

Websites of Churches as Religious Marketplace: The Case of Three Ghanaian Charismatic Churches

Selorm Agbesi^{[a],*}; Mohammed S. Issahaku^[b]; John K. Sibite^[c]

^[a] PhD, Lecturer, Department of English, University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), Accra, Ghana.

^[b] MPhil, Assistant Lecturer, Department of Languages, Bagabaga College of Education, Tamale, Ghana.

^[c] MPhil, Assistant Lecturer, Department of French, University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), Accra, Ghana.

* Corresponding author.

Received 1 February 2026; accepted 20 February 2026

Published online 26 February 2026

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore how three Ghanaian charismatic churches rhetorically construct identities for themselves in their website texts. The three churches considered were Action Chapel International, International Central Gospel Church, and Perez Chapel International. The website texts studied were the churches' history, beliefs, vision, and mission statements. Qualitative content analysis, guided by Constitutive Rhetoric Theory, was employed to explore the constructions that are embedded in the texts. Various identity constructions were found embedded in the texts of which the main ones are as follows: ownership of the church (especially in the history and vision narratives), the church as a collective or community, the church as a solution centre, the best church, and a call on audience to take action to perpetuate the ministry of the church (mainly in the Mission Statement). Through these constructions, each church presents itself as the best with the obvious aim of attracting and maintaining membership. This makes them appear as business competitors scrambling for new members in the religious marketplace. The study has implications for further research.

Key words: Constitutive rhetoric; Identity construction; Charismatic churches; Pastors; Website

Agbesi, S., Issahaku, M. S., & Sibite, J. K. (2026). Websites of Churches as Religious Marketplace: The Case of Three Ghanaian Charismatic Churches. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 32(1), 18-26. Available

from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/14008>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/14008>

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore how three Ghanaian charismatic churches rhetorically construct identities for themselves in their website texts. It has been observed that what we say, how we say it, and what language we use to say it are all a way of performing identity. In other words, whenever people use language (or fail to do so), they reveal something about themselves and how they want others to perceive them (Flowerdew & Wang, 2016). Burke and Stets (2009) have defined identity as a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure, groups they identify with and belong to, and unique ways in which they see themselves. The definition reveals three types of identity: role, group, and person identity which have been described in Identity Theory as bases of identities (Stets & Serpe, 2013). *Role identities* are the internalised meanings that people associate with roles they play in the society. *Group identities* are the meanings that arise as a result of one's membership in a group. When individuals come together to achieve a common purpose, a group is established. The expected activities of the group as a collective define the activities of the individual members, and those activities give members the group's identity. *Person identities* are based on a set of meanings that sets individuals apart as unique not as a result of the role they play or their membership in a group (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Moje (2011) notes that identities are categories people assign to themselves or others (discursive constructions); stories that people tell about themselves and others; or enactments of self, shaped by time, space, and relationships. The present study follows the view that

identity is something that people do rather than what they have; and individuals assume multiple identities over the course of their lives (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011; Burke & Stets, 2009; Zhao & Jones, 2017). This view studies identity as constructed in discourse through discursive activities, ‘as negotiated among speaking subjects in social contexts, and as emerging in the form of subjectivity and a sense of self’ (Bamberg et al., 2011: 1). In this sense, discourse is very important in identity studies as ‘construction is deeply embedded in discourse’ (Bamberg et al., 2011: 1). The study explores some website texts of selected Charismatic churches in Ghana to reveal the identities that circulate in them and to understand how the identities are constructed. The following research questions guide the study:

- What rhetorical elements can be found in the construction of identity in the texts?
- What linguistic features are employed in the construction of identity in the texts?

Answering the above questions will provide insight into how language is used to construct identity in the religious texts of the selected churches. The analysis will also reveal what purposes for which identities are constructed and how these constructions influence audiences’ behaviour.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

This section discusses relevant literature on Charismatic churches in Ghana, identity construction in the Ghanaian church, and the theoretical perspective of the study. The purpose of the discussion is to situate the study within a context.

2.1 Charismatic churches in Ghana

Churches in Ghana are broadly viewed as Mainline and Pentecostals (Sarbah, 2020). Mainline churches are those that form the membership of the Christian Council of Ghana, and are also called Mission, Historical, Orthodox, or Established churches. These churches were products of European and North American missionary activities in Africa (Birgit 1998). Characteristically, they follow a traditional formulaic approach in their operations and activities (Sarbah, 2020). The Pentecostals differ by their insistence on a ‘born-again’ experience for every individual Christian with emphasis on ‘Holy Spirit baptism’ with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Their worship services are patterned after William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival experiences (Coleman, 2002; Yeung, 2011). The Pentecostals are further divided by spiritual nuances into African Independent, Classical Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches (Omenyo, 2002).

Golo (2013) points out that Charismatic’s main point of departure from Classical Pentecostalism is the

prosperity gospel that dominates the messages of its preachers. Sarbah (2020) also observes that Charismatics do not lay emphasis on speaking in tongues as evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, but on the transformative work of the Spirit in the individual Christian and in the church. This work of the Holy Spirit must manifest in freedom from sin, healing from sicknesses and diseases, and deliverance from demons. They also believe in the ‘priesthood of all believers’ hence every Christian is called to work for God (Sarbah, 2020: 71).

Golo (2013) observes that Charismatic churches in Ghana are an offshoot of Classical Pentecostal churches and only remotely related to William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival. Most of the scholars who studied the Charismatic Movement in Ghana (e.g., Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Birgit, 1998; Lauterbach, 2016; Omenyo, 2002) noted that it started and thrived at a time (1970s and 1980s) of political instability and severe economic hardship in the country. Similar observations were made in Nigeria by Ojo (2010) who affirmed that the movement developed within an era of political instability, economic recession, and social tension. It is possible to conclude that Charismaticism was a Christian response to the economic and social crisis in Africa at the time. This is more so when it has been established that the central message of the Charismatic churches has been health, wealth, and success through faith in Christ (Golo, 2013). Birgit (1998) perceived that people had lost faith in the state and turned to the churches for alternative solutions. The Charismatic churches in turn preached to inspire hope in their members.

In Ghana, it is perceived that charismatic churches drew most of their membership from the African Independent churches (AICs) (Birgit, 1998; Gifford, 1998). This is probably because of the initial attitude of the Mainline churches toward the charismatic churches. According to James Amanze (n. d.) of the University of Botswana, Pentecostal Charismatic churches were initially frowned upon by African Mainline churches. In Ghana, they were even described in derogatory terms such as ‘one-man churches’ (Lauterbach, 2016: 7). Now, Pentecostal Charismaticism has been acknowledged by many scholars (e.g., Amanze, n. d.; Lauterbach, 2016; Ojo, 2010) as the fastest growing version of Christianity in the world and cannot escape attention. A recent study (Sarbah, 2020) also establishes that there has been migration from the Mainline churches into the charismatic churches. This, Sarbah found attributable to the spiritual, economic, and social appeal of the charismatic churches.

The earliest charismatic churches in Ghana were Christian Action Faith Ministry now known as Action Chapel International established by Nicholas Duncan-Williams in 1979; International Central Gospel Church popularly known as ICGC founded by Mensah Otabil in

1984; and Word Miracle Church International, now Perez Chapel International, founded by Charles Agyinasare in 1987 (Sarbah, 2020). After decades of their existence since the late 1970s, these churches still seem the most visible charismatic churches in the Ghanaian public space. Their pastors have been described by De Witte (2003) and Gifford (2004) as the ‘most well-known’, influential, and richest charismatic preachers in the country (cited in Lauterbach, 2016: 8). A possible explanation is that the pastors of these charismatic churches have carved certain identities for themselves and their denominations which continue to attract new members and maintain loyalty in their congregations. The present study would analyse how these first-three and most popular charismatic churches use constitutive rhetoric to construct identities for themselves on their websites making them attractive to the public.

2.2 Identity construction in the Ghanaian church

The present study is about identity construction in the Ghanaian Charismatic church. And some previous studies have been done in the area, and these help to clarify the position of our study in the literature. Dovlo (2017) explored the construction of the African Christian identity in Dr Mensah Otabil’s book, *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia*. In this book, Otabil tried to establish the case that the African Christian, for that matter the black Christian, is a bona fide child of God much as the Western Christian (Dovlo, 2017). This argument was pitted against some Western ideological myth that Africans are the cursed generation of the biblical Ham. Otabil is appalled that a Canadian author even went as far as purporting that the Bible refers to the black person as ‘the beast of the field’ (Dovlo, 2017: 25).

Dr Otabil reconstructs the African Christian identity by rereading Genesis 9: 18-27 to dismiss the myth of Ham that Africans are cursed. By reinterpreting the story of Keturah, Abraham’s other wife, Otabil shows that black people are not inferior to other races in God’s redemptive plan (Dovlo, 2017). Through this discursive construction of identity, Otabil places the African Christian at par with the Western Christian. This, by extension, makes his calling as a Man of God and his church ministry divinely legitimate and worthy of acceptance globally.

Darko (2017) examined dance as a tool for identity negotiation in the Ghanaian church. She did an ethnographic case study of the Immanuel Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Madina. She posits that though as a Christian group worshipping God together as one family, different cultural and social groups used dance to express their identity as belonging to one or the other groups. In this sense, the Christian group identity is seen as an amalgamation of diverse group identities. Dance is seen as a powerful form of self-expression and communication that complements the worship style of the

church in bringing people together in peaceful coexistence (Darko, 2017).

Public representation of the church and its leader has been identified as a defining feature of the Pentecostal-Charismatic church (Lauterbach, 2016). It has been a practice of charismatic pastors to project a certain image of themselves and their churches to the public (De Witte, 2003). Lauterbach (2016) posits that the African Charismatic pastor is characteristically portrayed in the public space as a ‘big man’ with tremendous power to transform his followers into his type of person. And this big-man image is what defines the charismatic pastor’s church as well. In other words, the charismatic pastor is often representative of his church.

De Witte (2011) observes that African charismatic leaders create two kinds of identities for themselves. First, they craft themselves as modern celebrities with fans and followers who form their congregations and virtual clients. For example, she asserts, ‘Otabil’s charisma—or his fans’ and followers’ perception of his supernatural giftedness—derives largely from his being (crafted as) a national and international star’ (De Witte, 2011, p.231). These fans and followers patronize the charismatic pastors’ often-advertised goods and services in the religious marketplace (Quenin, 2016). Second, African Charismatic leaders constitute themselves as intermediaries between God and humans much like African traditional shrine priests who are perceived as intermediaries between the human and the spirit world (De Witte, 2011).

The tool for the creation of these identities has been noted as the electronic media (Quenin, 2016). Hackett (1998, cited in Quenin, 2016) argued that African Charismatic church leaders followed the example of their counterparts in the U.S. to become popular through religious broadcasting. Asamoah-Gyadu (2018) corroborates this argument by asserting that most of the Charismatic doctrines were learned by Ghanaian Charismatic church pastors from the electronic and print media ministry of Oral Roberts from the U.S. Quenin (2016) notes that Charismatic churches use televangelism in particular as a platform ‘to grow membership, advertise services and products, create positive perceptions of the head pastor and build a brand’ (Quenin, 2016, p.22).

The study bears in mind the idea of religious markets or economies. The central debate among scholars is whether religious pluralism increases religious participation or not. On one hand, Finke et al. (1996) and others say it does. On the other hand, Opfinger (2011) and others assert that it does not; in fact, it decreases it. A common ground between the two divides, however, is that where there is religious freedom, religions increase. The plurality breeds competition among the religions and religious capital becomes a means of winning and maintaining memberships and participation (Ahdar, 2006; Finke, 2003; Flere, 2012). This common ground is

relevant to the proliferation of Charismatic churches in Ghana and the competition among them to be better than one another to get members.

From the foregoing, it could be understood that the search for popularity and economic gains underpins the use of electronic media by charismatic churches. This possibility may be underscored by the churches' use of advertisement strategies during televangelism. According to Quenin (2016) who studied Duncan-Williams' Action Chapel International and Otabil's International Central Gospel Church, 'Advertising was an integral part of each church's communication activities used to enhance their visibility, project a good image, and possibly retain members' (Quenin, 2016, p.37). Nevertheless, televangelism has resulted in some audiences' healing and conversion to Christianity among other things (De Witte, 2003). This suggests that not all televangelists may be using electronic media solely to advertise themselves and their churches. There must be some of them who seek to reach souls with the gospel of Christ through electronic media.

What is well known, though, is that charismatic churches in Ghana use mass media to create a public image for their head pastor and the church itself (De Witte, 2003). Television, radio, and social media handles are perceived as very important for the success of the charismatic ministry. Churches have their media units, such as the Alter Media in International Central Gospel Church, that are responsible for recording, editing, and broadcasting only those aspects of their ministry that appeal to people and produce a public image of the head pastor's personality, the church, and its public audience (De Witte, 2002; 2003; 2012; 2018; Quenin, 2016). Thus, much of the literature shows how Ghanaian Charismatic churches use electronic media to construct public identity for themselves. What is not so well explored is how the charismatic pastors use constitutive rhetoric in their texts to construct certain identities for their churches and to persuade their audiences to act in consonance with such identities. The present study attempts to add to the literature in this aspect.

2.3 Theoretical perspective

The study explores identity construction through the lens of Constitutive Rhetoric Theory (Charland, 1987; McGee, 1975; White, 1985). According to Aristotle, rhetoric is the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion (Foss, 2009). Rhetoric is said to have started in ancient Greece by a group of philosophers called sophists (Foss, 2009). To them, rhetoric was the art of speaking convincingly to win a case. Rhetoric became popular through the activities of the sophists (Bitzer, 1963; Buck, 1900; Foss, 2009). Rhetorical Theory posits that people are able to persuade others to believe things through communication (Zachry, 2009). Burke

(1969) understands that humans convey their attitudes by using language purposefully. For him, rhetoric is 'the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents' (Burke, 1969, p.41 cited in Quigley, 2009). Even though rhetoric is always persuasive (Bitzer, 1968), Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory emphasizes the term 'identification' rather than persuasion as the goal of rhetoric in contrast to traditional rhetorical theory (Quigley, 2009, p.1). Burke views rhetoric as a means of identification rather than the use of artistic discourse for persuasion (Hansen, 1996). Burke's concept of identification explains the processes by which humans build social cohesion using language. This process involves three steps namely, the process of naming something or someone, the process of associating with and disassociating from others, and the state of being consubstantial with others (this being the product of identifying). During the associating process, individuals persuade others, or themselves, that they share important qualities in common.

Aristotle, according to Kennedy (2007), delineated three types of rhetoric. These are deliberative, forensic, and epideictic: deliberative rhetoric seeks to induce future courses of action in the audience for their best interest; forensic rhetoric calls on the audience to be judge of past actions, while epideictic rhetoric expects the audience to observe and praise or blame the subject for upholding the community's values or not (Kennedy, 2007). According to White (1985), however, constitutive rhetoric is the capacity of language or symbols to create a collective identity for an audience, especially by means of condensation symbols, literature, and narratives. He explained that it denotes the act of constituting character, community, and culture in language. The term describes rhetoric that calls a common collective identity into existence and induces action in its audience to reinforce a constituted identity (White, 1985). Unlike some theorists (e.g., Burke, 1950; Charland, 1987; McGee, 1975) who believes that an audience creates itself without the agency of a rhetor, White (1985) emphasizes that rhetor using constitutive rhetoric makes conscious linguistic choices to create the audience as a constituted subject. Charland (1987) explained that constitutive rhetoric affects audience in three ways. First, it creates a collective interest that replaces individual differences among the audience. Second, it connects the audience to those who lived in the past with the same identity; and third, it leads the audience to believe that they are free to act according as they please while they are regulated by the beliefs of the collective identity that has been constituted for them (Charland, 1987).

Constitutive rhetoric theory is considered appropriate for the study because it seems to richly combine the theories of identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013) identity construction (Flowerdew & Wang, 2016;

Mole, 2011), and rhetoric (Burke, 1969 cited in Quigley, 2009; Bitzer, 1968; Zachry, 2009) in its definitions. The study relies on these theories to analyse how the selected churches use language in their website texts to reveal something about themselves, how they want others to perceive them, and how they invite others to participate in their identities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative content analysis (Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015) to explore constitutive rhetoric in the website texts of Duncan-Williams's Action Chapel International, Mensah Otobil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), and Agyinasare's Perez Chapel International as a multiple case study. The study favoured this research approach because it provided the opportunity for interpretative and descriptive analyses of constitutive and linguistic elements in the churches' website texts. We relied on purposive sampling techniques (Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015) to select the three churches because of their representativeness of the Ghanaian charismatic church phenomenon in the literature, and because they were the first-three and still most popular charismatic churches in the public space (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2018; De Witte 2003; Dovlo, 2017; Gifford 2004; Lauterbach, 2016, p.8).

The analysis leans toward deductive analysis which seeks to determine 'the extent to which qualitative data in a particular study support existing general conceptualizations, explanations, results, and/or theories' (Patton, 2015, p.792). The website texts analysed were the churches' history, beliefs, vision, and mission statements. These were selected because they were common to all three churches on the websites. A simple coding system was used to label the extracts that were used from the text for easy reference. For example, extracts from Action Chapel International's history would be Action History 01, 02, 03, etc.; ICGC's Vision Statement would be ICGC Vision 01, 02, 03, etc. The study was not a comparative one, but an intertwine content analysis (Raich, Muller, & Abfalter, 2014) was followed to explore the themes, meanings, and generalizations that are observable in the constructions that are embedded in the texts across the three churches.

4. ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the discussion of the results of the analysis of the history, vision statement, mission statement, and statement of beliefs of the three selected churches. The texts were extracted from the churches' websites (Action Chapel International, www.actionchapel.net, Retrieved March 12, 2022; ICGC, www.centralgospel.com, Retrieved January 18, 2023; Perez

Chapel International, www.perezchapel.org, Retrieved January 20, 2023).

4.1 Construction of the church as a community or collective

In the texts, it was found that the construction of community or collective identity was embedded in the statement of beliefs for all the churches. In addition, Action Chapel and Perez Chapel used their vision statement to create their churches as community or collective. However, only Action Chapel was found to have used its history narrative for this purpose. The dominant tool used to construct community and collective identity was Burke's (1969 cited in Quigley, 2009) *identification by an assumed we*. This refers to the use of the first-person plural pronoun in its various forms such as 'we', 'us', 'our' etc to refer to people who have little in common as though they were one. Examples in the document texts include *we are one church...* (Action History, 02), *a global family church...* (Perez Vision, 01), *we believe...* (All Churches, Beliefs), *our vision* (All Churches), *our mission* (All Churches), etc. This type of discourse creates the church as a collective subject and assumes a community identity.

According to Charland (1987), the constituting of a collective subject in this manner requires members of the constituted subject to replace their individual values and beliefs with those of the collective. The creation of this community identity for the church, therefore, implies that members would be expected to shift their commitment and loyalty from previous or similar groups to the new identity. This is because, an identity is created in contrast to another identity so that there is a division between 'us' and 'them' (White, 1985). According to social identity theory, one of the effects of this division is that 'you' cannot belong to 'us' and 'them' at the same time (Stets & Serpe, 2013). The construction of the church as a community on the church website seems to present the churches to the public as desirable for new members to join.

4.2 Construction of ownership identity

Another construction of identity revealed in the texts is the ownership of the churches. The churches used their history narratives mostly to achieve this. Action Chapel used diction in the caption to distance the church from any persons' claims and names the founder. The caption ACTION'S HISTORY instead of, say, OUR HISTORY like other sections such as OUR VISION or OUR MISSION, distances the church from the writers or members and sets it off as an independent entity. The diction hides the ownership of the narrative and potentially reduces, if not denies, any person's claims of ownership of the church apart from the named founder. The very absence of detail in the historical narrative, comprising only four sentences, could be interpreted as

silencing past voices of claims to the church. The choice of OUR HISTORY instead would have implied collective ownership of the history and, therefore, the church itself. After the caption distances the church's history from all persons, the third sentence explicitly names the founder:

United Denominations of Action Chapel International was founded by the Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams (Action History, 01).

This way, the history is carefully written to construct a single instead of collective ownership for the church. Action Chapel International belongs to Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams.

On the other hand, the caption of the history narrative of ICGC, *OUR HISTORY*, uses the plural possessive adjective (as well as pronoun) 'our' to indicate a collective voice for the narrative. It is not just ICGC's story but 'our' story; suggesting that it is a story belonging to the members as well as the organization. This further implies that the members own the story as well as the organization. Otabil is not mentioned as the narrator in the history narrative, neither is he identified as the founder of the organization. The narrator may only be identified by the word 'our' which most likely represents all the members including Otabil himself. This construction does not distance the history from the members but makes them owners of it.

The interpretation of the above construction could mean that ICGC belongs to 'us' and not just to Otabil. This ownership identity is constructed for all the members of the church by someone else. In other words, most of the members may not have been part of writing the history but they are constructed as owners of it. That is the essence of constitutive rhetoric: someone else, by conscious linguistic choices, creates an identity for a people who are rhetorically persuaded to live that identity (White, 1985). However, one of the ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric would play out in this ownership identity of ICGC. That effect is the illusion of freedom (Charland, 1987); so that even though the creation of this identity could make members have a sense of ownership and belonging, they are not truly free to act in most cases as owners of the church except Otabil. One of the possible reasons for the choice of this approach in presenting the history is the sense of belonging it could give the members. With the sense of belonging come members' commitment and loyalty to Mensah Otabil's dreams for the church socially and financially.

Perez Chapel started because Agyinasare received a revelation from God as follows:

On the first occasion He said to me: "My boy Charles, I send you out as I sent Moses; go and I will put my words in your lips and reach the world for me." On the second occasion which was the fourth day He said "My boy Charles, I give unto you power over demons and principalities, heal the sick, raise the dead, preach the Kingdom" - Most Rev. Dr. Charles Agyinasare (Perez History, 01).

This happened in 1983 as he fasted and prayed. Agyinasare interpreted his encounter as a divine commission to start evangelistic campaigns. This conviction resulted in the launching of *Brother Charles Gospel Crusades* in 1985 and the starting of the church in 1987. This information presents Agyinasare as the God-chosen builder of the church.

4.3 Construction of 'the best church'

In the texts, each church is presented to the internet public as the best church. The only date mentioned in Action's history is in the following excerpt: *and since 1992 has met in the Prayer Cathedral near the Accra airport* (Action History, 05). Sarbah (2020) and others in the literature reveal that the church started in 1979. It seems that this date is not as significant to the history narrative as the date the church started meeting 'in the Prayer Cathedral near the Accra airport.' What is the significance of this information in the narrative? According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2006), as of the year 2006 the Prayer Cathedral stood as the biggest church building in Ghana. In addition, it is near the Accra airport, one of the most important areas in the city. The Prayer Cathedral, then, is a symbol of the church's status and importance in Ghana. This implies that to be a member of this church means one belongs to the 'best church' in Ghana.

In addition, Action Chapel is presented in its history narrative as *a place where Divinity meets Humanity* (Action History, 03). Note the order of arrangement that it is Divinity that meets Humanity and not the other way around. This syntax is important because it indicates God's willingness to bring his positive attributes to bear on human problems. Putting Humanity at the passive side of the action further stresses the ease with which people can receive favours from God. And the *place* where this happens is Action Chapel. This identity of the church makes it a likely choice of destination for those who need a social group to belong as well as those who need God's intervention in their problems.

The history narrative of ICGC uses carefully chosen verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to describe the achievements of the church to make it a progressive and excellent church. The achievements are arranged with dates to show how the church has developed very quickly within a short period of time. For example, the church started with **just about** *twenty members* in 1984 and **grew to hundred and eighty** (180) in 1986 (ICGC History, 01). Ten years later, *the membership rose to over 4,000* and planting *about 40 branches in Accra-Tema metropolis of Ghana alone* (ICGC History, 02). This information presents a very fast-growing church. The various venues of worship mentioned also reveal some of the odds against which the church has thrived. These *included classrooms, a private residence, a public hall, a science laboratory, a mechanical workshop and a cinema theatre* (ICGC History, 05). The list constructs the church as one that

started small but has grown to be one of the biggest or best in Ghana. The present status of the church including its Christ Temple East Complex, *premier private-owned University in Ghana* (ICGC History, 06), *largest non-governmental scholarship programme for students in pre-tertiary education in Ghana* (ICGC History, 07), and being ‘the single highest donor to the cardiothoracic centre at Ghana’s main teaching hospital’ (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2020, p.43) viewed against its humble background, makes it a magnificent achievement, indeed.

Perez Chapel International is also presented in the text as a big church. The following excerpt uses adjectives of number and adverbs to construct a big image for the church:

The Perez Chapel also has over 106 churches in the city of Accra, with its headquarters in Dzorwulu, Accra. The Church currently has almost 600 churches in 22 countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh (Perez History, 03).

With over 106 churches in the city of Accra, the presenters would like readers to imagine Perez Chapel as ubiquitous. This identity of a big church is further reinforced in the next excerpt:

The Perez Dome, a 14,000 seater auditorium regarded as the largest auditorium in Ghana and 13th largest auditorium in the world, is the leading branch of P.C.I. By the beginning of 2020 the Perez Dome had over 20,000 worshippers in two services (Perez History, 04).

With the largest auditorium in Ghana and 20,000 worshippers in two services, Perez Chapel is an attractively big church. This public image could appeal more to new members than a small church at nowhere with few members.

4.4 Construction of ‘the best man of God’

The history of Action Chapel introduces the pastor of the church to the outsider who is being invited to join. After identifying the pastor as Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the history has this about him: *who is the founder and father of the Charismatic Movement in Ghana* (Action History, 06). The title archbishop constructs the pastor as a ‘big man’ indeed. He is the second known Pentecostal archbishop in Africa after the late Benson Idahosa of Nigeria. Until recently this year, 2022, when Agyinasare was also consecrated archbishop, Duncan-Williams has been the only known Pentecostal archbishop in Ghana. To the best of our knowledge, a higher title has not yet been invented in the Pentecostal Charismatic world. That makes him a topmost ranking pastor in the Pentecostal Charismatic context. In addition to his title as archbishop, the excerpt also designates Duncan-Williams as ‘the founder and father of the Charismatic Movement in Ghana.’ This construction makes him a most experienced, knowledgeable, and anointed man of God available. It implies that to have such a person as one’s pastor makes one spiritually safe.

Even though there is information about Mensah Otabil on the ICGC website, the texts analysed did not mention him directly as either the founder or the pastor of the church. These texts seem to hide the identity of Pastor Mensah Otabil and focus on presenting a good image of the church to the public. This finding contrasts other findings (De Witte, 2011; Quenin, 2016) that ICGC’s Altar Media deliberately crafts a modern celebrity image of Otabil and presents him on electronic media as a supernaturally gifted man of God. One explanation of this contrast could be that ICGC chooses to use these website texts to construct the church as a formidable Christian organization without Otabil’s presence; while using other platforms for building Otabil’s public image.

Perez Chapel uses its history narrative to present its pastor, Agyinasare, to the internet public as truly called by God as the following excerpt reveals:

On the first occasion He said to me: “My boy Charles, I send you out as I sent Moses; go and I will put my words in your lips and reach the world for me.” On the second occasion which was the fourth day He said “My boy Charles, I give unto you power over demons and principalities, heal the sick, raise the dead, preach the Kingdom” - Most Rev. Dr. Charles Agyinasare (Perez History, 01).

The presentation of this information constructs Agyinasare as an authentic man of God and the church as God’s mission and not Agyinasare’s own enterprise. This is because it was God who sent him to do whatever he is doing. This identity is constructed in contrast to other men of God who may be false prophets or motivated to do church work for personal gain. In that case, Agyinasare could be trusted, and his miracles considered genuine, and his church safe for its members. Therefore, those individuals who do not want to be deceived by falsehood and fake miracle workers can then come to Agyinasare’s Perez Chapel.

4.5 A call to action

Apart from the construction of the above-mentioned identities as an element of constitutive rhetoric, the element of calling on the audience to act is also embedded in the document texts. The study found that the three churches presented their mission statements as a collective duty to be performed by members of the constituted community. For example, Action Chapel’s mission statement identifies the specific activities that must be performed to achieve the vision of the church. These include praying, preaching the word of God, and winning souls. Then, the mission statement again makes these activities a collective responsibility by referring to the mission as *OUR MISSION*. It is not only the work of the pastor, but every member of the church must be disciplined to do the same.

For Perez Chapel, the collective duty is the preaching of the gospel to win *our* communities for Christ. Each member of the collective is enjoined by the mission

statement to act by winning souls for Christ and for that matter the church, to live the Perez identity. The mission statement is, therefore, a call on all those who accept the collective identity of the church to take this action to reinforce the identity. For ICGC, the mission statement promises a better life for those who would come to the church. This promise is attractive to those who seek such fortunes and may want to go to the church to benefit from it. Therein lies constitutive rhetoric as it persuades its audience to act (White 1985). The mission statement is, therefore, presented as an advertisement of the church on the internet possibly to attract new memberships.

5. CONCLUSION

The study explored the use of constitutive rhetoric in the website texts of Action Chapel International, International Central Gospel Church, and Perez Chapel International. It was found that the texts used Burke's principle of *identification by an assumed we* (Quigley, 2009) and Charland's (1987) *ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric*, especially the creation of a collective subject, to construct community identity for the churches. Since an identity is created in contrast to another identity (White 1985), it appears that the churches used these strategies to present themselves as unique and better than other churches to attract and retain memberships. The above findings address our first research question: what rhetorical elements can be found in the construction of identity in the texts?

It was further found that churches used a number of linguistic features to construct identity in the texts. The first-person plural pronoun subject *we*, object *us*, and possessive *our* were used throughout the texts to create a collective or community identity and ownership identity. These were used to caption the document texts such as *our history, our beliefs, our vision, and our mission*. They were also used to start declarative sentences in presenting the churches as a collective. For example, *we believe..., we are one church..., we are a global family church...* etc. Duncan-William's Action Chapel used syntax in its history narrative to construct the church as a solution centre. The history narrative of Otobil's ICGC used carefully chosen verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to describe the achievements of the church to make it a progressive and excellent church. Agyinasare's Perez Chapel also used adverbs and adjectives in its history narrative to construct the church as a big one. These findings also addressed our second research question: what linguistic features are employed in the construction of identity in the text?

It can also be concluded that the selected churches present information about themselves on their websites as a way of advertisement to attract and maintain new memberships. Each church crafts its history narrative,

beliefs, vision, and mission statements to present itself and its pastor to the public as the best. This conclusion agrees with Quenin (2016) and De Witte (2011) who found that charismatic churches made themselves and their pastors popular through television and radio broadcasts. Through those media, the churches sold their products and services to attract new memberships. The present study also suggests that in addition to radio and television, the internet, especially the churches' websites, is a religious marketplace where the churches compete for new memberships through self-advertisement. The creation of 'the best church' identity presents inimitable religious capital about each church on the websites to make it the best option for religious consumers.

REFERENCES

- Ahdar, R. (2006). The idea of 'religious markets'. *International Journal of Law in Context*, 2(1), 49-65. <https://rolandoperez.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/the-idea-of-religious-markets-rex-ahdar.pdf>
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2005). *African charismatics: Current developments within independent indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Brill.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2006). Encountering Jesus in African Christianity: A Ghanaian evangelical/Pentecostal thought on faith, experience, and hope in Christ. *HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies*, 62(2), 363-377. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v62i2.368>
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2018). "Your miracle is on the way": Oral Roberts and mediated Pentecostalism in Africa. *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology*, 3(1), 5-26. <http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/vol3/iss1/2>
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2020). Spirit and empowerment: The African Initiated Church movement and development. In P. Öhlmann, W. Gräb, & M. L. Frost (Eds.), *African initiated Christianity and the decolonization of development: Sustainable development in Pentecostal and independent churches*(pp. 49-66). Routledge.
- Bitzer, L. F. (1968). The rhetorical situation. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1(1), 1-14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40236733>
- Charland, M. (1987). Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the People Québécois. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73(2), 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638709383799>
- Coleman, S. (2002). The faith movement: A global religious culture? *Culture and Religion*, 3(1), 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01438300208567181>
- Darko, J. D. (2017). *Negotiating religious identity through dance in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana: A case study of Immanuel Congregation, Madina*[Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Cape Coast.
- De Witte, M. (2002). Accra's charismatic screens. *Etnofoor*, 15(1/2), 222-228. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25758026>
- De Witte, M. (2003). Altar media's living word: Televised charismatic Christianity in Ghana. *Journal*

- of Religion in Africa*, 33(2), 172-202. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700660360703132>
- De Witte, M. (2011). Fans and followers: Marketing charisma, making religious celebrity in Ghana. In C. M. Cusack (Ed.), *Religion and celebrity* (Special issue). *Australian Religion Studies Review*, 24(3), 231-253.
- De Witte, M. (2012). Television and the gospel of entertainment in Ghana. *Exchange*, 41(2), 144-164. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157254312X633956>
- Dovlo, E. (2017). "The people of God": Scripture, race, and identity in African perspective. *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology*, 7(1), 1-28.
- Finke, R. (2003). *Spiritual capital: Definitions, applications, and new frontiers*[Paper presentation]. Spiritual Capital Planning Meeting, Cambridge, MA, United States. <https://www.metanexus.net/archive/spiritualcapitalresearchprogram/pdf/finke.pdf>
- Finke, R., Guest, A. M., & Stark, R. (1996). Mobilizing local religious markets: Religious pluralism in the empire state, 1855 to 1865. *American Sociological Review*, 61(2), 203-218. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096331>
- Flere, S. (2012). Religious capital and religious rewards: A study in the economics of religious life. *Panaeconomicus*, 59(1), 117-127. <https://doi.org/10.2298/PAN1201117F>
- Flowerdew, J., & Wang, S. H. (2016). Identity in academic discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 81-99. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719051400017X>
- Gifford, P. (2004). *Ghana's new Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalising African economy*. Indiana University Press.
- Golo, B. K. (2013). Africa's poverty and its neo-Pentecostal "liberators": An ecotheological assessment of Africa's prosperity gospels. *Pneuma*, 35(3), 366-384. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-12341351>
- Lauterbach, K. (2016). Religious entrepreneurs in Ghana. In U. Rösenthaller & D. Schulz (Eds.), *Cultural entrepreneurship in Africa* (pp. 19-36). Routledge.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. Guilford Press.
- McGee, M. C. (1975). In search of 'the people': A rhetorical alternative. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61(3), 235-249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637509383289>
- Meyer, B. (1998). The power of money: Politics, occult forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana. *African Studies Review*, 41(3), 15-37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/525351>
- Moje, E. B. (2011). Developing disciplinary discourses, literacies, and identities: What's knowledge got to do with it? In G. López-Bonilla (Ed.), *Discourses and identities in contexts of educational change*(pp. 49-74). Peter Lang.
- Ojo, M. (2010, May 12). *Of saints and sinners: Pentecostalism and the paradox of social transformation in modern Nigeria* [Inaugural lecture 227]. Obafemi Awolowo University.
- Omenyo, C. (2002). *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A study of the development of charismatic renewal in the mainline churches in Ghana*. Uitgeverij Boekencentrum.
- Opfinger, M. (2011). *Religious market theory vs. secularization: The role of religious diversity revisited*(Diskussionsbeitrag, No. 475). Leibniz Universität Hannover, Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/73119/1/dp-475.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*(4th ed.). SAGE.
- Quenin, S. O. (2016). *Advertising and religious publicity: A study of Action Chapel International and International Central Gospel Church*[Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Ghana.
- Quigley, B. L. (2009). "Identification" as a key term in Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory. *American Communication Journal*, 11(3), 1-5. <http://ac-journal.org/journal/2009/Spring/4Identification.pdf>
- Raich, M., Müller, J., & Abfalter, D. (2014). Hybrid analysis of textual data: Grounding managerial decisions on intertwined qualitative and quantitative analysis. *Management Decision*, 52(4), 737-754. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-03-2012-0227>
- Sarbah, E. K. (2020). *Migration of historic mission churches to Pentecostal churches in Ghana*[Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria]. UPSpace Institutional Repository. <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/77896>
- Stets, J. E., & Serpe, R. T. (2013). Identity theory. In J. DeLamater & A. Ward (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 31-60). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6772-0_2
- White, J. B. (1985). *Heracles' bow: Essays on the rhetoric and poetics of the law*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Yeung, T. (2011). The characteristics of William Seymour's sermons: A reflection on Pentecostal ethos. *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 14(1), 57-73.
- Zachry, M. (2009). Rhetorical analysis. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini (Ed.), *The handbook of business discourse* (pp. 68-79). Edinburgh University Press.