Predictors of Church Participation In Effutu Municipality, Ghana: A Marketing Perspective

Rexford Owusu Okyireh, George Kankam, and Daniel Opoku

Abstract—The budding rate of churches in recent past has been on the rise due to myriad of factors ranging from miracle seeking, economic sustainability and the quest to be different in the wake of competition. A cross-sectional survey was used for the study. The population for the study comprised all church in the Efutu Municipality, totalling 400. A sample size of 292 respondents was selected using convenient sampling technique. Questionnaires were used to elicit information from respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse research objectives while Pearson product moment correlation was used to test the relationship between the variables. The study concludes that; preaching style and branding are significant in increasing church participation. However, physical evidence such as church building, signage and ambience do not influence church participation.

Keywords—church marketing, church branding, faith branding, physical evidence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of churches in Ghana is unprecedented at least from the layman’s point of view. It is also insightful that a lot of churches in Ghana are established mainly for economic gains of the founders rather than satisfying spiritual needs of congregants [4]. Studies have shown that the surge of churches is the result of unsatisfied customers seeking varied solutions to problems as well as heightened competition amongst churches [27]. [8] observed that congregants, also known as customers have peculiar way of worship especially in the charismatic churches. According to [31] charismatic churches mostly equate faith with the personality of God by shouting, dancing, running, jumping amongst others. This characteristic is not the same with the orthodox churches hence the youth sometimes prefer the former to the latter. [28] observed that the seemingly increasing style of worship creates competition and it is very evidential that churches have taken up the media landscape to propagate ideologies from dawn to dusk. [2] asserted that, there are lots of churches totalling about 7,897 as at 2010 and hence the churches could be considered as commercial entities; and this number is sure to increase looking at the time of the research.

The increase in churches has culminated due to marketing strategies and marketing communication tools used to stay in competition and help increase visibility [28]. [18] argue that non-profit organisations to various degrees engage in product improvement, especially when competition beckons. The authors further opine that churches have added non-religious activities to satisfy members seeking non-spiritual needs as well. In fact, [30] lays a strong claim that churches must strive to meet the needs of its congregants in order to reduce defection. In addition, [19] are of the opinion that preaching styles can help increase church enrolment in the wake of intense competition. Despite this assertion, some scholars have split opinion as to whether marketing activities influence church participation or people are influenced by the ambience of the church. More importantly, [27] are of the view that brand identity with regards to the church is under researched and that studies are needed to have a conclusive view on church and its related branding issues. The extant marketing literature on church and its related issues are very limited and in Ghana it is almost non-existent [1]. Therefore, insights into the marketing activities of churches in Ghana are not properly documented due to the little attention given to the subject matter. This study was undertaken to answer this question on predictors of church participation in Effutu municipality, Ghana; A marketing perspective. Thus the following research objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. To find out if preaching style has a relationship on church participation?
2. To find out if physical evidence has an influence on church participation?
3. To examine if church branding has a relationship with church participation?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rational choice theory posits that individuals weigh the costs and benefits of a product or service before maximising on the potential benefits [21]. This theory views the individual as a rational being and hence decisions are made based on evaluation of benefits. Furthermore, an individual’s ability to make a decision to attend a church is primarily based on the expected outcome such as social support, spiritual growth as espoused by [12]. In the work of [11], rational choice theory was used to explain the benefits of church participation among regular and irregular church goers. The study concludes that, a correlation exists between perceived spiritual and social benefits on church participation.

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III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure I: Conceptual Framework on predictors of church participation. Source: Author’s construct

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. MARKETING THE CHURCH

[24] observed that competition, whether seen as a bane or not has led to the awakening of many institutions which hitherto were virtually “lifeless”. Moreover, the spread of churches in Accra has gone up significantly at least from observation. Indeed not a single day passes without hearing screams and shouts of congregants. [16] opine that, the past two decades has seen media saturation at alarming rate. These unavoidable strategies demand that, institutions adopt market-oriented approaches in staying ahead of the competition of attracting and retaining potential members at the church. Marketing is defined by [10] as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large”. Due to the processes involved in the creation and communication, churches are able to package messages and disseminate it on various mediums. This is expected to reach the target audience and the result is seen in the increase of members to the church. [17] opine that, members consume the products the church offers through religious teachings that culminates in shaping the faith of the individual.

In addition, [3] & [4] are of the view that marketing by the church is characterised by analysis, planning, and management of charitable exchanges that inure to the benefit of both the church and the members. This goes to buttress the earlier assertions by [17] that the ultimate goal of church participation is spiritual fortification though; there are other hidden interests of members. Once marketing is seen as an exchange of value between two entities, churches can be seen in the same spectacle as discussed. Despite the significant role marketing plays in bringing churches to the limelight, [3] and [3] studied church growth through marketing efforts in Ghana and observed that, there is the need for churches to keep marketing principles, which eventually culminates in the growth of the church. The authors further suggest that churches stand the chance of slams when marketing concepts are ignored. In reviewing the work of [3], it is evident that marketing is needed in promoting the activities of the church and this can help increase member participation. In addition, some customers or perhaps members of the church stop attending church when visibility of churches activities are not propagated through varied mediums.

V. BRANDING THE CHURCH

Many non-profit organizations including the church have adopted marketing strategies to project distinct characteristics which branding is inclusive [24]. Scholars in non-profit research have given prominence to branding strategies in recent literature. [23] define a brand as “a more than a visual identity: the name, logo and graphic design used by an organization. A brand is a psychological construct held in the minds of all those aware of the branded product, person, organization or movement. Brand management is the work of managing these psychological associations”. To this end, branding of churches is of great importance in the wake of competition that has characterized the non-profit sector. It is essential that, branding is very powerful and can help keep existing customers and also attract new ones as well. [22] further posits that, a brand is the most valuable asset of company and helps consumers to differentiate one brand from another. [26] also believe strongly that, brands are necessary and hence aids in the decision making of consumers towards a product or a service. The usage of brand elements such as name, sign, colour by churches are meant for identification purposes which also helps to differentiate from other churches.

[15] observed the evolution of religious branding and it emerged that, marketing of religion has grown substantially and it’s due to the varied media channels used. The study concludes that branding is an important tool in marketing hence religious activities ought to be marketed to increase enrolment and brand differentiation. [15] assertion has a resemblance to [3] as both scholarly works agree that churches ought to make their presence felt in media outlets and that can encourage potential customers or members to their fold. The work of [30] put a light on the way forward for churches in attracting and retaining members. The study recommends that the growth of a church partially depends on marketing communication media other than the usual referral and newsletters often given out. [30] argues that churches ought to be trendy in disseminating information and move away from the traditional marketing channels. In a related study, [13] considered factors that attract members to church. The study was primarily interested in age of new members and the possible sources of information. The study concluded that, churches should not stay aloof hoping members will throng its premises but rather, marketing efforts are needed to persuade potential members to the church. [4], discovered that there exist a positive relationship between church promotion and church attendance growth. The authors concur that, out of the numerous channels of communication, it was radio that emerged as the single most important channel. [4] are of the view that pastors who are commercially inclined are skewed towards marketing on radio platforms and that helps to increase membership. This claim really supports the work of [12] who opines that churches must not be distant from marketing activities, otherwise it might affect participation.
[25], sought to establish the role of branding in enhancing choice of charismatic churches in Accra. The research found that people go to church due to the preaching style and the personality of the spiritual leader. [4], in their study mentioned Mensah Otobil, a leading pastor in Ghana and made concrete assertion that, the preaching style makes members visit the church regularly hence the day the pastor does not preach, membership drops. This shows that, membership grows due to the preaching style of the pastor and not necessarily advertisement. The author further opines that, logo and name of the church do not influence church participation. Almost four decades back, [25] developed the Hortatory-Interactive Preaching (HIP) scale to assess preaching styles. The study found that the scale helped to distinguish preaching styles and more importantly favoured certain age groups. For instance, young people prefer interactive preaching style than older ones. The study further revealed that interactive styles are neutralised depending on the preaching topics however, hortatory style is sometimes preferred. The study of [24] sits perfectly well in the work of [25] in that some renowned in Ghana (e.g. Pastor Mensah Otobil) preaching style seems to influence the younger generation as seen on Sunday services over the period.

[19] explored the factors influencing church choice. The study revealed that, uninspiring sermons accounts for the reason why church members move from one church to another. In addition, worship experience accounts for some members joining or leaving a church. This further suggests that preaching and worship styles account for church growth. [20] looked at preaching style and concludes that topical preaching is welcomed by the church members and it meets the needs of the congregation. In addition, topical preaching enhances church growth and hence the study admonishes pastors to blend expository with topical preaching styles. In the works of [14], it is established that new religious format has come to stay in Ghana especially on religious leaders. Many observed posters and billboards in Ghana do not project Christ-like images but rather a flamboyant pastor grinning from ear to ear. This according to the author has a way of influencing church participation more importantly when these pastors are viewed as religious celebrities.

On the issue of physical evidence on church participation, [9] assessed physical evidence on service delivery and conclude that there is a strong linkage between the physical environment and the quality of service. The authors further encourage the need for service firms like churches to remain competitive by improving on infrastructure to help improve the quality of service to potential and actual customers. [32] in a related work on service environment and service delivery concludes that, perception of service quality is largely dependent on the service environment in the form of ambience. This according to the authors leads to quality-value-satisfaction. Similarly [5] assessed atmospheric elements in the service industry and concludes that, consumers show positive affiliations when atmospheric elements are deployed in the right manner. [5] are of the view that, there are limitations in consumer research when it comes to ambient factors predicting consumer responses. This means that, a lot of studies cited by the authors do not support service scape supporting consumer responses. [29] on the contrary ague that service scape has little influence on the satisfaction levels of customers. The study further makes emphasis that the physical environment does not automatically lead to satisfaction and hence organizations ought to invest carefully.

Based on the empirical literature and theory reviewed, it is hypothesized that;

H1: There is a positive relationship between preaching style and church participation.
H2: There is a positive relationship between church branding and church participation.
H3: There is a positive relationship between Physical evidence and church participation.

VI. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey was employed for the study. The design helped to generate enough relevant data to provide answers to the board and complete range of research questions and generated stronger evidence for corroboration of findings and conclusion. To ensure that adequate number of responses were received, the sample size was determined using [34] table of random sample size. Therefore, a sample size of 292 was used for the study. A convenience sampling was used to solicit views from 292 respondents of used for the study. This represents 73% recovery rate and the study took a duration of five Sundays as some participants were in the rush to go home. Others too did not return the questionnaire and some were simply not interested for fear of questioning their faith. Furthermore, the Cronbach’s coefficient for the pilot study was 0.95 for preaching style, church branding was 0.94, physical evidence 0.87 and church participation 0.95 which is a satisfactory level of significance.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table II: Correlation Coefficients between Physical evidence, Church participation, Church branding and preaching style.

| Correlations                  | P.Evidence | P.Style | P.Branding | Church participation |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------|------------|----------------------|
| Pearson                       | 1          | .325**  | .325**     | .500**               |
| Correlation                   |            |         |            |                      |
| Pearson                       | .508**     | 1       | .325**     | .500**               |
| Correlation                   |            |         |            |                      |
| Pearson                       | .539**     | .787**  | 1          | .500**               |
| Correlation                   |            |         |            |                      |
| Pearson                       | .325**     | .435**  | .500**     | 1                    |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Field Data, 2018.

Table II indicated respondents view on the relationship between church participation, preaching style, church branding and physical evidence. Pearson correlation matrix was used. Here a correlation was established between the factors and church service. Based on the correlation.
interpretations suggested by Cohen (1988) where correlation coefficient ($r$) = .10 to .29 or $r$ = .10 to -.29 Very Weak. $r$ = .30 to .49 or $r$ = .30 to -.49 and Weak. $r$ = .50 to 1.0 or $r$ = -.50 to -1.0 Strong. Level of significance ($p$-value) = $p$ ≤ 0.05. (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix in Table 1 indicates that, the hypothesis H1 was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.114 \ P < 0.05$). This indicates that preaching style has a significant influence on church participation. The hypothesis H2 of the relationship between church branding and church participation was also found to be positive and significant, with $P<0.05$ and $\beta = 0.702$. The hypothesis H3 was found to be statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.047, \ P < 0.05$). This indicates that although church participation has a relationship with physical evidence, the relationship between these two variables is insignificant. However, there was no issue of multicollinearity since all the VIF is not more than 10 and the tolerance is less than 0.1.

VIII. DISCUSSION

A. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND PREACHING STYLE

From the findings of the study it can be said that participants viewed the way a religious leader delivers messages of faith to their congregation as a tool for marketing the church. In addition, when members assess these messages during church programs and find them to be impactful, it enhances their decisions to be regular and punctual at church. This finding was consistent with [25] who highlighted the role of sermons delivered by charismatic leaders like Mensah Otabil and how it enhances regular church attendance. [19] reported that worship experience accounts for some members joining or leaving a church. Several reasons might have accounted for these findings; first of all, in Ghana most people believe that religious leaders are prophets who have been ordained by God and hence they pose as a symbolic representation of the Supreme Being so when they deliver sermons it involves messages that God have asked them say to their congregation. Hence, failing to attend church means one will miss out messages form the Supreme Being for that week and this will have an impact on one’s life. Moreover, it is also believed some of these religious leaders have personality characteristics such as piousness, which the congregants admire and wish to see or interact with them during the course of the service. Finally, it can be said that the sermons given which mostly portrays elements of prosperity is targeted at specific groups of people such as the youth and so the observed relationship could have been attributed to this reason.

B. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND CHURCH BRANDING

The observed relationship between church branding and church participation meant that when the management of a church adopt strategies to enhance its image, it will increase the number of congregants of churches in municipalities and this finding was consistent with [14] who observed that pastors who engage in engage in direct marketing have the chance of attracting more people to the church since they are seen as religious celebrities. [13] also concluded that, churches should not expect that new members will throng to their churches when they don’t make an effort to use strategies to persuade these people. Reasons that account for the finding is because in Ghana, there is the perception that churches that are famous make a positive impact on people’s lives and therefore when one doesn’t attend such churches, one is missing out on some basic needs of life such as salvation, healing and prosperity. Besides it is also perceived that members of churches that are not well known are mocked by members of famous churches. Also it can be said that in Ghana people will like to see images of religious leaders and what they are “capable of” on posters and billboards and electronic media before they are convinced of attending such churches.

C. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The findings of the study indicated that the edifice of a church did not have an impact of people’s intention to attend church programs. Hence, structural environment makes little impact in increasing church members. This finding was consistent with [29] who is of the view that services cape has little influence on the satisfaction levels of customers. On the contrary, it was inconsistent with [5], who observed that consumers show positive affiliations when atmospheric elements are deployed in the right manner. Reasons that account for the observed relationship could be attributed to the fact that the participants might have had some experiences of visiting churches with attractive edifices but the messages preached where not appealing, the order of service was not properly conducted or the religious leader did not possess the characteristics they desire. Additionally, it can be said that the participants might have considered other factors as more relevant and motivating than what was captured in the study.

D. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The current study is unique in that it assesses the effect of a combination of factors preaching style, church branding and physical evidence and how it enhances church attendance. Also the study adopts two types of analyses: analysis of variance and multiple regression to assess how each of the study variables influence church attendance which previous studies haven’t done. In addition, the respondents used for the study was 292 which seems to be the most populous sample size cited. Finally, the theory of rational choice is used as a framework to guide work and to enhance the understanding of the determinants of church participation.

IX. CONCLUSION

Church marketing in the Effutu Municipality is seen on different dimensions due to the fact that, members of congregation perceive a vibrant or active church to be one that performs miracles and healing. Therefore, members throng to these churches regardless of the physical structures.
that help the spiritual leader deliver the service. The architectural and aesthetics associated with modern era church was really absent in the area where the study was conducted. Member’s preferred to see a ‘powerful’ man of God than the beauty of the church building. Again, preaching style was significant in predicting church participation and that, the ability of a spiritual leader to craft sermons whether with coarse or deep voice influences church participation. Indeed, in the Ghanian context, every spiritual leader is seen as next to the Supreme Being hence, members of congregation tend to worship them like gods.

Branding is the use of logo, signs, and symbols to differentiate one church from the other. It is often seen as how the church is able to communicate to members without losing identity. The current study opine that church branding influences participation in church in the sense that, members are able to remember the church’s name with ease, colours are easy to identify and popularity of the name of the church. When members are able to recall and relate to these phenomena, then it can be concluded that, the church has a strong brand.

X. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In view of the observed relationships in the present study, scholars of church branding should conduct a follow up study to investigate sub-portions of physical evidence such as security equipment, modernized building materials, parking space and others and how it influence church participation. Again, the study can be replicated in other geographical settings to ascertain whether differences might exist. Furthermore, an in-depth interview could be explored to discover new trends in church and its related activities, and this will help expand the discourse.

In terms of practice, marketing teams of churches should explore a wide range of branding strategies so as to enhance church attendance. It is worthy to note that, potential members seek for answers to problems and not just the church building and hence, churches ought to satisfy their members with tailored solutions. Finally, management should consider the nature of preaching styles adopted by religious leaders and invited guest as this can influence the decision of congregants.

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