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Understanding Church Growth through Church Marketing: An Analysis on the Roman Catholic Church's Marketing Efforts in Ghana

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Abstract

Dwindling church membership coupled with the pressing need for raising resources have made it essential for churches to understand the laity's expectations about religious organizations and act upon them. For good or bad, there is an increasing influx of marketing philosophies and principles into the churches' everyday practices. This paper reviews the extant literature on church marketing and highlights opportunities for market oriented managerial actions for church growth. Challenges in adapting the marketing concept to the promotion of faith and the sale of religious objects are identified. Finally, a brief case study of the marketing activities of the Catholic Church in Ghana is provided.

Keywords: Church marketing; market orientation; consumer behavior; social marketing; Catholic Church; Ghana.

Introduction

The term Church came from the Greek word called “Ekklesia” meaning any assembly. The concept of ‘church’ as an assembly is defined by Fagunwa (2015): it is the gathering of local believers or local bodies of believers within a common assembly or the universal bodies or groups of all believers. According to this author, Jesus Christ is the first person to have used this term in the New Testament. It is recognized as an association with other members or believers. In the New Testament, the church was used to represent a covenant community of members or groups whose mandate is to edify one another within the community.

Church management in recent times has seen tremendous application of marketing principles, theories and frameworks (Kuzma, Kuzma, Kuzma, 2009). A study by Adebayo (2015) indicated that many churches most especially the evangelical and Pentecostal traditions have developed an intention of becoming mega churches as well as global brands and so have adopted elaborate marketing strategies, framework and tools. The overall indication is that these marketing tools and frameworks are developed through social marketing principles.

Church marketing is ideally placed as a sub-domain of social marketing. According to Fjeldsoe, Marshall and Miller (2009), social marketing is regarded as an intervention designed to behavioral change with the purpose of improving the personal, social and economic well-being of people. Similarly, Kotler and Armstrong (2010) defined the concept as the adoption of commercial marketing principles, concept, theories and instruments in designing appropriate programme that has the capacity of influencing the behavior of people and improving their social well-being for societal development. The concept is also considered as the use of systematic marketing procedures and application of chronological traditional marketing principles, theories and models, with the purpose of bringing desired benefits onto people (Kotler and Lee, 2008).

In the light of the above, a formal definition for church marketing could be that it is the application of social marketing principles by which individuals and groups through the word of God are converted and as well as goods and services provided to these converts in order to help strengthen their faith to remain in Christ Jesus. The provision of the goods and service to the new converts is not the

ultimate goal, but to help meet the needs of these people so that they can remain with the church and Christ.

This paper subjects some of the key marketing driven growth practices of churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, to the relevant theoretical frameworks provided in the marketing literature, with the objective of knitting together a theory of Church marketing. Essential literature on consumer behavior, market orientation, social marketing, were brought into better understand issues and challenges in Church marketing. The discussion is contextualized by means of a case study of the marketing practiced employed by the Catholic Church.

Theoretical Background

Religion is an important part of day-to-day life that affects the way consumers behave and take decisions. There is need for churches to understand the choices and decisions patterns of believers and unbelievers in order to present the gospel to meet their needs. The consumer of a religious product doesn't make decisions in a vacuum. Many factors come into play in settling on a particular product or service. How people make choices should underpin the religious decision making model as well. The objective is to provide believers an alternative framework upon which they can willingly accept the gospel to become part of the body of Christ.

According to Arli and Pekerti (2016), consumers of faith related products use as screen evaluation framework to make choices: the choice made by the consumer is regarded as the best screen out of a myriad of alternatives. The decision model follows the traditionally established order of need recognition, information search, evaluating alternatives, making a decision, and post purchase behavior. Understanding the decision making process should help the Churches orient themselves to the market need.

Market Orientation

The concept of marketing orientation emerged in the mid 1950's (American Management Association). According to Hart (2003), marketing orientation found its roots in the marketing concept which posits that business entities should always have the needs of the customer in mind. At the very heart of the concept is the notion of customer focus of which customer sensing and customer satisfaction are at the bedrock. Looking for what the customer needs and satisfying

those needs are of importance here. As the marketing concept became a focal point of marketing thought, marketing orientation came to be known as the execution of the marketing concept (Lafferty and Hult, 2001).

Riley (2012), was of the opinion that a marketing oriented approach should react to what customers want and not what a business feels is right for the customers. Adebayo (2015) further stated that when it comes to market orientation, it is vital that marketers conduct a thorough research to discover the needs and wants of customers in order to develop products and services that meet the increasing needs and wants of customers at all time. The idea here is to satisfy the needs of the customer with the right products and not rather seeking out customers to purchase products the firm simply produces. For an organization to succeed, it must outdo its “competitors in creating, delivering and communicating customer values to its chosen target markets” (Kotler and Keller, 2015, p.23).

The theory provides the framework for church growth. It shows how churches can package the word of God which is unadulterated to meet the needs of the people in fulfilling the great commission. The preaching or word evangelism should put the person considered as unbeliever at the center stage and present the word as was preached by Jesus to meet the needs of the unbeliever. Spreading of the “good news” regarded as the word of God should capture the needs, expectation and aspiration of the present generation in order to win such souls for Christ Jesus. In view of this, the theory provides the foundation for fulfilling the great commission taking into consideration the needs of the present generation.

Social Marketing

The individual and societal good is another central focus of social marketing besides profit maximization. Social marketing is of the view “that an organization exists not only to satisfy customer wants and needs and to meet organizational objectives, but also to preserve or enhance individuals’ and society’s long term best interests” (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel, 2012, p.21). Kotler (2015) posited that the theory utilizes social and ethical considerations within the frames of marketing to ensure a balance among conflicting variables such as profits maximization, satisfaction of consumer wants and public interest. It is therefore meant to make marketing morally, socially and ethically

responsible (Adebayo, 2015). It signifies a movement of marketing outside the domain of economics, adapting and applying marketing models, skills and tools to nonprofit and social organizations (Angheluta, Strambu-Dima and Zaharia, 2009). Earlier studies have considered social marketing as the origin of religious marketing (Abreu, 2006).

The theory expounds on the need of using marketing tools adequately in meeting the interest of the public, socially, morally and religiously. Therefore, it is vital that churches develop strategies that ensure the social, moral and religious interest of the public, in order to guarantee the appropriate spreading of the gospel to meet the needs of people and to win souls for Christ. This therefore is a critical indication of church growth principle in fulfilling the great commission. The theory is relevant and appropriate for the study, because it establishes the basis necessary to understand the public interests to provide the 'good news' that is morally sound, religiously acceptable and spiritual to the general development of the society.

Empirical Studies on Church Marketing

A study conducted by Appiah, Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire (2013) shows significant positive association between church promotion and church attendance growth. The study found that 'Radio PR' was found to exert greater influence on church attendance growth in Ghana. Sherman and Devlin (2001) examined the issue of strategic planning in marketing among the clergy in England. The result from the clergy was unfavorable with regard to marketing planning techniques or methods and church growth. However, the study found some management and marketing principles used most often by these clergies in their respective churches. Although, respondents were adamant regarding the use of marketing planning tools and techniques, it appears majority use marketing principles and management practice unconsciously.

Dhliwayo (2013) examined how promotion marketing strategies influence growth of churches in Zimbabwe. The study argued that recent development in management has changed the focus of non-profit making organizations of which the church is no exception. It was indicated that churches currently have taken the business approaches of management of which promotion techniques have become their focal point of church management. In view of this, the study examined the effect of promotional strategies such as advertisement, personal selling,

face to face church service selling, invitation of friends and relatives, miracle service, communion service and many more on church growth among Pentecostal churches. The study also examined the perception of people towards the church services performed by African Pentecostal congregations. Using the purposive and convenience sampling techniques, the study sampled six Pentecostal churches and 140 respondents across these churches.

Through the quantitative approach the study utilized cross sectional descriptive research design to obtain relevant information from the sampled respondents. The study found complete acceptance of promotion strategies as effective instrument for church growth. The result also shows that promotional strategies or elements have different effect on church growth; however, the combination of the elements has stronger impact on church growth. The study concluded that it is vital that church leaders, pastors and service coordinators develop their skills and become more marketing oriented in order to apply marketing principles and tools in meeting the increasing needs of church and individual members of the congregation.

A study by Siegel and Scrimshaw (2002) examined how consumer perception theories influence church growth. The study using quantitative research approach tested some perception theories and its impact on church growth from the perspective of 30 reverend ministers and 170 church members with the traditional orthodox churches. The study found that one of the critical reasons why members attend church is to benefit from the worship activities of the church. These worship activities included sharing the word of God, intercessory prayers and individual prayers. It was discovered that these worship activities help church members gain spiritual satisfaction through mutual relationship leading to growth of church. The result further indicated that worship activities are motivated by two drives in the church, including spiritual and social drives regarded as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation respectively.

Although a number of studies have examined market promotional strategies as well as market centered approaches in nonprofit organizations including the church, the most recent one was conducted by Hoyle (2002). The study using the mixed research method obtained information from leaders and pastors of some sampled churches in Zimbabwe. The finding shows that promotional strategic

budget has become part of church growth agenda by churches which is underpinned by a number of outreach posters and PA systems.

It was found that this covers electronic means, social media, bill boards, giant screens, fliers, car stickers, free distribution of bible, church invitation cards, free gifts, literature and books, as well as church directories. The study posited that it is therefore important that marketing function is integrated into all aspects of church organization so that critical efforts are centralized to ensure effective attainment of winning people for Christ and growing the church. The promotion strategies discovered by the study included newspapers, television and radio adverts and programs.

The concept of marketing and communication has become vital concept in church programs, practice and activities. According to Adebayo (2015) it is clear that there is a positive link between church practice and marketing activities. The author argued that the attachment between people and religion is the same as the attachment between people and brand. Adebayo (2015) examined how marketing principles are transferred into the church and church growth. The study further investigated the ways in which marketing core values are interconnected to the church, as well as social values. The study adopted the qualitative approach to interview 8 respondents and 10-12 focus group discussion. The study found that the mandate of the church in fulfilling its social values is shrouded by a lot of marketing principles and strategies. The study found marketing components in the planning of church activities and programs. This clearly indicates that marketing strategies form part of church program planning, directing and implementation.

Conrad (2008) conducted a study to examine how the church can be promoted through the use of modern marketing instruments. The author argued that communication would suffer in church promotion or in any organization without good marketing. The study through the qualitative research interviewed 12 respondents who were pastors and leaders of churches. The study found that marketing is a vital component of church growth and promotion. It was established that marketing and promotional strategies are effective ways of fulfilling the great commission. The study recommended appropriate communication plan for marketing local churches. Finally, the indication was that marketing has a greater benefit for the church and is truly biblical.

A study was conducted by Mangwana (2009) aimed at designing an appropriate training program for promoting the growth of Ebenezer

Baptist Church, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth based on the Schwarz model of a healthy church. The study further examined the perception of pastors and church members with regard to challenges towards effective church growth and development. It also investigated the feature that underscores a healthy church and the principles needed to build a healthy church. The study adopted Schwarz's eight quality characteristics of a healthy church as well as some literature on church growth strategies. The study using the qualitative and quantitative research approach discovered that training programs developed using the Schwarz's model of a healthy church was effective in building church members, winning more souls and growing the church. The study concluded therefore that training programs targeted at church growth are very significant in developing the required desires of people and meeting their needs as well as towards the social economic development of the church.

Common Church Marketing Practices

Literature has indicated a number of strategies, methods and instruments considered as church marketing frameworks used in spreading the gospel message and growing churches. These practices include:

Advertisement Through the Use of Media

Advert is regarded as the act of making products and services known to people through non-personal face to face encounter by a sponsor of which payment is made to that effect (Berkman and Gilson, 1987). Advertisement is a vital tool for most businesses, especially for introducing new products or services to the public. According to Adebayo (2015) advertising can be highly effective for church organizations when the organizations have limited base of committed members of which the church can rely upon.

It is therefore important that promotional strategies are done through the media, or word of mouth or invitation of friends for church activities when the church has a significant pool of members it can capitalize on. In this vein, Adebayo (2015) argued that media adverts are very effective in the area of church growth and development.

The Use of Posters, Billboards and Banners

The study by Belch & Belch (2005) shows that outdoor advert using posters, bill boards and banners plays significant role in selling and exposing the opportunities of the church to the outside world. Based on the number of people passing where the board, poster or the banner is located, many people are attracted to read the advert which influences how they perceive the church. Belch & Belch (2005) also indicated that the effectiveness and success of bill boards, banners and posters is dependent on the amount or number of traffic within the location of these advert indicators.

The stronger the traffic that passes by these advert indicators the more success the church is prone to attain and the lesser the traffic the lower the success of the advert on influencing people. A study by Jefkins (1995) shows that in Kwazulu-Natal many churches have adopted posters, bill boards and banners as a means of reaching out to people on the road. These have been located around high traffic areas of the town, as well as areas of strong pass ways, in order to expose their church messages, programs and others to people.

The Use of Platform, Transit and Terminal Posters

According Belch & Belch (2005), the use of platform, transit and terminal posters have become one of the common means of church marketing strategies for most people in both developed and developing regions. These forms of adverts which include pasting on cars, transport buses, washrooms and other areas where people are found are means of bringing church programs and activities closer to these people. Belch & Belch (2005) argued that these adverts have a strong message exposure and impact on people. However, the authors posited that frequency of the exposure of these adverts have the propensity of influencing others. The more people come into contact with and read, the more the message sticks into their minds. It is regarded as an effective strategy in sinking the church's message in the minds of people.

The Use of Personal Selling

Krepapa, Berthon, Webb and Pitt (2003) postulated that personal selling is one of the common marketing promotional strategies suitable for unsought product and services where the needs of customers are not even familiar to the customers themselves. Unlike advertisement, personal selling goes beyond the details determined by the personal

seller or marketer in the process of selling. It provides more in-depth and clearer information as compared to advert. In personal selling, the customer has the opportunity of asking more questions in order for the marketer to fully convince him on the need for the product or service.

The proactive churches of today have adopted the practice where people are trained purposely for face to face presentation, as well as one on one teaching with the sole aim of converting people to their church (Krepapa, Berthon, Webb and Pitt, 2003). This according to Webb, Webster and Krepapa (2000) has made these proactive churches adopt customer-defined market orientation in such face to face presentation, to convince people about their church and the need for them to attend their church.

The Use of Greeters and Ushers

In marketing, most greeters and usher strategies are created to warmly make customers comfortable in buying or purchasing a product. According to Kotler (2003) the marketing gathering through these strategies provides a suitable environment that welcome customers, provide them with proper direction, proper sitting position and provide them the necessary materials required to make customers feel at home. In the frame of marketing management, providing customers with the required attention and helping them to feel comfortable is a sure way of winning customers to become committed and loyal to the marketer. This according to Kotler (2003) is similar to the role played by ushers and greeters in church services. The aim of this strategy in the church is to help church members feel at home and become committed and loyal to the organization.

Growing Churches

According to Mangwana (2009) although the church has somehow not paid critical attention to the social context upon which it functioned in early years, church growth movements have hammered institutional and social factors within the church and outside the church that propels church growth. The internal dynamics of the church has been the focus of concentration to the neglect of the social milieu upon which members and the church functions; however, the external indicators have been emphasized by the church growth movement. Mangwana (2009) argued that church growth is not a man's affair or by the wisdom of man, but by the spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit that

changes the heart and minds of men in order to become part of the church.

Studies have shown that the church growth movement begun in the 1960s through the works of Mcgavran Donald, with his great philosophical ideas and principles of missionary works. The seminary works of Peter Wagner in the 1970s popularized the movement in the United States to be specific (Fagunwa, 2015). In the 1980s the movement exploded and its effects were felt on the evangelical scene. According to Fagunwa (2015) the movement contributed to the understanding of church growth issues across the globe. The aim of the movement was to develop ways and means to reach out to people with the gospel message.

Mangwana (2009) in his study indicated that little knowledge and write ups as well as empirical evidence was known about the concept of church growth in many churches across the globe regarding church planning, evangelism, organization of churches, executing outreach programmes and making the gospel message become known to many people. The movement has provided tremendous insight and in-depth understanding to the issues of how churches can grow through the development of appropriate programmes and strategies.

Previous studies have identified a number of factors that prevent some churches from growing. The study by Bryan (2011) provided the following: the attitude of church leaders, pastors, founders and members of some churches; ineffective development of evangelism programs; negative feeling towards running effective outreach programs; failure to apply relevant marketing principles and tools; limited levels of facilities; inadequate personal resources; limited financial resources; lack of vibrant administration; and, increasing complexity in church operations and activities.

According to Wilbert Shenk, as cited in Fagunwa (2015), the church growth movement has offered a new way of approaching the missionary work and tradition and encouraged how the history of the Christian missions can be rewritten in order to capture the growth theme. Through the movement, churches have come to appreciate and accept the cognate tools of other disciplines such as statistics and other social sciences. It has given better view on how the church can be evaluated in order to propel people for evangelization and development. Lastly, the church growth movement is regarded as a pioneer of the study of church growth, underpinned by theories and conceptual

models. According to McGavran cited in Fagunwa (2015), church growth is regarded as evangelism given birth within the missiological milieu.

Church Growth through Evangelization

Within the context of Christianity, evangelization is a means of spreading the gospel and winning souls for Christ. Through evangelization the church is able to increase its numbers as a result of new converts coming in (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2008). The word evangelism originated from the Greek word “euangelismos” which means *a preaching of, or an enthusiastic effort to spread the gospel or the zeal to propagate the cause*” (Webster, 1978, cited in Ene glo, 2004, p. 45). Evangelism is a means of preaching the gospel and winning new converts for the church; using the word of God, biblical ideologies and methods (Ene glo, 2004). Ene glo (2004) posited that the foremost duty of every Christian is to go into the world and present the ‘good news’ or spread the gospel message to all creation. This was the commanding message given by Christ Jesus as stipulated in (Mark 16:15-16, in the Bible).

It is a truism that, one basic concept that has been part of the church’s mission and agenda is evangelism. Diverse strategies, methods and techniques exist in the spreading of the gospel including one on one witnessing, discussion in churches, using a tribe head, and many more (Ene glo, 2004). Despite these techniques, strategies and methods, recent methods of evangelism have changed the principal focus of soul winning resulting in a decline in mass evangelism across the globe and making more people secularized in recent times (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2008). It is important to understand that evangelism has a central focus of winning souls and growing the church. Converting people and growing the church is therefore considered as the fundamental work of the supreme God (Holy Spirit) through the activities or duties of men and women within the church (Orobator, 2000). It is therefore important to posit that evangelism goes beyond the superficial procedures that people go through. It is regarded as an instructional process which takes into cognizance the intellect rather than the psychological underpinning of the convert (Williams and Tamale, 1996). A study by Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2008) indicated that although evangelism means different things to different people in Ghana, the effect of evangelism on church growth is significantly positive.

Case Study of the Catholic Church in Ghana

The Roman Catholic Church is considered as one of the oldest churches in Ghana. It was introduced into the shores of the then Gold Coast in 1471 by Portuguese missionaries (Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Coast, 2016). It can be found in almost every corner of the country. It continues to be the largest single Christian denomination in the country despite losing some members to the other churches (Zuckerman, 2009). It is also part of the world wide Roman Catholic Church governed and controlled under the spiritual authority and leadership of the Pope in Rome. The Church is divided into four ecclesiastical provinces, comprising four Archdioceses and fifteen dioceses and an apostolic vicariate (Cheney cited by Addai-Mensah, 2009). Table 1 shows the Ghanaian Catholic Dioceses and Archdioceses.

Table no. 1. Archdiocese and Diocese of Catholic Church Ghana

Archdiocese	Diocese	Region
Accra		Greater Accra
	Ho	Volta
	Jasikan	Volta
	Keta-Akatis	Volta
	Koforidua	Eastern
Cape Coast		Central
	Secondi-Takoradi	Western
	Wiawso	Western
Kumasi		Ashanti
	Goaso	Ashanti
	Konongo-Mampong	Ashanti
	Obuasi	Ashanti
	Sunyani	Brong-Ahafo
	Techiman	Brong-Ahafo
Tamale		Northern
	Damongo	Northern
	Navrongo	Upper East
	Wa	Upper West
	Yendi	Northern

Source: Catholic Church Ghana, 2012

Marketing Practices and Challenges

According to Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire (2013) the application and use of marketing principles in promoting church services has become a common practice for many churches and pastors in Ghana. This is fostered by the autonomous, non-centralized and independent religious or church movements. It has become a central favorite pivot around which many church and religious activities and their marketing strategies revolve. Although, some pastors, founders and leaders of church movements have expounded that these activities are underpinned by the Holy Spirit in fulling of the great mandate, diverse scholars within the religious fraternity have posited that economic reasons underpin such activities (Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire, 2013). The church business in Ghana for economic gains has become rampant as churches continue to emerge across all corners of the country. Many church adherents are charged a number of fees all in the name of seeing a man of God who has the power to end their personal and family problems. Services and products paid for include consultation, deliverance sessions, spiritual breakthrough services, anointing oil and anointing water.

Scholars have pointed that church business has become one of the most creative areas of making riches in Ghana (Obiora, 2004; Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire, 2013). The social context of making citizens become healthy and productive through church activities has lost its value since many citizens are exploited and as well as made to pay for religious services rendered by supposed men of God. The mandate of the church in winning souls and providing health society has been questioned in recent times by some scholars (Obiora, 2004). In the light of this, the country has seen the ascendancy of autonomous, personal, non-centralized religious and self-owned movements emerging within the past few years. According to Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire (2013) the country has become a fertile and vital ground for the growth and development of many movements across the globe.

The nature of the religious business engaged in by some men of God has made many people including reverend ministers to argue that religion has become the source of money making, indicated as money worshipping practice by Rt. Rev. Dr. Yaw Frimpong- Manso now Professor Frimpong- Manso (Ghana Dot.com, 2009). The money business has become acceptable across many Christian faith traditions. This is what Obiora (2004) in his study described as 'Holy Deceit',

meaning using the name of God in trading. Many founders of churches observing the nature of the money business have commercialized their churches for their own selfish gains. As a result of this, many have fallen victims of such religious acts (Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire, 2013). This is what Xavier (2004) in his study regarded as the double edge sword of religion which can bring benefits and also cause harm.

Recent developments within the religious circles have shown that all religious/church movements in Ghana have strategic processes and operations regarding church marketing. According to Dwomoh and Asare-Kyire, (2013), modern marketing has provided churches with enormous amount of means upon which church programmes and activities are made known to the world and people across the globe. Although, these are used wrongly by some pastors and founders of churches, the principles of marketing are an effective way of fulfilling the great commission.

Conclusion

Decades ago, Kotler and Levy (1969) called for expanding the reach of marketing to include the social and community sectors. The intersection between religion and marketing is an important research area, but has remained as a footnote in the literature (Cutler, 1992). In this paper, we explored theories and literature constituting the field of Church marketing. Church marketing has invited renewed attention since, globally, church membership began to decline since the early 1970's (Webb, et al., 1998) and the trend does not seem to reverse even today. Many countries in Europe are turning to atheism and the Church finances are getting hit hard. Yet, throughout this paper, we took the moral position Church marketing is not to be aimed at economic profits. We also discussed marketing strategies and their impacts upon church growth, specifically in Ghana.

Churches are increasingly using marketing concepts, consciously or unconsciously, in their promotion efforts. The marketing plans are often devised by the clergy without giving heed to the voice of the believers, resulting in acrimony (McDaniel, 1986). A critical failure in church marketing is that it considers that the Church is the maker of the products that it sells. The Church is rather an agency of God, the ultimate granter of faith products (Kenneson and Street, 2003). Also, salvation is an individualized good and mass marketing with sweeping promises will not yield meaningful impacts. The Catholic Church

encourages national-cultural bound traditions and each local church has some leeway in determining its religious market structure (Trejo, 2009).

It is an interesting future research issue to examine if the normative Catholic teachings about ethical issues in marketing are applied to the Church's own marketing practices. Developing right perception towards growth strategies would foster church growth in churches across the globe. The onus also lies on church leaders and pastors to develop marketing models which are effective in ensuring the spreading of the gospel message as well as the programmes and activities of the church.

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