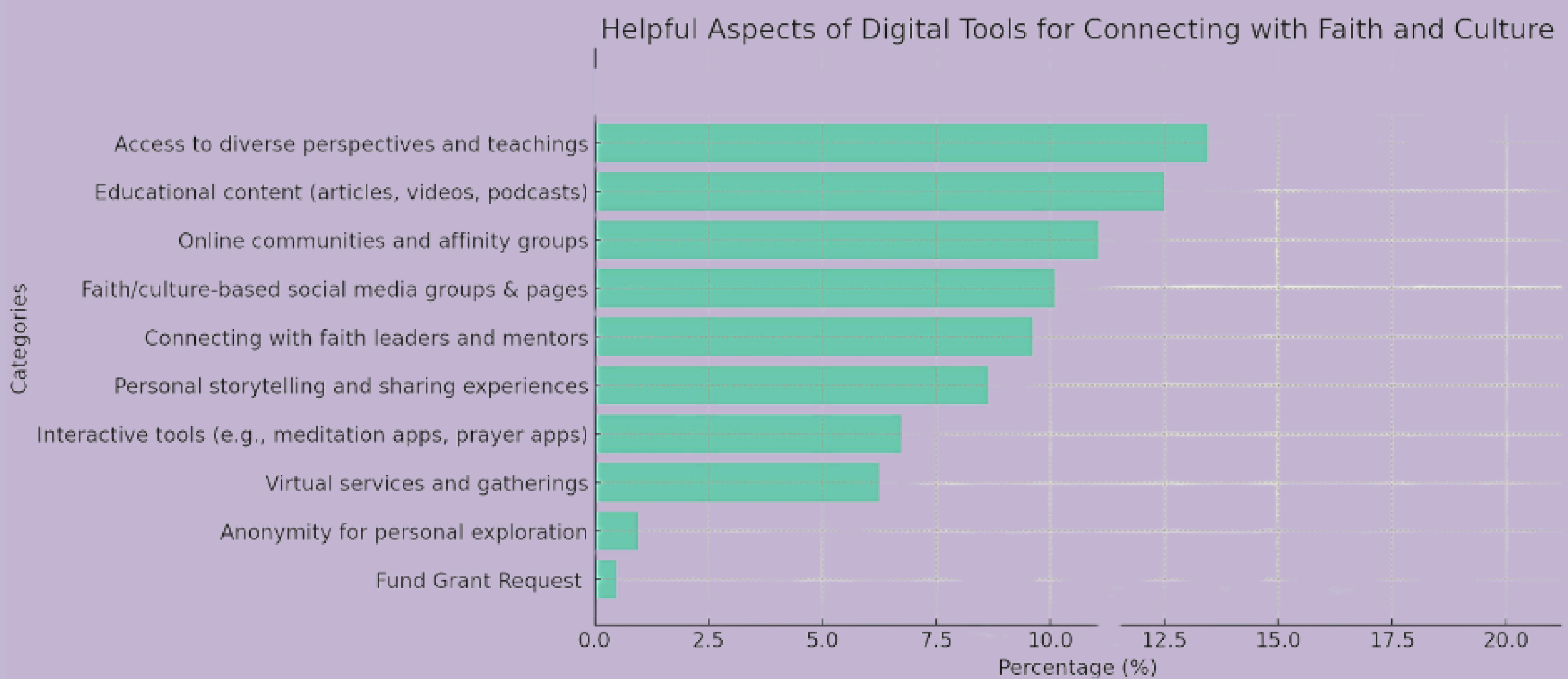
The global youth respondents voiced that:

- 1) Access to diverse perspectives and teachings;
 - 2) Educational content; and
 - 3) Online opportunities to connect faith/cultural communities
- were the top digital pathways for further engagement in their community and community action.

In our conversations with the youth respondents and within the Faith for Earth Youth Council, many emphasized that faith-based principles such as compassion, justice, and community service inspire young people to engage in social and environmental causes.

Cultural traditions, with their deep-rooted practices and communal bonds, offer a sense of identity and belonging, crucial in times of global change.

Youth groups within religious and cultural organizations are supporting networks, enabling young individuals to share experiences, seek guidance, and collectively navigate uncertainties. And digital tools now facilitate this all.



Youth are looking at the current world and seeing destructive paradigms of politics, state structures and ideologies, colonialism, the climate crisis...the system is not working. We're interested in something else. So, we're turning to the spiritual, returning to the ancestral. Here we find answers in the ways our families, cultures, religions, or peoples used to live which are at odds with extractivism."

– Madeline, North America, Adamah Jewish Youth Climate Movement, age group 19-24.