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The Relationship between Church Marketing and Church Growth: Evidence from Ghana

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Abstract- This paper explores the impact of church marketing and its effect on church attendance growth. Evidence was gathered from the analysis of a randomly-drawn sample size of 132 which involves 12 pastors, and 120 members from six charismatic churches. Results from the calculated Pearson correlation indicates that positive relationship exist between 'church promotion' and church attendance growth although regression results show that among all the variables considered in the study, it is 'Radio PR' that plays a major role in influencing the growth of churches in Ghana. The study concludes that 'Radio PR tool' has been the most effective tool influencing church attendance growth in Ghana.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research posits that using marketing elements to promote religious services has become a top bracket business in Ghana. This is occasioned by the upsurge of autonomous, non-centralized, independent established religious movements in Ghana. This situation has favoured marketing of religious activities in Ghana. Although church founders and leaders postulate spiritual reasons for the emergence and expeditious growth of these religious movements, other research has shown that the pivotal reason of their emergence is basically economic. When religious adherents go to see men and women of God' who are implied to develop power, predict the future, explain the present and uncover the past, they pay for the supposedly religious services rendered. Thus, religion is now one of the easy means of achieving riches rather than a means of making people better citizens for a healthier society, hence the need to market their activities. Ghana, like other nations in the third-world, has been witnessing the ascendancy of autonomous and non-centralized religious groups and movements in the past few decades. The country is a fertile ground for all kinds of religious movements. Despite the reasons for the foundations of these religious groups by their founders, there appear to be a common notion that the pivotal reason for the emergence of these religious groups is commerce. But most founders of the independent religious groups would hardly accept this fact. For instance, in a pilot survey conducted by the

researchers, none of the founders of the religious groups identified commercial tendencies as a motivational factor for the commencement of religious groups.

Commercial tendencies of the many religious groups in Ghana have of late become overtly evident that it cannot be safely ignored. Religion has been largely seen in Ghana as a source of making money hence Ghana has been described as basically a money-worshipping nation by Rt. Rev. Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso (Ghana Dot.com, 2009). The money-business in colours of religion finds a comfortable place in many churches in Ghana today. Religion has been twisted as it were to suit the intents and purposes of the users. This is what Obiora (2004) describes as: 'Holy' Deceit – the art of trading in God's name. The nutty trend for money has made some people willing to commercialize religion for their own benefits and interests. Many vulnerable people have fallen into the trap of this unholy merchandize. A detailed survey of the effects of religion in human society according to Xavier's (2004) is that religion has a tremendous power both to heal and to harm. On the positive side, religion has led to great achievements in the history of humanity. In Ghana for instance, religious groups and organizations led the foundation for formal education that ushered in the era of Western Civilization. For example, Opoku Ware senior high school, Aggrey memorial and Adisadel College are among the numerous schools which were introduced by religious groups particularly the Catholic Church. Apart from this positive aspect of the increasing number of churches in Ghana, it is also noted that certain aspects of religion enable people to be compassionate, truthful, disciplined, understanding, peace loving, responsible, creative and open minded (Mc Daniel and Cooper 2002). Despite this positive aspect with the increasing number of Churches in Ghana, in the history of humanity, religion has been experienced as one of the easy and ready tools that can be manipulated for diversified intentions and purposes (Santos and Matthews 2001). For instance, a brief survey of the Bible shows that the Hebrew religion supports the killing of people in the name of God. In the Israelites wars of Jericho recorded in the Books of Joshua, the invasion of the city of Jericho led to putting everyone to death except the family of Rahab at the command of the Lord (Numbers 26:3 KJV). It must be noted that there are no religious

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crises in Ghana but what is prevalent in the Ghanaian religious realm is what influences the sustainability and growth of these churches when they are established by individual people? In answering such a question, the study seeks to set up the following hypothesis based on the various literatures which the researchers have gone through.

H_1 : There is relationship between church advertisement and church attendance growth.

H_2 : There is a relationship between word-of-mouth and church attendance growth

H_3 : There is a relationship between church Radio PR and church attendance growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

One aspect of marketing that many researchers have not concentrated much is “ecclesiastic marketing” and according to Sherman and Delvin (2001) it refers to the application of marketing in order to spread a religion, to attract proselytes and to obtain their loyalty and that is increasingly used by different religious groups, through specific institutions such as churches or praying buildings and missions in order to get the wanted answer from a target market. We consider this definition of church marketing being too commercial, referring to religion as a normal service, not as a social one. Another view, of Christian origin is offered by Prehn(2001) which states that religious marketing is a serving measure that consists of a sum of activities (every action and process that tells the story) involved in moving the Salvation good (produced by God through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ) in order to help the one who intends to become consumer(a lost human being) to accept this Salvation. The limits of this approach lies in two aspects. The first one regards the fact that religious marketing is analyzed only from a Christian perspective. The second aspect is related to the fact that it refers only to the “spiritual” exchange. In reality, church marketing can be used by any Church or religious organization, and the pursued goals can be less grandiose (for example, fundraising).In the opinion of Stevens et al. (2004), church marketing means analysis, planning and management of the voluntary exchange between a religious organization and its constituents, with the aim of satisfying the needs of both parties. Religious marketing focuses on analyzing the needs of its constituents, on developing marketing programs to satisfy those needs, on offering them at the right place and time, on effective and efficient communication with the constituents and on attracting the necessary resources in order to support the activities of the organization. The authors describe the “constituents” of a religious organization as being members, employees, participants, supporters and all other persons affected by the organization. This definition is considered to be too inward oriented.

Religious marketing can be used also in missionary missions, or proselytism, the action being oriented to some groups outside the respective church. Horne and McCauley (2005) conceptualize church marketing and stated that it refers to “understanding, creating, communicating and delivering consumer related values. This is a modern definition, which underlines the creating value role of marketing, but it is too general. Chuck et al (2005) in adding his voice to what is meant by church marketing see it as a process by which concrete decisions are taken (regarding what religious organizations can or cannot take in order to fulfil their mission). Marketing is not selling, advertising or promotion, though it may include all of them. Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementing and control of carefully formulated programs, in order to determine voluntary exchange with specific target groups, in order to accomplish the missionary objectives of the organization. In other words, marketing may help a religious organization to fulfil its goals, by interacting with different groups.

a) The Church Marketing Process and Commercialization of Religion in Ghana

It is obvious that all religious organizations have a strategic thinking. Modern marketing offers the necessary instruments to a continuous and complete process, whose result is favourable to the organization that uses it. Studies show that clergy opinions towards these strategic instruments are very diverse (they vary from one country to another and from one religion to another).On one hand, Sherman and Devlin (2001) studied the Church of England’s clergy’s opinions regarding strategic marketing planning and the results were not very favorable. On the other hand, Newman and Benchener (2004) present the results of survey of American protestant churches that indicate that 91.8% of the churches have mission statements, 70.5% have vision statements and 63.9% have official declaration on their values, philosophy and doctrines. Baron and Kenny (1986) declared that even though the debate whether religious organizations should embrace marketing concepts continues, yet the use of management and marketing practices by churches appears pretty often This lack of concordance between the declarations and the actions of religious organizations may lead us to the belief that the real problem is the unfavorable image of strategic actions, as a result of the way they are used in the business world. There are innumerable cases in Ghana where religion has been used as a commodity for merchandize particularly among the independent religious groups. All over Ghana and the world generally, ‘marketing’ God is fast becoming a top bracket business. When you go to see a “man of God” who develops power, sees past, present and future, you pay the gate fee and also the consultation fee. That is only a preamble. Johann Tetzl, a Dominican Friar was

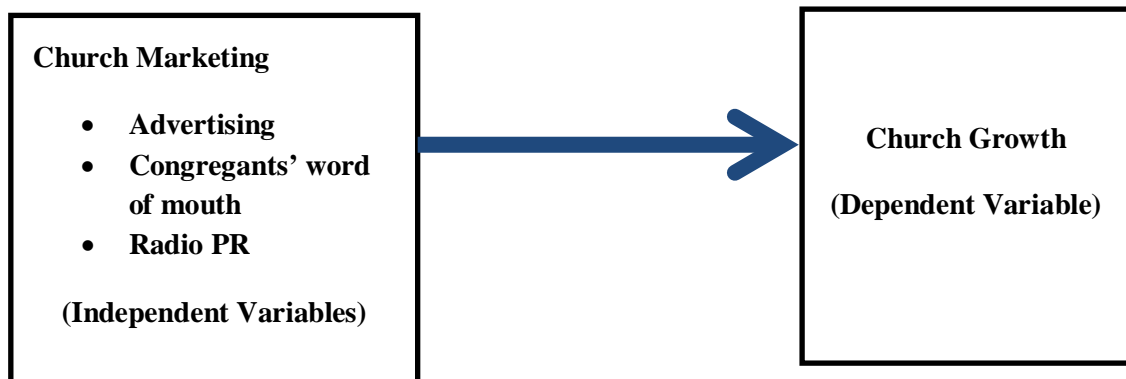
one of the commercial masters of the indulgence. He offered a formula that wiped up the religious sentiments of the people who accept to pay whatever amount they could afford as a price for indulgence. It is also alleged that Tetzel attached to the sales of the indulgence that even the sins which a man intended to commit would be forgiven of indulgence sent to his Archbishop. Luther condemned among other things the sales of indulgence on moral and theological grounds. The commercialization of indulgence tore Christianity apart as many considered this irreverent trade sacrilegious. Nearly five hundred years after the scandal and abuse of indulgences, Christianity is still witnessing immense commercialization in religious matters, William & Alan (2002).

b) Marketing Church Products/Services

Just like other organizations that market product and services, churches also offer products/services and market them to their congregation members. One of such products according to Gainer and Padanyi (2002) is fertility. In linking this to the Ghanaian situation, one may realize that most Ghanaian Communities are Patriarchal. Payments for bride prices are high. Women are expected to be productive in childbearing otherwise the whole bargain of marriage would be considered a lost and a "bad market". Women go to any length to ensure that they get children. The religious climate often leads most women to seek help from Spiritual churches. The Spiritualists often explain the reasons for such infertility within a religious context. Items are usually required to perform rituals of religious nature. This is another hot spot for merchandize. These religious vendors of fertility are only too willing to utilize the opportunity to make money by marketing the church using any of the communication tools to tell the outside world what they can do in terms of fertility. Another product/service marketed to congregation members is salvation. Salvation can have a double meaning within a

religious context. In otherworld sense, it can be described as where one attains eternal bliss with God. In this sense, the condition for achieving it is righteousness of life. In another sense, it is moving from a state of danger to a peril-free one. Such Peril could be provoked by natural phenomena like a storm, hunger, sickness or it could be caused by a human enemy or a malevolent deity.

Salvation is not cheap to get, it must be paid for and using advertising and other communication tools play a significant role for churches to communicate to the outside world that they can excellently provide this service. Last adopting marketing communication strategies, one of the most common product/service marketed to congregation members is healing. In the state of ill health, a desperate client is willing to pay any amount to get well. Now just like other communication tools employed by marketers such as advertising, customers recommendation and public relations to attract customers to patronize in the products or services offered by these companies, it is evident from the literature provided by Foreman and Sargeant (2001) as well as Hill and Hood (1999) that churches also adopt these communication tools in order to sell these products/services to congregation members and also to attract more congregants to be loyal to the churches which they find themselves. Though looking at the comments by these authors that churches adopt these communication tools to market their products and also to attract more members, one need to critically look as to whether these communication tools really have positive impact on the patronage of these church products as well as church growth. In doing this, the researchers have set the theoretical framework for the study as:



The theoretical framework above shows the relationship between these independent variables and the dependent variable. As can be seen, the

independent variables are advertising, church member recommendation and public relations whilst the dependent variable is church growth.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study hinges on two main sources of data, namely primary and secondary. The secondary data which constitute the core of the literature review are drawn from textbooks, journals, articles, previous researches and media reports, and the internet. For the primary data the researchers drew them from the field and constitute the opinions of local and national pastors' and congregation members of Pentecostal Life Church International, Back To God Family International, Church of Patmos International, Faith Alive Ministries International, Power Chapel Worldwide and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. The researchers selected a branch of these churches drawn from different cities namely Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi and Akosombo to be the target population for the study. In all, two Pastors from each church were selected for the study to service the qualitative part of the study. With regard to the congregation members, using convenience sampling, 20 congregants from each of these churches numbering 120 in total was also used for the study. The main data collection instrument used for the study was interviews and questionnaires directed to the pastors and congregation members respectively. The interviews centred on the impact of church marketing on growth of their churches in terms of increase in number of congregation members. The questionnaires directed to the congregants focus on whether the communication tools employed by the church influenced them to patronize in the church services. The data obtained from the study was analyzed using SPSS (Version 16). In order for the researchers to check the reliability of the figures, this was done through Cronbach's alpha. Again, the use of likert type questions necessitated the use of this test to check internal consistency. The researchers also adopted Mean, Variance, Minimum, Maximum and Standard Deviation to check the characteristics of the sample selected for the study. Since there were multiple variables (Advertising, Congregants word of mouth and Public Relations) as against dependent variable (Church Growth), the study adopted a correlation and multiple regressions to check the characteristics and relationships among the variables. In doing this, data with different set of years 2007 to 2012 from these 6 different churches in relation to the amount of money spend on advertising, congregants' word of mouth and public relations (independent variables) and corresponding church growth (dependent variable) were obtained from these churches. This makes the number of observations to be 36 from these 6 different churches. The model specified for the study was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$$

Here

Y = Church growth

β_0 = constant variable

X_1 = Advertising

X_2 = Congregant's word of mouth

X_3 = Radio PR

e = error

By this equation, effect of independent variables on dependent variable was measured.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Data collected from the study with regard to the pastors showed that 11 members indicating 91.7% were males whilst 1 member indicating 8.3% was a female. For congregation members, 72 representing 60% were females whilst 48 representing 40% were males. On the age of respondents of pastors, 5 of them representing 41.7% were in the ages of 30-39 years, 6 of them representing 50% were in 40-49 and 1 representing 8.3% was in the age of 50-59. On the side of the congregation members, 100 members representing 83.3% were between 30-39 years, 15 representing 12.5% were in 40-49 and 5 representing 4.2% were in the age of 51-59. For the number of years they have been in the church, the responses of the pastors indicated that 2 of them representing 16.7% have been in the church between 5-10 years, 8 representing 66.7% have been in the church between 11-16 years whilst 2 representing 16.7% have also been in the church between 17-22 years. On the side of the congregation members, 56 members representing 46.7% have been in the church between 1-10 years, 51 members representing 42.5% have been in the church between 10-20 years whilst 13 representing 10.8% have been in the church between 21-30 years. The Mean values, Standard Deviation, Minimum, Maximum and Variance for all these categories are shown below in Table 4.1 and 4.2

Table 1 : Descriptive statistics of congregation members

	Age	Gender	NYIC
Mean	36.72500	0.600000	13.00000
Median	36.00000	1.000000	11.00000
Maximum	59.00000	1.000000	30.00000
Minimum	30.00000	0.000000	4.000000
Std. Dev.	6.022315	0.491952	5.967700
Skewness	1.616026	-0.408248	0.836910
Kurtosis	5.919682	1.166667	3.294096
Variance	36.268	0.242016	35.6134
Jarque-Bera	94.85350	20.13889	14.44082
Probability	0.000000	0.000042	0.000732
Observation	120	120	120

Table 2 : Descriptive statistics of pastors

	Age	Gender	NYIC
Mean	40.50000	0.916667	13.66667
Median	42.00000	1.000000	14.50000
Maximum	53.00000	1.000000	21.00000
Minimum	31.00000	0.000000	6.000000
Std. Dev.	6.259538	0.288675	4.097301
Skewness	0.181184	-3.015113	-0.222093
Kurtosis	2.600939	10.09091	2.754656
Variance	39.18180	0.083333	16.78788
Jarque-Bera	0.145280	43.32231	0.128747
Probability	0.929935	0.000000	0.937655
Observation	12	12	12

As was indicated from the study, in testing the reliability of the instruments used which is the questionnaires, the researchers used Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability. With 18 items in the questionnaire

(N), for both the dependent and the independent variable, the values obtained from the Cronbach's alpha of these variables which can be found in table 3 shows that the instrument used (questionnaire) was reliable.

Table 3 : Reliability co-efficients

Variable	Cronbach alpha coefficient	Number of items
Advertising	0.969	5
Word-of-mouth	0.918	3
Radio PR	0.935	4
Church Growth	0.977	6

Interviews conducted with Pastors of the church used for the research indicates 10 representing 83% subscribed to the fact that adopting church marketing through advertising, word of mouth and public relations play a major role in expanding their church through increase in numbers of their congregation members. The other 2 respondents representing 17% could not provide specific answer to the researchers' questions since to them they have not witness any tremendous growth in terms of increase in number of congregation members although they have spent money on advertising and other means of making their church known to the general public.

a) Correlation Analysis

The results of the Pearson correlation used to test the relationship between the variables are presented in the table below:

	X1	X2	X3	Y
X1	1			
X2	0.567703	1		
X3	0.23519	0.051264	1	
Y	0.078841	0.284383	0.606388	1

The table shows that advertising (X1), congregants' word of mouth (X2) and public relations (X3) correlate positively with church attendance growth (Y). This actually support the interview that was done by the researchers with majority of the pastors selected for the study that, marketing communication tools adopted by their churches has a significant role in terms of increasing the number of congregation members which signifies the growth of the church.

b) *Regression Analysis*

Regression table measures the amount of total variation in dependent variable due to independent

variable. The table below show the regression for church attendance growth.

	Coefficient	Standard error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	78.20086316	14.66284276	5.33326753	1.3975E-05
X1	0.00434645	0.006693296	0.649373551	0.521792811
X2	0.002794015	0.002795174	0.999585153	0.326724025
X3	0.032579821	0.008072298	4.036003043	0.000425586
Adjusted R Square			0.37661145	
F			6.8399811	
Observations			36	

From the regression analysis, one can see that the co-efficient of determination indicates approximately 38% of variability in church growth that can be explained by the exogenous variables. Again, the beta co-efficient of *X1* (Advertising) and *X2* (Congregants' word of mouth) show a positive association between them and church attendance growth though their *P* values show that they are not significant. Despite the fact that they are not significant, they had their expected signs as can be seen from the table above. The insignificant *p* values of advertising and congregants' word of mouth can be attributed to the fact that due to the influx of radio and television stations where churches do their advertisement, it becomes difficult for churches to get the timing right as to the right time people listen to a particular radio or watch a particular television station.

Again, the insignificant of the *p* value of *X1* can also be attributed to the fact that people tend to focus on their favourite programmes when watching or listening to radio programmes at their leisure times and therefore place little or no attention when church advertisement is made. Perhaps they see this advertisement as nuisance hence they perceptually block them. It therefore follows that though churches may see advertisement as a tool which positively affects attendance, however, it may be due to 'situational source of self relevance' if even they witness increasing number of congregants. Hence the role which advertising plays can be deemed as insignificant.

The insignificant of the *p* value of *X2* means that congregants' word of mouth is not an influential variable to the growth of churches in Ghana. This can be based

on the fact that there is dissonance between testimonies about the church when the spirit of word-of-mouth is invoked. For example, a congregant who recommends a church to a friend about getting a healing may decide not to continue with the church when the recommended person's expectation is not met. It therefore means that churches effort in strengthening the power of word-of-mouth should not see much investment as the tool is weak in developing its set goal.

With regard to Radio PR, at 99% significance level, *X3* plays a role in influencing church attendance growth. This implies that as resources are invested in Radio PR systems, it has a positive effect on church growth attendance. The significance of this variable to the dependent variable can be attributed to the fact that Radio PR enjoys positive feed-back from the prospects perhaps due to the benefit of 'Linguistically power' that establishes the spiritual benefits of the church in the long term memory (LTM) of the prospects. It was established from the study that the peak time for Radio PR works is between the hours of 10: pm and 5:30 am. It is therefore interesting to know what really keep these prospects awake at such a time when nature demands their sleep. Though *X1* and *X2* are not significant based on the regression, from the correlation analysis, the researchers can conclude on the hypotheses set for the study as:

Hypothesis	Direction	Hypothesis Supported
H ₁ : Church advertisement has positive relationship with church attendance growth.	Positive	Yes
H ₂ : Congregants' word-of-mouth has positive relationship with church attendance growth	Positive	Yes
H ₃ : Radio PR has positive relationship with church attendance growth.	Positive	Yes

From this, we accept all the hypotheses that the independent variables has a positive relationship with the dependent variable (church growth) but the variable that is more influential to the growth of the church is Radio PR.

V. CONCLUSION

The main objective underlying the study is to assess the relationship between church marketing and church attendance growth using six different churches

as case study. In achieving this objective, the researchers set three different hypotheses in order to assess if using marketing communication tools such as advertising, congregants' recommendation and public relation has any relationship with church attendance growth. Results obtained from the study through the calculated Pearson Correlation as well as interviews with Pastors of the churches selected for the study indicates that positive correlation exists between these independent variables and church attendance growth although in terms of their significance, it is Radio PR that plays a vital role in influencing the growth of churches members in Ghana. The positive correlation of the independent variables with the dependent variable made the researchers uphold all the hypotheses. On this note one can conclude that indeed there are present day commercial pastors who are really implementing Marketing tools in execution of their commercial agenda but whilst they have positive relationship with the dependent variable, from the regression analysis, the one that is significant in influencing the growth of churches in Ghana is Radio PR.

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