Branding as a tool for enhancing choice of charismatic churches in Accra, Ghana

Alexander Kofi Preko, (PhD)(CE), Wisconsin International University College, Ghana

ABSTRACT

The study was to determine what makes people choose a particular charismatic church over the other if it is assumed that worshiping the Supreme God does not depend on the name, logo and the spiritual leader of a congregation. The purpose of the study is to throw light on how branding activities have gained root in charismatic churches in Ghana. The study sampled 71 respondents from selected charismatic churches in Accra. A convenience sampling technique was employed to administer and collect data. Hypotheses were tested and data analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science, version 20.

The study revealed that the sampled respondents attend church not because of the names and the logos of the churches but the personality and the preaching style of the spiritual leaders. It is, therefore, recommended that charismatic churches should implement the concept of branding accordingly so that it does not conflict with the Laws of the republic of Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

A brand is a name, a symbol and a perception applied to a product or service in a manner that adds value to the product. Branding is the management of the business reputation so that the opinion people have of the business is positive and memorable (Kotler 1994, 444-445). Profit and nonprofit organizations today, see branding as one of the most powerful tools that help in lifting the corporate reputation of their companies high. Branding is described in several connotations and believes that it is the tool that presents favorable image of every organization. Strong brands help establish the organization’s identity in the market place, and develop a solid customer franchise (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997; Keller, 1998). According to Kotler (2006), the real value of a strong brand is its power to capture consumer preference and loyalty. Hence, a brand is more than just a name and a symbol. It is the key element in the company’s relationship with consumers. There is a strong body of research supporting the idea of brand as a way to boost patronage.

Svendson (2010) comments that the phenomenon of church branding has been gathering pace over the past decade. Decades back, the whole concept of promoting church by using marketing strategies such as branding, relationship marketing, customer relationship management, assessing customers’ perception of choice of place of worship and others to build images among “church goers” was a taboo, but now there has been a growing acceptance over time. Currently, people realize what it means to apply concept of marketing to church programmes as done in the profit making organizations.

In Ghana, the charismatic movement began in the 1950s with the emergence of new Pentecostalism. Nowadays, churches use different ways to build a brand image for themselves, by buying air time on radio and television stations, text messages to acknowledge members etc. In spite of the importance of branding, it appears not all non-profit organizations understand how best to brand their services to the communities they serve. In a profit making organization, brand is identified as a source of revenue generation, but in the case of churches brand may mean using a name, slogan or symbol for recognition and easy identification with a particular religious body. The trend has changed over time; church administrators now use brand not only as name or symbol for members to identify their churches from other churches, but also to market their services like, my church is a place you can get a wife or husband to marry, get visa to travel abroad and even get employment with reputable organizations.
Indeed, branded churches make members to have a feeling of belongingness. Some members even use possessive words like my church, our pastor etc. People are not ashamed of Christ, but of their church. The brand creates a persona that the internal community is proud of. They become more inspired and more effective at inviting others. In the end, it is the church members that make the brand work. A church that wants to brand its services should look at the environment in which it operates and how the branding element might add quality to the church members.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The overall objective is to examine how church members perceive branding that is the name, logo, preaching and personality of the spiritual leader as influencing choice of a church. The researcher formulated hypotheses based on the objectives stated.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: There is no relationship between church name and the choice of church
H2: There is no relationship between church logo and the choice of church
H3: The name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but rather the preaching style of the spiritual leader
H4: The name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but rather the personality of the spiritual leader as a brand

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to throw light on how branding activities have gained root in charismatic churches in Ghana. It also describes how the application of marketing tools could be used in nonprofit making institutions. Marketing as a social science is applicable in every working environment. The study would also serve as a platform for other researchers to criticize, extract materials for further study. It could be used in policy making in churches and other organizations that might find it necessary. It has also added knowledge to the existing one.

LITERATURE REVIEW

UNDERSTANDING OF BRAND

A traditional definition of a brand was given as “the name, associated with one or more items in the product line that is used to identify the source of character of the item” (Kotler, 2000). The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (p404), that brands today are much more than that.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) mention that within the traditional branding model the goal was to build brand image; a tactical element that drives short-term results. Kapferer (1997) mentions that “the brand is a sign -therefore external- whose function is to disclose the hidden qualities of the product which are inaccessible to contact”. The brand served to identify a product and to distinguish it from the competition. "The challenge today is to create a strong and distinctive image” (Kohli & Thakor, 1997).

CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE OF BRAND

According to Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995), five dimensions configure brand equity: performance, value, social image, trustworthiness, and commitment. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) define brand equity as brand assets linked to a brand’s name and symbol that add to or subtract from a
product or service. According to them, these assets grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty.

These dimensions have been commonly used and accepted by many researchers (Keller 1993; Motameni and Shalrokhi 1998; Yoo and Donthu 2001; Bendixen, Bukasa, and Abratt 2003; Kim, Kim, and An 2003). Brand awareness affects perceptions and taste; “people like the familiar and are prepared to ascribe all sorts of good attitudes to items that are familiar to them” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, p. 17).

Perceived quality influences brand associations and affects brand profitability. Brand associations are anything that connects the consumer to the brand, including “user imagery, product attributes, organizational associations, brand personality, and symbols” (p. 17). “Brand loyalty is at the heart of brand’s value. The concept is to strengthen the size and intensity of each loyalty segment” (p. 17). Any way that brand equity is considered, it can be understood as the incremental value a brand name grants a product (Srivastava & Shocker, 1991).

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model was introduced, commenting on the “approaches brand equity from the perspective of the consumer - whether it is an individual or an organization” (Keller 2003a, p. 59). The model is based on the premise “that the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time” (p. 59). He defines “CBBE “as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (p. 60), which emerges from two sources: brand awareness and brand image.

According to Keller (2003a), brand awareness consists of brand recognition -the “consumer’s ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given a brand as a cue” (p. 67) and brand recall the “consumer’s ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or a purchase or usage situation as cue” (p. 67). On the other hand, “brand image is created by marketing programmes that link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand in the memory” (p. 70). These associations are not only controlled by the marketing programme, but also through direct experience, brand information, word of mouth, assumptions of the brand itself -name, logo-, or with the brand’s identification with a certain company, country, distribution channel, person, place or event.

BRAND IN A CHURCH

Knowing the target audience is the first step of any marketing activity. The next step for a church is to develop a strategy that will help shape the image that the organization wishes to project to its target audience. Well, branding is not merely the choice of a name, a logo or design as (Kotler, et al., (2000) believe, but a much more intangible aspect, especially when being a service organization. “When you are out in the community, delivering services, working with volunteers and raising support, you are constantly creating an impression of your organization or the brand”. This impression is associated with a certain value set in the minds of your audience. Values, trust, relationships, benefits and promises are all associated experiences of your brand. Whether you are deliberate about your brand or not, you are by the very fact of engaging with the community creating a brand for your organization and that brand comes across in everything you do” (Hart, Greenfield & Johnston, 2005).

Branding is an emotional tool that can reinforce the loyalty of the consumer, adding value as well as encouraging additional consumption. Therefore, a brand not only facilitates recognition, but also makes a promise and must deliver on that promise in order to strengthen the brand that can ultimately increase awareness. Not everyone thinks that branding necessarily is a good thing. Branding can, meanwhile, function both outward and inward in creating identity, values and relationships. An
important key factor then becomes the use of internal marketing through which they communicate their brand values within the organization, which can ensure a more consistent behavior of the staff, improved commitment and enthusiasm that can potentially expand externally through contact points. It is, therefore, important to note that branding seems to optimally move in concentric circles, starting from within and extending outwards.

As relationships are a cornerstone of branding and trust, the internal practices must deliver on that promise. In this connection, the application of internal branding as opposed to internal marketing should be discussed, and whether or not a distinction should be made between the two principles as much confusion exists in connection with their application (Svendson, 2010). Within the church, the members act as ambassadors to spread the good news of the church if the church has brand equity.

CHALLENGES IN BRAND BUILDING

Ethical Issues -: Ethics is a very complex subject. Marketing ethics is but a subset of business ethics which itself is a subset of ethics (Martin, 1985). Research on marketing ethics has so far been confined to general marketing issues, such as product safety, pricing, advertising and marketing research (Laczniak, 1993; Smith, 1995 and Murphy, 1999); little attention has been paid to branding. No business ethics book has been found to have reference to branding while leading branding texts have made no reference to ethics (Aaker, 1991; Kapferer, 1997; Keller, 1998; de Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). A brand may be amoral, but there are ethical issues in branding. Ethical branding, as a subset of ethical marketing, relates to certain moral principles that define right and wrong behaviour in branding decisions. A brand needs to be evaluated not just by the economic or financial criteria but also by the moral ones. An ethical brand should not harm public good; instead, it should contribute to or help promote public good.

A vulnerable asset -: The image of a brand can also be affected by non-branding decisions that are made at the marketing or business level. For example, sweatshop accusations, animal testing labour disputes, etc. Most business decisions that might eventually affect the organization’s brand image are made by people other than the brand manager on financial criteria with little consideration for ethical issues. Whenever anything goes wrong, be it a small incident or a big crisis, it is the brand that takes the blame; the brand image and corporate reputation are always the victim. Brands became the mistaken identity in the debate between no logo and pro logo camps it is not the brand or logo, but the bad corporate policies that are responsible for all the wrongdoings. “Brands are not guilty of social and environmental damage – nor are they even a symbol of unethical working practice.

Corporate Social Responsibility -: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business ethics are the two concepts that are often used inter-changeable but different. This area is further complicated by the use of other terms such as corporate reputation, corporate image, and corporate citizenship, to name but a few [for a comprehensive review on CSR, see Carroll (1999)].

HOW DO CHURCHES USE BRANDING?

As the market for churches is cluttered with choices, information and messages, branding helps in reducing the noise, conveying credibility and helping the organization to distinguish itself and its product from that of the competition as well as creating a lasting impression in the mind of the prospective consumer. “Today Protestantism has become a commodity. The suppliers are redundant, and church space is oversupplied. That’s why denominations need separation via branding” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 65).

Branding, therefore, becomes the tool with which the church can make their offerings more tangible and ultimately easier to differentiate from competition and communicate it to the target audience. A brand is
perceived as an experience. According to Zyman (2002), “a brand is essentially a container for a customer’s complete experience with the product” (p. 41)

Therefore, the satisfaction of the customer depends on both the product of the church, i.e. the service and the small groups, as well as the interactions between the employees and the customers (Svendsen, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted triangulation research design. This form of design allowed the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative research designs. The study made use of 71 church members from selected charismatic churches in Accra. The charismatic churches sampled were Pure Fire, Miracle Ministries, Mountain of Fire, Church of Paradise, Maximum Light Chapel International, Assemblies of God, Church of Christ, Word Alive, Global Evangelism, Glorious Ministry International, Mount Horeb Victorious Church and Run Missions. The above churches were selected due to the names and the logos. It was intended to find out if the names and the logos influenced respondents to attend the church for the first time. A total of 105 questionnaires were administered; only (71) questionnaires were collected and analyzed. Convenience sampling technique was employed to collect data. The hypotheses were tested and data analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science, version 20.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

HYPOTHESIS 1

H0: There is no relationship between church name and the choice of church one attends
HA: There is relationship between church name and the choice of church one attends

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symmetric Measures</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std. Error(^a)</th>
<th>Approx. T(^b)</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal</td>
<td>Contingency Coefficient</td>
<td>.395</td>
<td>.873</td>
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<td>Interval by Interval</td>
<td>Pearson's R</td>
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<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computerized from SPSS

Using the contingency coefficient of the \textit{p value of 0.395 > 0.05}, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It means that there is no relationship between church name and the choice of churches one attends. It indicates that people attend church not based on the name but rather the belief that God is everywhere and could be served under any name. The church is a group and every group should have an identity. The Spearman correlation of 0.174 indicated that there is a weak correlation between the two variables.

HYPOTHESIS 2

H0: There is no relationship between church logo and the choice of church one attends
HA: There is relationship between church logo and the choice of church one attends
### Table 2
Symmetric Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std. Error</th>
<th>Approx. T</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal</td>
<td>Contingency Coefficient</td>
<td>.155</td>
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<td>.781</td>
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<td>Interval by Interval</td>
<td>Pearson's R</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.885</td>
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<td>Ordinal by Ordinal</td>
<td>Spearman Correlation</td>
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<td>.136</td>
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<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computerized from SPSS

The *p value of 0.155 > 0.05*, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It indicates that there is no relationship between a logo of church and the choice of the church by a member. The table further explains that church logo is not significant to choice of the church. Using the approximate significant level of 0.781 > 0.05 also reveal that the logo has nothing to do with choice of church. The spearman correlation shows the correlation level of 0.065 which indicates that there is a weak correlation between the two variables: church logo and choice of a church.

### Hypothesis 3

**Hypothesis**

Ho: The name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but the preaching style of the spiritual leader

HA: The name of church does motivate one to attend a particular church but the preaching style of the spiritual leader

### Table 3
Symmetric Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std. Error</th>
<th>Approx. T</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal</td>
<td>Contingency Coefficient</td>
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<td>.633</td>
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<td>Interval by Interval</td>
<td>Pearson's R</td>
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<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
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<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computerized from SPSS

The *p value of 0.487 > 0.05*, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It indicates that the name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but the preaching style of the spiritual leader. Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.65 indicates there is strong correlation between the two variables.

### Hypothesis 4

**Hypothesis**

Ho: The name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but rather the personality of the spiritual leader

HA: The personality of the spiritual leader motivates one to attend a particular church not the name of the church
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std. Error&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Approx. T&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Contingency Coefficient</td>
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<td>Gamma</td>
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<td>.179</td>
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<td>.711</td>
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<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computerized from SPSS

The <i>p</i> value of 0.132 > 0.05, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It indicates that the name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but the personality of the spiritual leader as a brand. The table also shows the significant level of the relationship between the two variables, which appears to be significant at 0.938.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In line with the first and the second hypotheses, it was indicated that there is no relationship between church name, logo and the choice of church one attends. There are several explanations to clarify the outcome of the hypotheses tested. But these explanations are limited to the sample used for the study. It could be understood from this point that people attend church not based on the name or logo but other factors like God is everywhere and could be served under any name or logo. A church is a group and every group should have an identity. The outcome of the first and the second hypotheses could be linked to works of Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997; Keller, 1998), which state that strong brands help establish the organization’s identity in the market place, and develop a solid customer franchise.

Furthermore, according to American Marketing Association (AMA) definition, states that a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” The above researchers further comment that brand name is more than just name and symbol. From the work of the scholars and the definition of the recognized institution in marketing, it is clear that brand name or logo is there for identity and also assist people to easy identify members in the church. In addition to this, name is one of the basic requirements for companies to be registered in Ghana. Once again, according to Kotler, et al. (2000), branding is not merely the choice of a name, a logo or design as believes, but a much more intangible aspect, especially when being a service organization. It means that when churches are out in the community, delivering services, working with volunteers and raising support, they are constantly creating a brand for organization. The outcomes of the first two hypotheses tested justify the benefits of branding that is (identification and guarantee), mentioned by Kapferer (1997) among the eight benefits of branding to customers.

The third and fourth hypotheses tested that the name of church does not motivate one to attend a particular church but the preaching style and personality of the spiritual leader. It indicates that the respondents sampled attended their various churches because they have perception that the preaching and the personality of the spiritual leaders are more significant than the names and logos. People go to churches to worship, speak to God, have their demands and needs attended to and these can be achieved in certain ways by the help of the preaching and the spiritual leader. Branding is an emotional tool that can reinforce the loyalty of the consumer, adding value as well as encouraging additional consumption. Therefore, a brand does not only facilitate recognition, but also makes a promise and must deliver on that promise in order to strengthen the brand that can ultimately increase awareness. In all the challenge today is to create a strong brand and distinctive image (Kohli and Thako, 1997).
CONCLUSION

The results obtained from the study revealed that respondents sampled attend church not because of the name and the logo but rather the preaching style and personality of the spiritual leaders. The last two hypotheses tested induced the researcher to conclude that today in Ghana, most people attend church because of what a particular pastor is going to preach or the pastor is a powerful person. If the outcomes of the last two hypotheses are to be generalized, then it is true that spiritual leaders are buying air time on radio and televisions in order to brand themselves and also sell their products to the Ghanaian community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the concept of branding in churches should be well understood and structured so that it does not conflict with the Laws of the Republic of Ghana. Spiritual leaders should market only what they have and capable of doing and not add services that are not in existence. The basis of the concept of branding is to deliver values of your products and services to the final consumers.

REFERENCES


