



ARTICLE

Digital transformation and changes in religious communication of neo-prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana

Victor S. Gedzi^{1,*}

¹Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, KNUST. Kumasi. Ghana

*Correspondence email: vsgedzi.cass@knust.edu.gh

Abstract

The main objective of the study is to find out how the adoption of digital transformation by Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches in Ghana affects their religious communication, using Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre respectively at Kenyase-Adwumam and Ahenema Kokoben in the Ashanti region as case studies. The study employed a mixed methods approach in investigating the research objects. The findings have shown that while there are challenges in going digital, the churches have significantly benefited not only in the improvement of overall religious communication, but also in their membership size. This study contributes to both local and international theories on digital transformation of faith and secular business institutions. It further enhances the ongoing debates about the role of religion in matters of development and contextualises the recent digitalisation wave as a medium for religious revival.

Key words: Digital transformation; Neo-prophetic Pentecostalism or Charismaticism ; Religious communication

Introduction

The transformation of analogue information into digital format as well as the concomitant process of utilizing digital technologies to change business models started far back in the 1990s. After over 30 years of mobility, 'cloud computing, the internet of Things (IoT), augmented reality, social media and decentralized public ledgers of transactions like blockchain are driving enterprises to new digital customer engagement and IT enabled processes' (Tratkowska, 2019: 32). Starting from the mid-2000s to date, smart devices and social platforms have had profound influence on Business-to-Consumer (B2C) communication methods leading to the opening of new communication channels for customers. The rise of the new technologies has significantly impacted global industries, including Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana, which operate market-like enterprises that produce and supply religious goods and services that are consumed by members and window-shoppers of the churches (Wuaku, 2012:337). These prophetic churches have been working out 'various initiatives to discover and exploit technological benefits to their advantage since the 1980s (Tratkowska, 2019: 32). Even though there are massive studies on digital transformation and its benefits to the business world, very little is on how this transformation has affected Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in their drive towards improving their religious communication that would attract large membership to their fold for revenue mobilization. Consequently, this current study fills this gap in knowledge by investigating how the digital transformation adopted by

the churches has affected their religious communication using Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre respectively at Kenyase-Adwumam and Ahenema Kokoben in the Ashanti region of Ghana as case studies. Thus, the questions this current paper wants to find answers to are: In which ways has the adoption of digital transformation by Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, affected their religious communication? What are the types of digital technologies deployed by the churches? These questions underscore the importance of local and international theories on digital transformation of faith and secular business institutions, an area that has not been given sufficient attention in the modern literature. Moreover, this study advances our knowledge on the ongoing debates about the role of religion in matters of development.

Conceptual issues in Pentecostalism/Charismaticism and digital transformation

Theoretically, it is important to clarify the main concepts and variables in the research topic and context since this may facilitate full comprehension of the research processes and outcome. 'Pentecostalism' as a concept, lacks one universally accepted definition due to the different meanings it connotes in different cultural and political contexts as a movement. This means even though there may be some cross-cultural commonalities, the phenomenon has enormous variations and characteristics. This brand of Christianity emphasizes salvation in Jesus Christ as a transformative experience, made possible by the Holy Spirit that emanates from God, the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. Consequently, this Spirit of God empowers the new convert with 'spiritual gifts' (charismata pneumatika) as detailed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and other passages like Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 in the Bible. The Holy Spirit signifies the presence and empowering activity of God among his people just as he empowered and enabled the early disciples to efficiently and effectively communicate Jesus Christ as the only Lord and universal Saviour (See also Asamoah-Gyadu, 2000:12; Gedzi and Anderson Jr, 2021:60). Admittedly, the other twin concept, 'Charismaticism' shares similar characteristics with Pentecostalism. Like Pentecostalism, Charismaticism gives 'prominence to the diversity of spiritual gifts' (Gedzi and Anderson Jr, 2021: 60; Asamoah-Gyadu 2000, 12-13). This shows there is a considerable overlapping in these twin Christian concepts. Even then some scholars still differentiate the concepts on the ground that Pentecostalism makes speaking in tongues as a necessary criterion of Spirit-baptism while Charismaticism does not. The World Christian Data-base, for example, conceived the concepts as separate, distinct entities, indicating demographically among other things that 'Pentecostals make up about 12 per cent (about 107 million) of the population' of Africa; whilst 'non-Pentecostal Charismatics make up about 5 per cent (about 40 million) of the population' (Gedzi and Anderson Jr., 2021: 60; Lindhardt, 2018: 1). But one can plausibly argue that since both concepts derive from the same activity of the same Spirit of God, there is no need for such conceptual distinctions. It is on this basis that this current study uses both terms interchangeably. Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity has significantly changed the nature of Christianity in Africa by laying greater emphasis on 'spiritual warfare', 'empowerment' and 'prosperity' (Gifford, 2004). Also, not only does this brand of Christianity characterize itself as 'a system of beliefs, meaning and symbols by use of which individual adherents organize experience and make sense of the world around them, but' also 'as a multifaceted social and cultural force that has shaped life in significant ways' (Lindhardt, 2015: 2; Gedzi et al., 2020:25).

Historical review of Christian religious movements in Ghana

Western Europeans came to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in the 15th and 19th centuries. with trade and political motifs; and with the Christian religion and culture. At the time, the local people were already having and practicing the African Traditional Religion (The Free Encyclopedia, N.d). 'As the Europeans explored and took control of parts of the country during the colonial days, so did their religion' (The Free Encyclopedia, N.d: 1). The new religion with new culture apparently looked alien to the local people who tried to contextualize to make it suit their context. This contextualization gave rise to Christian New Religious Movements (CNRMs). Ghana experienced the proliferation of the CNRMs in the 19th and 20th centuries. It started first with Sumsum sore (spiritual churches). These spiritual churches together with others became what is referred to as African Independent Churches (AICs) or African Initiated Churches at the time. The nomenclature signifies that these churches were founded and owned by Africans. The churches in this category included Apostles Revelation Society, Musama Disco Christo church and the Twelve Apostles' church (Dovlo, N.d: 9). The significance is that these churches were founded by Ghanaians and other Africans as a reaction to the introduction of the non-indigenous, Western religion (Christianity) and culture. As such, the AICs operated as indigenous African forms of expression and manifestation of religiosity and spirituality that resulted from the interaction between the African Traditional Religion and its worldviews, on one hand, and the non-African Christian tradition, on the other. It demonstrated Africans' attempts to interpret and relate the new impinging Christian faith to their local milieu, circumstances, experiences of life and the apprehension of reality. Such an interpretation seeks to make sense of the changing circumstances of an inter-religious and a cultural encounter and also make the new Christian experience more meaningful and more relevant to the everyday experience, needs, problems, concerns, anxieties and aspirations of the African and therefore the Ghanaian people. For majority of Africans, the reaction was a decisive and rightful move because the early 'missionaries, by attempting to impose Christianity' on Africa, 'set themselves up against beliefs that go to the very core' of the indigenous African religion 'and thus bring tremendous conflict' among the African people (El Arbaoui, 2018: 11). The attack by the 'colonizing power' did not only crash the value system, but also 'undermines to change almost everything of African society, from religion,

politics and culture to economy', leading to a complete disruption of the social cohesion between African people in their societies (El Arbaoui, 2018: 11). Thus, Chinua Achebe could not give a better description of the situation than what he reflected in one of his chief characters, Obierika in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, that:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (1958:176).

The AICs were preceded by the classical Pentecostal churches which were also followed by charismatic ministries or churches that depict a lot of diversity.

The Classical Pentecostalism is attributed to the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 during a prayer event in a former African Methodist Episcopal church building located at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. The emergence of this church in Ghana is attributed to the activities of Apostle Peter Newman Anim's connection with the Apostolic Faith church of Florence Louise Crawford who was an associate of Seymour's Azusa Street movement. The Christ Apostolic Church International founded by Apostle Peter Newman Anim was part of the fruits that came from his connection with Florence Louise Crawford (White, 2017: 252). This church is believed to be the first and mother of all Pentecostal denominational families in Ghana.

Charismatic Ministries are relatively a recent development beginning from the 1980s. Most of these churches mushroomed through the evangelical activities in the 1960s and 1970s. These churches apparently share the same spiritual ethos with the AICs relating to 'the power of the Holy Spirit and miracles' (Dovlo, N.d: 10). The churches began as lay fellowships that tapped 'the skills and gifts of members into teams for effective ministry' (Dovlo, N.d: 10).

More recent decades have seen the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity completely metamorphosed from a marginal phenomenon to a core reckoning force in African Christianity. Today, there is proliferation of these churches that appear a resurgence of a new type of AICs with strong prophetic ethos – i.e., prophet-led-churches that singled out as a strand of Pentecostalism that proliferated between the 1970s and the 1980s, experiencing its exponential growth in the early 1990s (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015: 162; Benyah, 2018: 116). In Ghana, just as the entire sub-Saharan Africa, these Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches appear to operate like business enterprises or firms – i.e., market-like enterprises that produce and supply religious goods and services that are consumed by their members (Wuaku, 2012:337) and faith window-shoppers. Participatory field observations of religious functions or sessions of the selected prophetic churches have overwhelmingly supported this depiction. The field observations have shown how all sorts of goods such as handkerchiefs, bottled mineral water, soft drinks, anointing oil and eggs, holy water, well water, rice, fruits, brassieres, headgears, stickers, 'baby-toffees', among others are openly displayed and sold to people in the churches for a particular type of 'salvation', deliverance or solution. Unlike the mission-related orthodox churches where these 'sacramentals' are not sold but freely given, the prophetic churches sell them. One even has to pay a consultation fee before one is allowed to see the prophet of the church. Unstructured field interviews with some members and functionaries of the two churches being studied have shown that pastors/prophets involve in the commercialization of religious items/services in order to raise money for God's work. Respondent pastors/prophets argue that they buy the items in the market before sacralising them for God's service; and so, they cannot give them out for free. Interviews with some of those who patronize the religious items/services indicated they need them to address their spiritual, physical, economic and sometimes psychological problems. They also use the items for protection against their enemies and malevolent spirits. However, two pastors/prophets contacted denied in interviews that they do business with the religious items/services. This appears why Gerrie ter Haar, the prominent and respected Professor of Religion and Development, who commented on the first draft of this article, cautioned in an interview that scholars should be careful about how they use concepts like 'business-like', 'business enterprises', 'firms' or 'market enterprises' in describing activities of the prophetic churches in Africa since it may sound like employing Western categories in assessing African phenomena. For her, in analysing religious phenomena in Africa, the emic perspectives that come from within the culture of the churches in Africa must be respected, and not the etic perspectives focusing on observable behaviours and practices that aim at understanding activities in terms of their functional or evolutionary significance. While this study to some degree agrees with ter Haar's observation, it is equally true that religion in Africa has often been employed as a medium to assuage challenges in life. In other words, this pragmatic-oriented function of religion in Africa's faith economy, makes religion in this context business-like – a kind of an economic good or service that can be tapped into dealing with all kinds of existential needs and aspirations of the people (Benyah, 2018). Thus, even though there is a scholarly agreement that 'in Africa, the sacred and the secular constitute one organic reality' (Ilesanmi, 1995:54), the operative unpacking of this 'organic reality', in the context of this study, becomes necessary for the purpose of a heuristic evaluation.

Controversial as this subject matter may be, it is apparent that the practices of the prophetic churches are not something new. They seem to be in a historical continuity with the cosmology and epistemologies employed by shrines/traditional religious groups and societies within African Traditional Religion where clients paid priests and also thanked shrine gods for good services rendered – a practice that, to a great extent, is still observable at shrines in Ghana today. The AICs and now the neo-prophetic churches have tapped into these African religious cosmological epistemologies for their Christian experience. One thing that is abundantly clear, however, is the apparent exaggeration in the practices for monetary gains by the modern-day pastors/prophets of the prophetic churches.

Historically, as indicated, the AICs were the first religious movements to co-opt these African worldviews and ways of doing things into Christian beliefs, practices and experience (Normenyo, 2019). This was to make Christianity contextually relevant and meaningful to the African people. But it also manifests a drive of the churches towards a religio-cultural, socio-economic and political self-reliance and independence. This has become poignant when at the present time

globalization has changed welfare capitalism to market capitalism; inducing an alteration in the global political economy that destabilizes ‘many aspects of modern society’ to the extent that ‘social safety net and the sense of equality of opportunity is now highly contingent’ if not completely lost depending upon which part of the world one is located (Macekura et al, 2016: 137).

According to Eric Sengers (2006: 7–9), the religious market is not limited to the vicinity of religious organisations, but extends to other places where exchange process take place between ‘customers’ and religious organizations.

The steady growth of the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches over the past three decades in the West African sub-region (Adeloye, 2014) has facilitated the emergence of a spirit of competition among these churches for audience and membership (Bonsu, 2013). In order to stay afloat in the competition, many of the churches have adopted and adapted the use of modern digital technologies to improve upon their religious communication (theological messages) and contacts in order to attract large membership size to their fold. This theological messaging in the church, including outreaching the outside world is what is termed by this current study as ‘religious communication’. The study derived the concept from the original Greek word, *theologia*, which means ‘utterances’, ‘sayings’ or ‘oracles’ about God (The Free Encyclopaedia, N.d: 1). Therefore, religious communication as employed in the current study characterizes utterances, sayings and oracles about God through sermons, preaching or the re-parcelling of the message(s) about God that are transmitted to people inside and outside church communities. It is about how the good news of salvation, mediated by Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels, is re-parcelled in a modern way by ‘experts’ of religion (pastors, prophets, evangelists or religious functionaries) through the employment of digital technology or transformation for efficient and effective communication or reaching out to religious audience and consumers as subsequently demonstrated in the sampled case studies. Improvement in religious communication through digital transformation is seen by the churches as a necessary catalytic tool that would widely attract and appeal to the conversion of people that would augment their existing membership size. For the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic, large membership size is important because it correlates with large revenue mobilization. Consequently, these churches in particular have embraced the opportunity to be digitally transformed so as to realize this dream of preaching and reaching out to their members and non-members alike.

Digitalising the church

Digital transformation offers a more comprehensive understanding than ‘digitization’ (downloading forms online) and ‘digitalization’ (filling out forms online) do. In other words, it depicts a comprehensive transformation that goes beyond the mere downloading and filling out of forms online. The online service transformation is conceived as a means of improving ‘the customizability and automation through standardization’ (Andal-Ancion et al, 2003). It is also a means of rebuilding business models so as to satisfy the needs of customers by using new technologies (Berman, 2012). To Mergel et al,

Digital transformation is a holistic effort to revise core processes and services ... beyond the traditional digitization efforts. It evolves along a continuum of transition from analogue to digital to a full stack review of policies, current processes, and user needs and results in a complete revision of the existing and the creation of new digital services (2019: 12).

The term digital transformation originated from the private sector and it is associated with the need to use new technologies in order to stay competitively afloat in the internet age ‘where services and products are delivered both online and offline’ (Mergel et al, 2019: 2). Thus, as indicated, within the rise of these new technologies, all industries, including the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic ‘church enterprises’ in Ghana are conducting various initiatives to discover and exploit benefits. Even though their efforts might not be seen as a full-fledged digital transformation as the term connotes, the process, as we would see, has transformed their business operating models, and also affected their product portfolios. Processes and organizational structures of the churches are also engineered and continue to be re-engineered in a way to govern the complex evolution. As such, digital transformation is now an integral part and parcel of the churches’ everyday life. The challenge currently confronting many of these churches’ entrepreneurs (pastors/prophets and other functionaries), however, is how to deal with and maintain the implementation of the new digitally-based business model that necessitates a wide range of capabilities to be developed, ‘starting with the influence on people’s mindset and organizational culture and the ability to change’ (Zinder and Yunatova, 2016); and all the financial implication this entails. For example, qualitative interviews with some members of the Believers Worship Centre (BWC) in Kenyase-Adwumam in the Ashanti region of Ghana unveiled that the church uses a minimum amount of Gh100,000 (US \$9,000) every month to run its Second Chance private TV station. All these elements tie together to form the phenomenon that is labelled digital transformation (Mugge and Gudergan, 2017).

It is also significant to understand Fountain’s (2004) technology enactment framework approach, which discusses the impact of technologies on organizations whether public or private. Fountain makes a dichotomy between what she terms ‘objective technology’ and enacted technology’. To her, ‘objective technology’ incorporates innovations like internet, while ‘enacted technology’ involves the employment, ‘design and perception of those technologies by individuals within an organization’ (Fountain, 2004 as cited in Mergel et al, 2019: 2; Andal-Ancion et al, 2003). Arguably, whereas its perception and usage may be constrained by institutional arrangement, enacted technology also has much influence on the organization. It is therefore plausible to argue that the rate of the role and success of this kind of technology may vary from one organization to another depending on the organizational perception and how individuals within the organization make use of it sustainably (Mergel et al, 2019: 2).

In a nutshell, as manually done in previous years, today digital technology is applied to almost everyday task, including

religious activities by Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches in Ghana. Their effort in doing so is meant to improve efficiency and effectiveness in their communication. It entails, among others, employing digital devices to complete tasks that used to be done offline. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to find out in which ways the adaption to digital transformation by Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana has improved their religious communication using Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre respectively in Kenyase-Adwumam and Ahenema Kokoben in the Ashanti region as case studies.

Research Methods and Design

The achieved domain of the study is to find out how the adoption of digital transformation by the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana has improved their religious communication using Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre respectively in Kenyase-Adwumam and Ahenema Kokoben in the Ashanti region as case studies. As implied, both churches belong to the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic brand of Christianity. The choice of these two churches is based on the fact that their brand of Christianity, according to recent studies, constitutes the fastest growing religious economy in Ghana (Gedzi and Anderson Jr., 2021; Benyah, 2018; Ghana Statistical Service, 2012: 40). Secondly, the fact that both churches are well known to be extensively involved in the use of digital technologies in their religious activities for the spread of their brand and also sale of religious products/services justifies the choices. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through the help of research instruments like interview guide and questionnaires that were respectively tailored to provide queries that addressed the research objective. The results have been presented and analysed based on the responses to the research objective, and also in accordance with the format and design of the questionnaires. Qualitatively, the study used unstructured in-depth individual and group interviews. A total of eight (8) church-leaders/functionaries and sixteen (16) church members from each of the churches were interviewed to retrieve information. Furthermore, 12 informants/respondents from each church respectively participated in the group interviews. Gerrie ter Haar, an expert in the subject matter, was also interviewed. This was done as a way of supplementing the data from the nonexpert source with the expert source. The relatively small number of informants concurred the qualitative principle that recommends that small numbers should be used when dealing with an in-depth or a probing investigation (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 1999). Informants were accessed via the availability sampling procedure after church services. The study has used the data obtained from the group interviews to validate those retrieved through individual in-depth interviews. Both research strategies have been supplemented by participatory field observation. This qualitative research strategy has helped the researcher to see what kind of digital technologies the churches have actually deployed to enhance their religious communication. The research design adopted is the case study to understand why and how the churches have engaged in digital transformation. Additionally, questionnaires distributed have been collected from 200 members of both churches to quantitatively retrieve information needed on the research object being investigated. The data collection activities took place from 1 – 23 April, 2023. Last, but not least, the qualitative and quantitative primary data have been supplemented by secondary data from related literature on the subject matter of investigation. Both the primary and secondary data have been respectively analysed using the descriptive approach, and the scientific package for social sciences (SPSS version 26). It is important to acknowledge that some of the citations in the study have come via the field investigations.

Results

Digital Transformation and Changes in Religious Communication

This section of the study presents the field results. In doing so, it first gives a brief history of the selected churches, provides the demographic response rates and the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. It then describes the kind of digital technology and media the churches have deployed to improve their religious communication; and how this effort appears to enhance the membership size of churches. Finally, there is a discussion of the results, and a conclusion given.

Brief histories of churches

The Believers Worship Centre (BWC) was founded by Prophet Stephen Adom Kyei-Duah in 1988 following a religious experience while on Mountain Sobi of Kwara State in Nigeria. The prophet, according to field investigations, interpreted the experience as a call from God to found his church. He then started with a small group of believers. The church went through a chequered history of instability as the prophet moved from one place to another; the last of which was Ivory Coast. Due to the protracted civil war in that country, the prophet came back to Ghana. After so many trials of church planting, he eventually settled at Kenyase-Adwumam in the Kwabre district of the Ashanti region. Thus, the BWC, which initially started with few numbers of followers, today with the help of digital transformation, has about 20 branches established in Ghana with over 100,000 followers. It hosts its headquarters at Kenyase-Adwumam. The founder refers to BWC as the 'Philadelphia' movement, a reference to a New Testament city, which the apostle John in Rev. 3:7-13 describes as 'one of the seven cities of Asia'. The founder describes the movement as consisting of 'holy nationals' (adehye kronkron) of the ancient biblical city of Philadelphia (now in modern-day Turkey). According to the prophet, the church is open to every

believer who accepts the existence of God as true.

Similarly, Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, one of the variables under investigation is a Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic church. The church took its name from its founder, Prophet Ebenezer Opambour Adarkwa Yiadom. It can be traced to a suburb of Kumasi known as Ahenema Kokoben. Historically, the church started as a prayer fellowship with few followers in the early 90's. According to field investigations, the founder like Prophet Adom Kyei-Duah received a revelation suggesting to begin his prophetic mission after engaging in prayer and fast. The fellowship he subsequently started was said to begin with miraculous signs that attracted followers. The unstructured qualitative field interviews with a section of the church revealed that 'many visually impaired recovered their sights, the deaf and the dumb heard and spoke, while cripples walked'. It is believed that Prophet Ebenezer has other gifts like foretelling the future. As a result, many flocked to his fellowship that has developed into a 'full-fledged church' today (Anderson Jr, 2022). Total number of worshippers is inaccessible and can only be surmised; and taking of pictures of either the founder, the church structure or worshippers are strictly forbidden by the prophet. But an observational visit to the church showed a large gathering of worshippers running to hundreds of people. Random interactions during a participatory observation visit showed there were about 179 non-members who also came from all walks of life, including neighbouring countries like Ivory Coast and Togo that day to attend the healing session.

Demographic response rates

A total number of two hundred (200) respondents (100 from each church) were accessed through questionnaires representing 100% of the entire populations. All the questionnaires were properly filled and returned. The response rates fell within the statistically significant response rate for analysis of population-wide generalization of findings as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018) corroborated by Johnson and Owens (2013: 129-130) and Fincham (2008: 1) who among other things indicated that 'Response rates approximating 60% for most research should be the goal of researchers ...' The demographic results are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Demographic response rates

Category	No. of Targeted Respondents from both churches	Response	Response Rates
Questionnaire administration	200	200	100%
Total	200	200	100%

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

Socio-demographic characteristics

The general background information for the survey included respondents' sex, age and educational background. In terms of sex, the statistics showed that 102(51%) respondents were females; whereas 98(49%) constituted males. This seems to reflect the usual situation in Ghanaian churches where women invariably outnumber their male counterparts in the attendance of religious activities and programs. Interpreting this might mean women apparently seek for spiritual, psychological material and other kinds of satisfaction (as these churches are believed to provide) than their male counterparts do in Ghana. In other words, women seem to consume more the products/services prescribed by the prophets/pastors and other religious functionaries of the churches for their needs. They therefore attend the churches to look for the products/services. Table 2 below illustrates women's domination in church attendance in the selected prophetic churches:

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	98	49
Female	102	51
Total	200	100

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

The picture below depicts a cross-section of worshippers with women dominating in church attendance at Kenyase-Adwumam, the Headquarters of BWC.

Figure 1



Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

Another survey conducted among 177 respondents picked from both churches shows that 109(61.6%) respondents belonged to the age bracket of 18 – 40 years. This age bracket group dominates the attendance in the selected churches. Additionally, 25(14.1%) of respondents respectively belonged to the age brackets 41–50 and 51–60. Sixteen (9.1%) members were between 61–70 years while 2(1.1%) members were above 70 years. Table 3 below shows the age distribution of respondents:

Table 3. Socio-demographic age characteristics of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 40 years	109	61.6
41 – 50 years	25	14.1
51 – 60 years	25	14.1
61 – 70 years	16	9.1
70 and above	2	1.1
Total	177	100

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

The seemingly ‘pull-factor’ of the youth, particularly women to the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches may be explained by the churches’ modern large architecture with neatly arranged elegant seats, the modern way of doing things; and the neatly well-dressed worshippers and prophets/pastors, ushers and members of other church ministries. This was really reflected during participatory observation visits to the churches’ services. More importantly, the fact that these churches, unlike the orthodox traditional mission churches recognise the natural talents/gifts, the capabilities of the youth, including those of women (that are tapped into the building of the body of Christ, making the youth feel belonged and valued) may be an added factor. Furthermore, the attractiveness of sermons of the churches that deal with every day socio-economic issues – the subject matter of ‘prosperity’; featuring epistemologies of how to ‘remove poverty’ so as to enrich people, and also solve other life’s predicaments, appears to mostly appeal to the youth, particularly women who flop to the churches to have their prayers and dreams realized. It appears therefore that the ecclesiology of this brand of Pentecostal or Charismatic churches has the propensity of dealing with everyday sociological themes and modern-related development topics in their sermons; demonstrating the ‘multifaceted ways public needs are situated within globalized contexts.’ In other words, it showcases ‘some of the imaginative ways’ these modern African initiated churches interpret ‘the sacred and the secular within the purview of ecclesiology’ (Okesson, 2012: 71).

The concept and practice of ‘prosperity’ predated the inception of Western Christian missionary activities in Ghana. Both theory and practice of prosperity constitute elements of the worldviews and practices that belong to the traditional religious heritage of shrines/societies or groups within African Traditional Religion (Normanyo, 2019: 88–89). As indicated, the AICs were the first to appropriate the African cosmology and epistemologies for their spirituality and other purposes. Thus, the fact that the selected Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches similarly reach out for these African traditional religious cosmological epistemologies seems to suggest that they are, as indicated, in a historical continuity with the AICs. One may argue this way because there is always a continuity with the past in the way these prophetic churches operate. That

is to say, the spiritual orientation of both leaders and members of the prophetic churches has always been influenced by the traditional religious worldviews. That is why, again, one can argue that the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches are new types of AICs, and like the latter, seem to represent a form of postcolonial religious movements that react to or protest against new forms of colonial incursions that deny full socio-economic, religio-cultural and political self-reliance, self-determination and independence of Africa. In this sense, the deployment of digital technology in the churches only adds as a catalytic tool to enhance their communication by making it more effective in getting their central message out.

In fact, the ingenuity displayed by these prophetic churches in the indigenization of Christianity, their versatility, creativity, imagination or the ability to visualize and adapt to the changing circumstances is puzzling. Knowledge production systems and policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa could tap into the imaginative skills of these churches so as to contextualize education that will tailor sustainable, pragmatic and quality solutions to existential problems of the changing times. It means for example, schools of health and medicine could tap into the African root by understanding that human health unfolds ‘the spiritual dimension of the sacred where the physical health (secular) mediates the immediacy within all aspects of African cosmology’ (Okesson, 2012: 64). This observation is important because the Western healthcare that we have inherited, defines health in biophysical terms that reduce values of “wholeness” to those narrowly conceived around the ‘absence of disease.’ This is particularly ‘the case in societies’ (which now realize their mistakes and making corrections) influenced by the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment, in which “patients become customers” or where “symptoms rather than people are treated ...” and where ‘the practice of medicine is seen as a battle against disease ... rather than the cure of the sick person’ (Okesson, 2012: 65). These inherited ideals do not flow from the African organic conception of reality. This is why we need to update our health systems and practices to conform to the cosmological epistemologies of Africa for the holistic treatment of sick persons.

Again, while the founder of Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre would not allow taking of pictures in the church or church vicinity, the leader of BWC allowed. The picture below shows part of the interior architecture of BWC temple. It shows a beautified altar with flowers and colour-changing led-lights screen, musical instruments, speakers, air conditioners, and the founder, Prophet Stephen Adom Kyei-Duah himself teaching during a session at his Head-quarters church at Kenyase-Adwumam in the Ashanti region:

Figure 2



Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

Also, a survey on the educational levels of respondents has shown that 133(66.5%) members had tertiary education, whereas 43(21.5%) members had senior high education. In addition, 15(7.5%) members had basic education and, lastly, 9(4.5%) members had junior high education. As illustrated, majority of the participants were well educated to the tertiary level. The survey appears to suggest that many educated people are presently attracted to the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal Charismatic churches in the study locations in Ghana. The following table 4 below illustrates this:

Table 4. Socio-demographic of educational levels of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Level of Education		
Basic	15	7.5
Junior High	9	4.5
Senior High	43	21.5
Tertiary	133	66.5
Total	200	100

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023).

Digital transformation and religious communication

The next section of the study presents the results on the main objective of the study concerning how the adaptation to digital transformation has affected the religious communication of the selected prophetic churches. Descriptive statistics such as simple frequencies were used to present the quantitative results as seen in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Digital transformation and changes in religious communication

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages%
Books and Pamphlets, CDs	36	18
Social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, now known as X, and YouTube)	156	78
Media (TV and radio stations, digital signage, powerful cameras, projectors, cordless microphones and speakers, colour-changing led-light screens)	167	83.5
Stickers and other religious memorabilia	6	3

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023)

According to the survey, out of the 200 respondents, 156(78%) members indicated that their churches use social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube in religious communication. Additionally, 167(83.5%) members also identified the use of television broadcasting and radio networks by the churches in their religious communication. The results of the turn-outs of the 167(83.5%) and 156(78%) respondents respectively show that majority among the sampled 200 respondents responded more than once both on the question about the use of the TV and radio and others, on one hand, and that of the social media, on the other. In other words, many respondents, including those who already identified with TV, radio and others as the most used by the churches, also indicated the social media as being the second well patronized as means of communication in the churches. When it came to the use of books, pamphlets, CDs, on one hand, and stickers and other religious memorabilia, on the other as communication tools, the turn-outs were respectively low. Based on the data provided, it is evident that the two Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches significantly utilize most the TV and radio stations, powerful cameras, projectors, cordless microphones and speakers, colour-changing led-light screens in their religious communication drive to reach out to their audience both inside and outside the churches. This was closely followed by the use of the social media platforms in the form of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. It is clear from the survey that the churches these days have lesser use of Books and Pamphlets, CDs, stickers and other religious memorabilia than in the past. The churches are also using Ghana graphic online, zoominfo.com, ghanachurch.com among others, in projecting their images, including pastors/prophets, programs; and products/services that are sold to the general public.

The qualitative individual and group in-depth field interviews supplemented the quantitative data by confirming how apart from the television and radio sets, projectors and Second Chance Television broadcast, Believers Worship Centre (BWC) also uses sophisticated Canon EOS R6 mirrorless digital cameras with 24-105mm f/4-7.1 lens to cover all its events. These cameras are handled by professionals. The church also uses the Anchor Audio MIC-90 Handheld Microphone with XLR Cable. These technological tools enhance the audio quality of messages shared by the prophet during church services. Also used for song ministration in the church are high quality musical instruments. In BWC, praise and worship which is usually accompanied by foretelling/prophecy, ensures that members are in the mood of contemplation and connected in spirit to the Holy Spirit. The quality of the musical instruments and the songs they produce are seen as important to the

moment. In addition, the employment of colour-changing led light screens and gospel music are believed by worshippers to create the necessary ambience of awe and holy feeling that enhances the contemplation of the divine. The field interviews also unveiled that the picture quality of transmission on BWC's Second chance TV appears to be a significant effective tool of evangelization that attracts many to the church. As one of the junior pastors of BWC has indicated, 'a significant number of people do not physically come to church, but listen to the church's theological message through the media technology'.

Group interviewees from Ebenezer Worship Centre also corroborated how digital technology has helped their church in its evangelistic drive to win souls for Christ. According to the group interviews, the church's private TV and radio stations (Prophet One TV and Radio Mercury stations) help a lot in spreading information on the activities of the church. The 'online platforms such as WhatsApp forums, the Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and others 'allow us to connect with members outside traditional church services, which has helped to foster a sense of community and belongingness'. The group admitted encountering a stiff competition using technology to remain online. The head of the technical department also corroborated in the group interview that 'we face challenges with technology in competition for attention online. With so many messages and distractions, it is at times difficult to capture the attention of potential church members. However, we have found that targeted advertising and personalized outreach efforts can help overcome this challenge.' He believed embracing digital technology and using it strategically in the church's outreach efforts has been instrumental in improving religious communication and also the growth of their church. He thinks that despite the challenges, digital transformation offers the church significant opportunities to reach a wider audience and also build a stronger community of believers than in the past.

In both churches, as illustrated, the media technology is mainly used to showcase supposed 'miraculous signs and wonders' of the pastors/prophets and to popularize their image. There are continuous telecasting of testimonies concerning the efficacy and redeeming power of the churches' religious products and services. Again, religious products sold to consumers comprise anointed eggs, baby-toffees, oil, water, handkerchiefs, key-holders, brassieres, headgears, among others. As indicated, these articles are believed to have the efficacy to solve specific problems because they were blessed by the prophets. There are also services like consultations with the prophets for a spiritual advice that are paid for by those in need of them. Ample time is invested by the churches in inviting people to give testimonies of claimed miraculous signs and wonders as religious experiences in their lives. As such, the churches are always filled to capacity with existing members and those who come to religiously window-shop. Many people from different walks of life in the West African sub-region, as indicated, also attend the churches' healing sessions. Interview participants indicated how even some Muslims attend such healing sessions. The research identified how healing 'functions as the central hermeneutic for understanding' activities of the prophetic churches 'where pastors/prophets serve as mediators of God's power' (Okesson, 2012: 69). It demonstrates the imaginative ways the churches interpret the sacred and the secular 'within the purview of ecclesiology' (Okesson, 2012: 71).

Gerrie ter Haar describes the great variety of such healing traditions as 'spiritual technologies.' 'Spiritual technologies' signify the awakening and mobilization of human faculties 'in reference to a spiritual world that people believe to be a source of real and effective power that they may use or harness to improve their material lives' (2011: 13). Thus, the methods used in the healing sessions of the churches are believed to be derived from an 'intimate knowledge of and regular contact with a spirit world' where spiritual powers of resident entities are harnessed for healing and tackling all sort of predicaments in the material world. In other words, reaching out to the 'source', i.e., resident entities in the spiritual world, 'facilitates the flow of power' that raises ontological implications about the status of those pastors/prophets. 'Touch, oil, or other' religious products like egg, handkerchief, headgear, 'baby-toffee', among others 'aid with the movement of power from spiritual to human domain. People are healed; others are delivered from spiritual oppression; oftentimes, these occur together' (Okesson, 2012:69). 'Notwithstanding the legitimacy' of some of these claims, there is a danger when spiritual specialists begin to think that they are the source of power or equate themselves to God or the divine. This 'sacralization' of power augments the status of pastors/prophets, 'making them a little near to God and suggesting that they might be a little less human' (Okesson, 2008) or not comparable to other humans as experienced in a number of these churches with some prophets/pastors calling themselves 'Angel of God' who supposedly can see, have meetings, and even shake hands with the Lord of Hosts, God and his angels. Despite the weaknesses or inclination to these tendencies, one understands that 'in African societies "sacralization" and "secularization" constitute two complimentary poles of a single phenomenon, necessitating a more nuanced exegesis of the dynamic' (Jules-Rosette, 1989:154; Okesson, 2012: 70).

Again, the healing sessions are always covered live by special powerful digital cameras that are showcased to the larger public in Ghana and beyond. The media technologies the churches adopted, according to the field interviews, have helped not only in improving the religious communication of the churches, but also impacted their membership size. In both churches the healing sessions turn out large numbers of people who are searching for deliverances, and all sort of cures.

Reiterating, it is significant to note that the covering by digital cameras of the testimonies of participants who claim to receive deliverances from or solutions to their physical, psychological or spiritual predicaments in the healing sessions are widely televised and spoken of on radio stations. This is believed to attract a lot more people who need similar divine interventions in their lives to the churches. The following respectively depicts some of the interview responses of church functionaries consisting of a church elder, a clerk, a junior pastor, a head of music department, and an usher (three informants from Believers Worship Centre and another two from Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre):

Live streaming has been a game changer for our church in delivering sermons to our congregation. We've been able to reach out to a wider audience and connect with people who may not have been able to attend church in person.

Podcasts have become a popular way for people to access religious content on their own time. We've seen an increase in downloads and listening to

our podcasts, which is encouraging for us.

Social media has allowed us to reach out to a younger generation that otherwise may not have access to our programs were we to stick to the old way of religious communication or preaching. The WhatsApp messaging application, for instance, has helped share updates and announcements about our church activities and events.

Our mobile app has been a great resource for people to access our church's content and stay connected with our church community. Our customized church app contains the church's almanack, hymns, and other resources which are especially useful for those who may not have been able to attend church in person due to mobility or transportation challenges.

Video conferencing has been a helpful tool for our church, especially during the Covid pandemic; we were able to continue our Bible studies and prayer meetings online, which was a lifeline for our members who were isolated at home. In addition to this, our theological institutions also do use webinars to share information, provide training, and connect with members.

The study further sought to determine the relationship between an improved religious communication and the membership size of the churches. The findings are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 6. Religious communication and membership size

Variables	Response	Frequencies	Percentages%
Influence of religious communication on membership size	Increase in membership size	140	70
	Decrease in membership size	2	1
	Moderate increase	58	29
	Total	200	100

Source: (Fieldwork, 2023)

According to the survey above, members of the selected churches were asked how the use of technological tools have impacted the churches' membership size. Out of the 200 population (100 respondents from each church) sampled, 140(70%) members indicated the use of social media platforms has positively impacted the churches' membership size. They also indicated how the employment of digital signage in showcasing information about churches' activities and upcoming events is actually helping in effective communication with members and non-members alike. This enhances provision of up-to-date information about the churches' events. Field interviewees corroborated the use of live streaming and video conferencing as effective means of reaching out to their members who for some reasons are unable to attend church physically. They indicated, how the improved religious communication through the use of digital technology helps members to watch live preaching from their prophets and actively participate in the churches' activities from the comfort of their homes. Many non-members of the churches also watch the programs and are attracted to the churches. Fifty-eight (29%) members, according to the quantitative survey, however, indicated they have only seen a moderate increase in the church membership size. Only 2 member (1%) indicated that they have not seen significant improvement in their church's membership size after the adoption of digital technology. But, as illustrated, majority of the respondents contacted during the survey strongly indicated their views of seeing significant increase in the churches' membership size after the digital transformation.

Also, field interviews with the churches' leaders have shown that the digital technology significantly improved their relationship with their members and non-church members through an improved way of communicating messages to them. They indicated how they now have new and different ways of communicating their messages and reaching out to potential church members. Moreover, they have the ability to reach out to a wider audience with their theological messages. This, for them, constitutes one major success they have achieved through the use of digital technology. For example, through the use of social media, online streaming, and other digital platforms, the churches, as indicated, can now share their messages with individuals who may not be able to attend services in person. This has led to increased visibility and awareness of the churches, which in turn led to greater membership growth. The fieldwork has shown how the digital transformation has also empowered the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches to improve their financial management and accountability. For example, the Mobile money technology and online donation platforms have made it easier for the churches to collect donations from their members and philanthropists, and are able to track financial transactions. This, according to the interviewees, has really improved financial management and accountability within the churches, and making them more transparent to their members.

Discussion

Kumasi and other places like Ahenema Kokoben and Kenyase-Adwumam in the Ashanti region of Ghana, have seen a heightened competition among Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, particularly the neo-prophetic ones to improve on how they reach out for more followers through the use of digital technology. Bonsu (2013) describes the phenomenon as a 'competition sport' with a pastor's image or status determined by the number of followers or members s/he is able to attract to his/her church. Impliedly, a preacher's religious communication appears to play a significant role in attracting the membership. The competitive religious atmosphere of the churches to outdo each other in attracting followers, has facilitated adaption and adoption of the mass media and other digital technologies that would enhance specific forms of delivery of theological contents (Schulz, 2006). Starting from the 1980s, Pentecostals/Charismatics have already been involved in digital transformation by using videos, CDs and DVDs and tracts to extend their messages and to start new branches across national borders (Ukah, 2007). Describing the changing character of the churches' mode

of communication, Ukah (2007) argues that pastors and prophets are media-smart and conscious, taking advantage of the existence of books, pamphlets, CDs, DVDs, stickers, key-holders and other religious memorabilia at the time. The increase in the development and use of translation software also enabled the distribution of the gospel to people speaking different languages across different nations (Edmiston 2007). So also, improvement in the printing technology enhanced the circulation of theological tracts and other easy-read scriptural materials (Edmiston 2007). Today, however, many Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches like Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre to a large extent have transitioned from the use of CDs, DVDs and other rudimentary gadgets and religious memorabilia to more developed digital tools. They own media wings with the sole purpose of coordinating TV, internet, radio broadcasting, and digital signage, which they use to promote their positive image, showcase their churches' programs, activities and contents, and also emphasize their uniqueness and what products/services they can offer their members and potential consumers (Ukah, 2007). There is also an increase in 'cyber-churches' and other 'on-line Bible study groups' (Edmiston, 2007). Again, not only are the Christian groups using the internet, the TV, the radio and the social media such as the Facebook, Youtube, TikTok, WhatsApp and others that they can lay hands on to enhance and spread their theological messages, but also digitally follow-up on their members at various parts of the world in order to meet their needs. What is interesting is that with the availability of video and audio digital technology, even persons with little or no education are able to hear Christian theological messages and follow discussions on themes (Edmiston 2007). There are also enormous number of preachers, healers, singers, exorcists and counselors who buy air time on local, national and private radios and televisions to proclaim their fundamental theological messages (Ihejirika, 2008). Some like the prophets and founders of Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, as indicated, have their own TV and radio stations that they use to showcase their churches programs.

The results of digital transformation efforts by the churches are first and foremost visible in the changes of the delivery modes of their religious communication or theological messages, and also in the new forms of direct interactions with their customers (both membership and potential followers). Through the social media they are able to adapt products and services to customers' needs. In the selected churches, this can be seen in the emergence of platform economies where the core business model is to create space for interactions between the churches as producers of religious products/services and consumers. That is to say, the value is produced by connecting people (Mergel et al, 2019: 33). In other words, the digital transformation in the churches is made visible through their acquisition of smart products that enable real-time monitoring and also updating their services that transform production processes and customer relations (Porter and Happelmann, 2015).

Reiterating, the adoption of digital transformation by the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in their activities has resulted in the creation of entirely new business models that 'undermine existing ways of delivering services' (Mergel et al, 2019) that are still prevalent with the mission-related or orthodox churches that appear conservative in outlook and slow in adapting to digital transformation. This may account as one of the reasons for their loss of many of their membership to the prophetic Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. This shows that the old existing channels of religious communication such as face-to-face preaching or writing sermons on papers or travelling in person to other mission stations or out-stations is being changed or changed and replaced by digital ways of doing things. It means a pastor/prophet can be in one place, but performing the same action in different places at the same time through televising or radio broadcast. In other words, this digital way of doing things results in a chain of benefits. It means the process does not only create new opportunities for membership size and the attendant revenue. It also adds value to the activities of the churches' 'business enterprises.' To put it differently, as manually done in previous years, today digital technology is applied to most tasks by the churches to improve effectiveness and efficiency in religious communication which in turn affects their membership size and productivity. Again, it involves utilizing digital devices to complete tasks that used to be done offline.

In this sense, digital transformation is seen as an opportunity for gaining new market shares (Mergel et al, 2019) for the churches in the form of membership or new converts. It is like entering new markets and gaining new customers in the form of converts and believers who window-shop for physical, spiritual and psychological remedies while maintaining existing membership. It also means dropping offline services that are no longer contributing to the financial benefits of the churches.

The discussion has shown that the digital transformation of the churches enabled the churches to better engage with their members and build thriving faith communities. Online platforms such as WhatsApp forums, chat rooms, digital signage, among others, allow members to connect and share their religious thoughts and faith experiences outside the normal church services. Through the use of data analytics and targeted advertising, the churches now tailor their messages and outreach efforts to specific targeted groups of individuals who may be more receptive to their message. This B2C method helps to increase the effectiveness of outreach efforts to attract new members who may have otherwise been unaware of the churches' messages. This is found to foster a sense of community, belongingness and faith-upliftment among members. Hence, it is seen as a powerful motivation for individuals to join the churches and remain active in them.

However, it is also important to be aware that apart from the significant contributions that digital technology makes, it also presents potential challenges. For example, there is a risk that it could lead to a decrease in face-to-face interactions and faith community-building efforts if pushed too far, which could ultimately have a negative impact on membership growth in the long run. Additionally, the financial and human resource implications associated with the use of digital technology that is ever evolving is something that the churches will always have to contend with.

Conclusion

The main rationale behind this current study has been to find out in which ways the adoption of digital transformation by Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana affected their religious communication using Believers Worship Centre and Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, respectively at Kenyase-Adwumam and Ahenema Kokoben in the Ashanti region as case studies. The study used the mixed methods approach in investigating the research object. The findings have shown that while there may be some challenges involved in going digital, the churches have significantly benefited in improving their religious communication such as preaching and reaching out to their membership and others who are not members on a scale that had never happened before. The social media platforms, digital signage and live streaming, video conferencing, the use of radio broadcast and televising have made it easier for the churches to outreach and communicate with both members and non-members in real time, which has improved their membership size. Additionally, digital financial platforms have also contributed enormously to improve financial management and accountability in the churches. Last, but not least, the adoption of digital transformation has not only brought about efficient and effective communication, but also made churches more effective in their daily transactions. In the final analysis, the study is important because it has contributed to both local and international theories on digital transformation of both faith and secular business institutions. As such, it has contributed to the ongoing debates about the role of religion in matters of development.

Author's Biography

Victor S. Gedzi (PhD) is an Associate Professor in Department of Religious Studies, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana. His PhD in Development Studies focuses on religion/culture, human rights, and socio-legal systems. His specialization is in religion and development relationships. Internationally, Gedzi is a Cambridge Editorial Advisory Board Member; a Nuffic Fellow; a member of several international academic Associations. His recent publications include: 1) Emotions, Transcendence, Differentiated Voices and Resistances at Coast Castle in Ghana: Poetic Analysis; 2) Environmental Reviews and Case Studies: Religious Resources and Environmental Management in Ghana; 3) Pentecostalism, the Media, and the State: Politicization of Indigenous Customary Systems in Ghana.

Acknowledgements

This postdoctoral research was possible because of the scholarship offered me by RWTH Aachen University for the AROP program from 1st April to 30th June 2023. I profoundly acknowledge this help from the university. I am very grateful to the group in charge of the scholarship fund, particularly, Ms. Ulrike, and the Welcoming Team for the enthusiasm with which they welcomed me. I am also profoundly thankful to Prof. Axel Siegemund, the Director of the Institute for Catholic Theology in the RWTH Aachen University, who did not only encourage me, but also hosted me; and to Sabine and Anne-Marie who showed me places I initially did not know. To Johann and Knut who helped me in diverse ways, many thanks. Many thanks go also to the faculty members and students at the Institute who accepted me to work among them. Finally, I wish to greatly thank Prof. Dr. Gerrie ter Haar, Professor of Religion and Development who critically read through the first draft of this script and made useful suggestions. I cannot thank you all enough.

Funding

The author disclosed a funding support from RWTH Aachen University through the AROP postdoc program from April 1st to 30th June, 2023.

ORCID ID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2120-6385>

Notes

- 1 This word comes from the Greek word 'charismata' referring to gifts of the Spirit (charismata pneumatika) that God poured on the church on the day of Pentecost (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2000: 12; Lindhardt, 2018:1). In later years, Christians who believe in Christ and stress these spiritual gifts in their spirituality or approach to worship are referred to as Charismatics (plural) and Charismatic (singular) just like Pentecostals or the Pentecostal. The word 'ism' is added to the terms 'Pentecostal' and 'Charismatic' to have 'Pentecostalism' and 'Charismaticism'.
- 2 This is recommended by the prophet to women who want to be pregnant or take a seed.
- 3 Interviews with Gerrie ter Haar at Aachen, Germany on 17th June and at KNUST, Ghana on 16th November, 2023. Gerrie ter Haar is a renown Prof. of Religion and Development. She is from the Netherlands.
- 4 Acknowledged gratitude to Profs. K.O. Akuoko, J.M. Dapaah, and Dr J.B. Forkuor from the Department of Sociology and Social Works, Faculty of Social Sciences, KNUST, Kumasi for their contributions in this section of the discussion.

References

1. Achebe C. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Random House, Inc.
2. Adeloye, J.O. 2014. 'Inter-religious conflicts in West Africa: The Nigerian experience'. In F.Appiah-Kubi P Addai-Mensah and NI Samwini (Eds.), *The Church and Society*, 1(8): 100–111.
3. Andal-Ancion A, Cartwright PA and Yip, G.S. 2003. 'The digital transformation of traditional business'. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 44(4):34–41.
4. Anderson, Jnr G. 2022. Neo-Prophetic churches in sub-Saharan Africa: A narrative on the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, Kumasi-Ghana. *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal*, 3(1): 1–11.
5. Asamoah-Gyadu, J.K. 2000. *African Charismatics: Current developments within independent indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. PhD Level, University of Birmingham.
6. Benyah, F. 2018. 'Commodification of the Gospel and the socio-economics of Neo- Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana'. *Ligon Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 29, No. 2: 116–145.
7. Berman SJ (2012) Digital transformation: Opportunities to create new business models. *Strategy and Leadership*, 40(2): 16–24.
8. Bonsu, A. 2013. 'A spiritual contest among pastors'. Accessed on the 3rd of September 2015. Available at: <http://www.ammazingseries.com/a-spiritual-contest/>
9. Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. 2018. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles, SAGE. Chicago.
10. Dovlo, E. (N.d). 'New Religious Movements in Ghana'. Retrieved from: <https://www.google.com/search?q=pdf+on+a+brief+history+of+christian+religious+movements+in+Ghana%3F&oq>
11. Edmiston, J. 2007. Internet evangelism and cyber-missions and their impact upon how we will do missions in the 21st century. Available at: https://www.cybermissions.org/articles/21stC_missions.pdf.
12. El Arbaoui, F.Z. 2018. 'The Post-Colonial Reality in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*'. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*. Vol. 1(2): 7–13.
12. Fincham, J.E. 2008. 'Response rates and responsiveness for surveys, standards, and the journal'. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*. Vol.72(2) Article 43: 1 – 3.
13. Fountain, J.E. 2004. *Building the virtual state: Information technology and institutional change*. Brookings Institution Press.
14. Gedzi V.S., Treve, W.K. and Segbefia, A.Y. 2020. 'Congregational conflicts and societal impacts: A case of Evangelical Presbyterian congregation in Ghana'. *Journal of African Political Economy and Development*, Vol. 5: 21–45.
15. Gedzi, V.S. and Anderson, Jr G. 2021. Situating the religious market theory in Ghanaian religious context: Merits and demerits. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture (AJRPC)*, Vol. 2, No. 1: 57–75.
16. Ghana Statistical Service. 2021. *2010 Population and Housing Census*, Accra.
17. Ihejirika, W. 2008. 'In-line religion: Innovative pastoral applications of a new information and communication technologies (NICTS) by the Catholic church in Nigeria'. *Politics and Religion*, 2(2): 79–98.
18. Ilesanmi, S. 1995. 'Inculturation and liberation: Christian social ethics and the African theology Project'. *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*. Baltimore, MD: Georgetown University Press: 49–73.
19. Johnson, T.P. and Owens, L.K. 2013. 'Survey response rate reporting in the professional literature'. *American Association for Public Opinion Research – Section on Survey Research Methods*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253590091_Survey_Response_Rate_Reporting_in_the_Professional
20. Jules-Rosette, B. 1989. 'The sacred in African new religions'. In James A. Beckford and Thomas Luckmann (eds.). *The changing face of religion*. London: Sage: 147–162.
21. Lindhardt, M. 2018. *Presence and impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa*. Available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/322478159_Presence_....
22. Macekura, S., Mcrone, C., Cebul, B., Ticona, J., Maiers, C. et al. 2016. 'The relationship of morals and markets today. A review of recent scholarship on the culture of economic life'. *An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 99, No. 2: 136–170.
23. Mergel, I., Edelman, N. and Haug, N. 2019. 'Defining digital transformation: Results from expert Interviews'. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36: 1–16.
24. Mugge, P. and Gudergan, G. 2017. 'The Gap between the practice and theory of digital transformation, White paper'. *The 50th Hawaiian International Conference of System Science*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318864420_The_Gap_Between_the_Practice_and_Theory_of_Digital
25. Normanyo, F. 2019. 'The resurgence of the African Traditional Shrines in a Neo- Pentecostal/Charismatic religious milieu in Ghana'. *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, Vol. 5, No.1: 88–96.
26. Okesson, G. 2008. 'Are pastors human? Sociological and theological implications for ministerial identity in Africa'. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 25, No.2: 19–39.
27. Okesson, G. 2012. *Public theology for global development: A case study dealing with 'Health' in Africa*. *The Asbury Journal*, Vol. 67(1): 56–76.
28. Porter, M.E. and Heppelmann, J.E. 2015. 'How smart, connected-products are transforming Companies'. *Harvard Business Review*, 93: 1–37.
29. Quayesi-Amakye, J. 2015. 'Prophetism in Ghana's Neo-Prophetic Churches'. *Journal of European Pentecostal Theological Association*, 35, 2: 162–173.

30. Schulz, D.E. 2006. 'Promises of immediate salvation: Islam, broadcast media and the remaking of religious experience in Mali'. *American Ethnologist*, 33(2): 210–229.
31. Sengers, E. 2006. 'Do you want to receive a missionary at home? Conversion and the religious Market'. *Exchange*, 35, 1: 4–17.
32. ter Haar, G. (ed). 2011. *Religion and development: Ways of transforming the world*. Hurst and Company.
33. The Free Encyclopaedia. N.d. 'Theology'. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theology>.
34. Tratkowska, K. 2019. Digital transformation: 'Theoretical backgrounds of digital change'. *Management Sciences*, Vol. 24, No. 4: 32–37.
35. Ukah, A.F.K. 2007. 'African christianities: features, promises and problems'. Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Working Paper No. 79, Johannes Gutenberg–Universitat, Mainz, Germany.
36. Verschuren, P. and Hans, Doorewaard, H. 1999. *Designing a Research Project*. Utrecht: LEMA.
37. White, P. (2017). 'Pentecostal Mission Spirituality: A Study of the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana'. *Mission* 44(3): 251–262.
38. Wuaku, A.K. 2012. 'Selling Krishna in Ghana's religious market: Proselytizing strategies of the Sri Radha Govinda temple community of Ghana'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 30, No. 2: 335–357.
39. Yidana, A, and Issahaku, M. 2014. 'Pentecostal creative ideas, inspiring vision and innovation in Ghana-A bane of Pentecostal continued plausibility'. *American Journal of Sociological Research*, 4(1): 1–10.
40. Zinder, E. and Yunatova, I. 2016. 'Synergy for digital transformation: a person's multiple roles and subject domains integration'. In: *Digital Transformation and Global Society*. First Inter-national Conference, June 22–24, Springer: 155–168. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Synergy-for-Digital-Transformation>