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VOCALISING FAITH AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN GOSPEL MARKETING TEXT: A PRAGMA-DISCURSIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STICKERS IN NIGERIA

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Article Info	Abstract
Corresponding author: K. A. Adedeji kadedeji@unilag.edu.ng **Keywords:** Gospel advertisement, Beliefs, Stickers, Identity branding	This study examines how Christian religious stickers are used to perform a range of communicative and socio-religious functions in Nigeria. Situated within the framework of Transcendental Discourse Analysis (TDA) (Opeibi, 2018), the study views language use in religious domain as a social enterprise creatively constructed to execute socio-religious objectives. The theoretical framework utilises principles from semiotics and pragmatics [multimodal discursive approach- O'Halloran (2011)] based on the inter-mix of text and images for meaning negotiation. The data set used for analysis was extracted from a self-collected corpus (Transcendental Christian Religious Corpus-TCRC), consisting of end-users Christian religious stickers and messages elicited from public and private spaces (e.g. doors of living/bedrooms, private vehicles, Bible covers, handbags, laptops of some residents) in South West Nigeria. Using content analysis based on approaches in discourse analysis, semiotics and pragmatics, we demonstrate how the producers of the stickers apply a range of communicative strategies to convey socio-discursive meaning and pragmatic functions. The findings show increase usage and proliferation of these religious marketing strategy for identity construction, denominational branding, membership recruitment, faith-professing and confidence-building rhetoric as well as general gospel advertisement. It thus highlights the linguistic, pragmatic and socio-discursive significance of this new trend of professing and confessing beliefs and faith among modern Pentecostal Christians in Nigeria.

Introduction: The Nigeria Socio-Religious Context

With the advent of transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and migration, Christian religion spread and became implanted within the socio-political and religious space in Africa. The emergence of Christianity eventually became the object of regular conflicts between the traditional and western cultures during and after colonialism. Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958) makes these cultural tensions and contentions its central theme.

Religion defines and influences the behaviour, social relationships, and private decisions of most people in Nigeria. An average African is deeply religious and passionately committed to the faith to which such subscribes. This sentiment might have informed some of the aggressive practices noticed among most adherents of the Christian faith who privately and publicly profess their faith through different outlets. Faith is used in two senses here. One, it refers to the expression of confidence and hope in the power of a Supreme Being(God) to intervene in human affairs and to perform supernatural acts and gracious benevolence that are beyond the realm and power in the natural world. The second sense is conveyed in the expression of religious ideological persuasion, also called, 'the tenets of faith' or the 'body of truth' based on interpretations of the requirements from the Bible, to which different Christian groups subscribe.

Since the era of Missionary activities and colonialism in Nigeria, Christianity has enjoyed a steady growth and spread across the country especially in the Southern part. This development has resulted in the establishment of several Churches. Within the space of five decades, Nigeria has experienced more than 100% growth in Christianity.

Three major religions are practised in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religions. However, statistics shows that as at 2014, Christianity is the largest religion in Nigeria with about 50.5% of the population professing Christian faith. (19.9% Protestantism, 12.3% Churches of Christ, 10.1% Anglicanism and 8.2% Catholicism). An 18 December 2012 report on religion and public life by the Pew Research Center stated that in 2010, 49.3 percent of Nigeria's population was Christian, 48.8 percent was Muslim, and 1.9 percent were followers of indigenous and other religions, or unaffiliated.

Most of the churches in Nigeria may be divided along three major denominational/doctrinal persuasions: (i) Orthodox, (ii) Evangelical, and (iii) Pentecostal. It is noteworthy that both (ii) and (iii) have particularly enjoyed some significant growth in the last couple of decades.

Since the 1970s, for instance when Pentecostalism began grow, there has been more emphasis on aggressive propagation of the Christian faith among adherents. This has led to astronomical growth in Pentecostalism between 1990s and 2000s. Members are usually challenged and encouraged by their leaders to use every opportunity and outlet to advertise or popularise their faith and win others (called 'converts') to their Lord Jesus Christ whom they believe died to save humanity from damnation. This is referred as 'evangelism', a religious obligation commanded by the founder of modern Christian faith (Jesus Christ). It is this sense of compulsory mandate given by Jesus that undergird the aggressive approach adopted by the evangelicals and Pentecostals to utilise different marketing strategies to spread the message of the gospel. The use of stickers thus constitutes one of many ways that the Pentecostal Christians use to externalise and create a special identity for themselves and their brand of faith in God.

To illustrate the intersecting socio-discursive dimension in church development in Nigeria, names and identities of some churches demonstrate their religious learnings and philosophies. The cultural belief in the influence of mystic powers on events and lives in the physical world especially, in dealing with the nagging and pervasive issues of poverty, diseases, illiteracy among other social and psychosomatic and physiological problems have made many average Nigerians to embrace the teachings and style of worship of the new generation of churches.

An online platform listed some curious names of churches in Nigeria that reflect the existing socio-cultural context where these churches operate. The emphasis on prayers to solve these demonic or satanic-inspired problems is obvious in the names as shown below.

(i) Guided Missiles Church (ii) Jesus In The Now Global Ministry (iii) Healing Has Begun Ministry (iv) The True Assemblies of God Church (vii) Jehovah Sharp Sharp (Festac) (viii) Hurricane Miracle Ministry (ix) Healing Tsunami Ministry (x) Satan in Trouble Ministry (xi) Fire for Fire (xxi) "Jesus no get muscle but he get power" ministry. http://www.234pulse.com/2015/01/christianity-is-the-largest-religion-in-nigeria-2014-statistics/

The discourse strategy deployed in the copies thus draws on resources from the social context of the consumers of the religious products. Primarily, meaning is constructed contextually in the stickers and interpreted 'globally' among the people that share the same [sub-] group religious cultures and worldviews. By relating the products on offer to their experiences and circumstances, these have become the tool used to persuade them.

Literature Review: The Stickers as Discourse

Fundamental approaches in discourse analysis explore the functionality of language in society. Most perspectives on discourse analysis provide opportunities for the [re]interpretation and application of the concept to suit emerging views and notions as well as cultural contexts that accommodate the basic tenets of the discipline. Such elasticity of theoretical conceptualisations of discourse studies has led to the development of political discourse, literary discourse, business discourse, academic discourse among several other genres and sub-genres. The unifying theoretical basis in all of these various perspectives remains language use to perform a broad spectrum of personal and social functions.

Brown and Yule (1983:1) and Schiffrin (1994) respectively see discourse as "a piece of language in use"; and "a system (a socially and culturally-organised way of speaking) through which particular functions are realised. And that discourse analysis views 'language as an activity embedded in social interactions which are a process whereby one person has an effect on another".

Elsewhere, it has been argued that:

The functional perspective is very central and well projected in the study of discourse, since it is agreed that discourse analysis revolves round the functional use of language. The general assumption is that language has communicative meaning and functions which influence the internal organisations of the linguistic system. In fact, discourse analysis as an investigative paradigm is said to begin with the outer frame of situational contexts and works inwards to locate the verbal feature that correlates with specific communicative settings (Opeibi, 2004;34).

Every social situation and cultural context thus produces discourse which encodes the meaning and intention of the participants in the events, and which demonstrate communication features that may be described and analysed using pre-determined and existing paradigms.

Christian religious activities have taken on both linguistic and social relevance that make them constitutive of discursive practice. The advent of Pentecostalism has brought a lot of vitality and energetic speech activities in expressing religious sentiments and beliefs being propagated by a new breed of worshippers. As some scholars (e.g. Alonson and Hyde 2002; George and Yule 1983; Fasold 1990) have observed, discourse analysis is a practical discipline which bases its theoretical framework on the findings obtained from the analysis of authentic pieces of discourse. It is concerned with language in use which requires an enormous apparatus of analytical tools to tackle all aspects of human communicative behaviour such as purposes, intentions and goals, mechanisms of conceptualisation and presentation of ideas, connectivity, inferential processes, presuppositions and assumptions, speech realisation, world knowledge … (Fasold, ibid p.9). Marked discursive practices characterise communicative behaviour within the context of the religious events which exhibit some socio-pragmatic properties.

Practitioners of this brand of Christianity in Nigeria extol the capability and virtues of God, the Supreme Being, the object of their worship and veneration as having the capacity to solve all their socio-economic, personal and national problems. That strong belief motivates them to verbalise their convictions and confessions in different forms of quotations, slogans, confession of faith and texts as illustrated on the stickers.

The relevance of Dijk's (1993) notion of discourse properly situates both the theoretical and methodological features in the Christian stickers used in this work. Dijk considers discourse as a communicative event including conversational interaction, written text as well as associated gestures, images and any other semiotic resources. The discourse of the stickers as conceived here may be described as a socio-discursive practice that strives towards performing some predetermined socio-religious functions. It aligns with Fairclough's (1992a:64) submission on discourse as "…a social practice which is reflected in human verbal and non-verbal signifying system which embraces a range of human activities."

Transcendental discourse therefore may be described as the exploration of language use in religious, spiritual, or mystic literature that focuses on subjects of the relationship between man and a Supreme Being or Mystic Object beyond the realm of social materiality and socio-physical space. In Opeibi (2018:19):

Transcendental discourse is viewed as that language use which originates from the Transcendent, accessible to man which may be deployed to achieve a higher purpose in the material world. In Kantian philosophy, Kant sees transcendental as 'presupposed in and necessary to experience it, a priori.' (Kant, [1724-1806], https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-transcendental/). His philosophical proposition on transcendental argument is woven around metaphysics which itself is difficult for human mind to understand and interpret. Kant argues that God is transcendence in himself. That the only way he can manifest himself is through human mind because of the structure of the human mind. He argues that God as transcendent Being thought out the universe out and uttered it to be. So one can safely argue that God is the source of transcendental discourse. This perspective agrees with the position of a number of discourse analysts and language philosophers that discourse originated from God.

This discursive approach goes beyond mere description of the study as a religious discourse but extends to every form of discursive enterprise that investigates linguistic and non-linguistic communicative interactions between human and spiritual or mystic beings with the aim of influencing human behaviour, activities, and relationships in the material world. The argument that man is both a social and spiritual being has been well debated over the years. An average human beings uses language facilities to operate within these two spaces.

The analysis of these various communicative behaviours (i.e. social vs spiritual/mystical) using any of the existing theoretical constructs such as pragmatics, speech act theory, systemic functional theory, and semiotics among others will considered as falling within the scope of transcendental discourse analysis (TDA).

Within the Nigerian socio-religious context very limited attention has been paid to the study of Christian religious stickers. However, a number of researchers in Nigeria such as Acheoah & Abdulraheem (2015), Esimaje (2012), Onoja (2010) and Adedun & Mekiliuwa (2010) have investigated discourse of sermons from the paradigms of lexico-syntactic features, stylistics and pragmatics. They focus more on the analysis of lexico-semantic and stylistic features of language in religious sermons. Academic and ecclesiastical literature on the description and analysis of Christian stickers as important socio-discursive enterprise is very scarce. The present study thus arose from this background to fill the critical gap by providing a systematic and integrative approach to the analysis of the stickers.

Socio-Discursive Pragmatics

Pragmatics is usually conceived and described with its multifunctional potential to see verbal or written communication as an intentional act performed within a given socio-cultural space towards achieving some socio-communicative goal. The combination of socio-cultural indices and the goal-driven preoccupations of language within a given context underpin language behaviour of every average language user. Such communication behaviour recognises the properties of the socio-cultural context as an integrative component of the interpretive facility. Opeibi (2006, p. 603) sees pragmatics as a case where '…language responds to and reflects the context in which it is produced.

The socio-political, cultural, cognitive and physical contexts, the surrounding environments more often than not dictate the messages and style of written works of art".

The adoption and construal of pragma-semiotic model and its analytic validity stems from the methodological duality evinced by this approach. The cognitive-textual-societal interface that the model provides helps to extrapolate the communicative intentions and the beliefs that underline the religious messages contained in the data.

In addition, it is believed that the application of the analytical framework in discussing these religious advertising texts provides a conceptual window through which intentions, beliefs and desires in religious communication are realised through text and images.

Since different cultures have different ways of organizing and structuring discourse, religious texts generally exhibit some unique features that require an understanding of the context to interpret the meaning. Albrecht Neubert (1984) stresses the need to go beyond the sentence and to consider macrostructural patterns in texts and what he calls more generally the `communicative matrix' of language communities (p. 146). Scholars in pragmatics have identified concepts that often mark out the scope of discussions in studies within this field to include communication intention, entailment, inference, and presupposition.

Ordonez's (1997) pragmatic model helps to explain how social context influences the construction and interpretation of advert messages.

Aside the use of linguistic elements to craft and communicate intentions, meanings are also communicated through signs and symbols as the study reveals later. As pointed out earlier, semiotic devices in the contents of the stickers provide additional tools to unpack the meaning of the messages by relating the image to the context and mapping these to the context of the discourse.

Theoretical Framework: Semio-pragmatic Approach

Scholars within the fields of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics agree that discursive practice in any social context draws on textual and contextual resources to communicate meaning. In advertising discourse genre, additional non-linguistic resources are drawn upon by discourse producers to increase the impact of the messages on the audience. These non-linguistic resources may include images, illustrations, pictures, graphology, colour, logo, among other socio-semiotic cues that encode shared meanings within the context of the text. Persuading people and influencing them to subscribe to the view of the communicator remain the overarching goal of utilising these resources. Scholars such as Lemke, O'Hallaran, van have described them as multimodal resources. The earlier perspectives of Peirce, and other scholars that describe them as semiotic properties underpin the theoretical construct adopted in this study.

As far back as 1953, Barthe had argued that almost anything in our society can be a meaningful sign in our community even if they are ideologically coded. Halliday (1978) agree that semiotics is the study of "meaning" in its most general sense. Halliday then sees semiotics not only as the study of signs but as the study of sign-systems. Wales 1989 describes semiotics as the "general study of signs" while Cuddon (1991) shares the same opinion by redefining Peirce's (1933) tripartite categorisation of semiotics. Cuddon's classification as follows: (i) The iconic - a sign which resembles its referent, as in red light for stop on roads. (ii)The indexical - when the sign is associated with the referent, for instance, smoke is associated with fire. And (iii) The symbolic - when the sign and referent have an arbitrary relationship.

Wales (1989, p.416) puts this perspective in more specific terms when he argues that "semiotics also takes as much interest in the messages of photography, myth, advertising and television as the writer's discourse of literature and concerned equally with how 'meaning' is produced as with what it may be".

The data used in this study contains pictures, illustrations, symbols and signs which play significant roles in communicating the messages and persuading readers to act in certain ways. Multiplicity of images and meanings often characterize these stickers. Beyond the conventional semiotic cues, many of the stickers carry an admixture of picture, colour, symbols and signs and written messages to inform, persuade, warn and transmit Christian-based religious ideologies and body of beliefs to the people. In the course of the study there a number of non-linguistic items that carry meanings that are interpretable and significantly meaningful to members of the community and in many other circumstances to the general public given the shared socio-cultural context.

Methodology

With millions of adherents spread across the southern part of Nigeria, religious materials are produced on a weekly or monthly basis. In fact, many of the mega Pentecostal organisations own their printing press that produce their materials on a regular basis. These include Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries. They all have their headquarters in South-west, Nigeria. Other smaller religious outfits outsource their printing jobs to professional printers.

The procedures for collecting the data involved collecting printed stickers bought by members of these churches or non-members who share the philosophies or ideologies of these churches and believe in the factuality and influence of the messages on the stickers. Over fifty stickers were collected. The guiding sampling principle was to purposively select stickers that convey different messages on major tents or articles of faith propagated by these modern churches. The categories include: faith, holiness, healing, deliverance, protection from evil, and success in life.

The data is qualitatively analysed using analytical procedures rooted in discourse analysis with resources from pragmatics and semiotics. This approach helps to demonstrate how Christian religious stickers are conceived as belief-propagation and religious-advertising tool. Some of the questions addressed are: What are the discursive-semiotic features of the stickers? How does the social context impact the conceptualisation and construction of the text? In what way does pragmatic implication influence the interpretation of the text?

The study also adopted a survey method to validate the findings of the study. This involved the principal investigator and four research students, and two former students who are members of two popular Pentecostal churches in Lagos, Nigeria.

The summary of the survey shows that over 75% of those who use stickers belong to Pentecostal/evangelical churches while about 22% belong to Orthodox Churches. Many of the evangelical groups adopt a more radical approach by pasting the stickers on every conceivable and conspicuous places especially handbags, Bibles, doorposts, laptops etc. On the other hand, members of Orthodox churches concentrate more on pasting the stickers on their cars and doorposts/or doors of their living/bedrooms.

Discussion and Analysis

Figure 1: NCRS 1: Sticker posted on the rear windscreen of a private vehicle. (produced by "GoodMorning Christian Ministries")

Figure 2: NCRS 2- Sticker posted on the rear panel of a vehicle(produced by/for Deeper Christian Life Ministry)

Figure 3: NCRS 3: Two stickers posted on the rear windscreen of a private vehicle. (Produced by The Mantle Prayer Ministry)
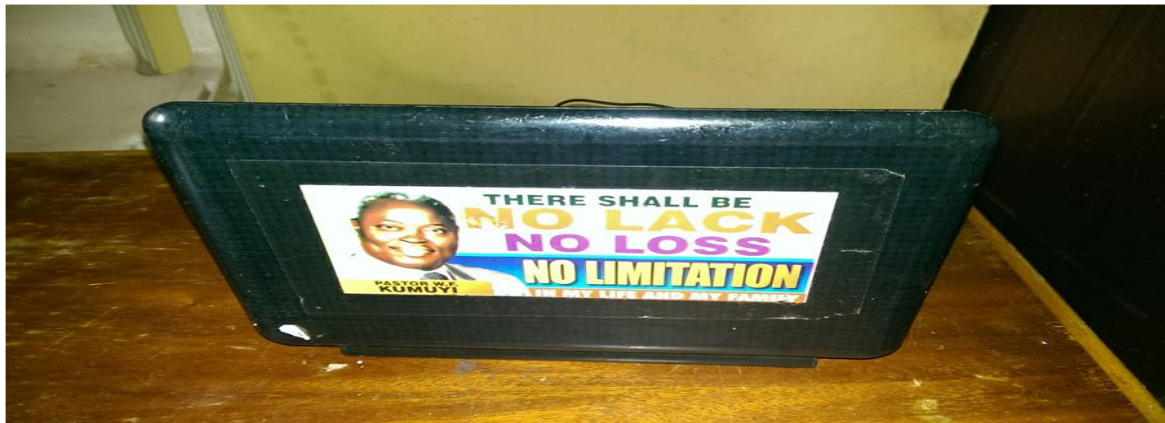

Figure 4: NCRS 4: Sticker posted on the rear on back cover of a laptop (Produced by Independent vendor supposedly for Deeper Life)

Figure 5: NCRS 5 & 6: Stickers posted on the door of bedroom (produced by independent vendor for Deeper Christian Life Ministry)

Figure 6: NCRS 7 & 8 : Stickers posted on the bookshelf inside a bedroom(produced by The Mantle Ministry, and Independent vendor respectively)

Figure 7: NCRS 9- Sticker posted on the rear panel of a bookshelf (Produced by independent vendor for Deeper Christian Life Ministry)

Figure 8: NCRS 10- Sticker posted on the rear panel of a bookshelf (produced by independent vendor for Deeper Christian Life Ministry)

Figure 8: NCRS 11- Sticker posted on the rear panel of a vehicle (produced by/for Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministries)

Figure 9: NCRS 12- Sticker posted on the rear panel of a vehicle (produced by/for Anglican Communion Church)

Figure 10: NCRS 13- Sticker posted on the front windscreen of a car(Produced by Anglican Church in Remo, Ogun State)
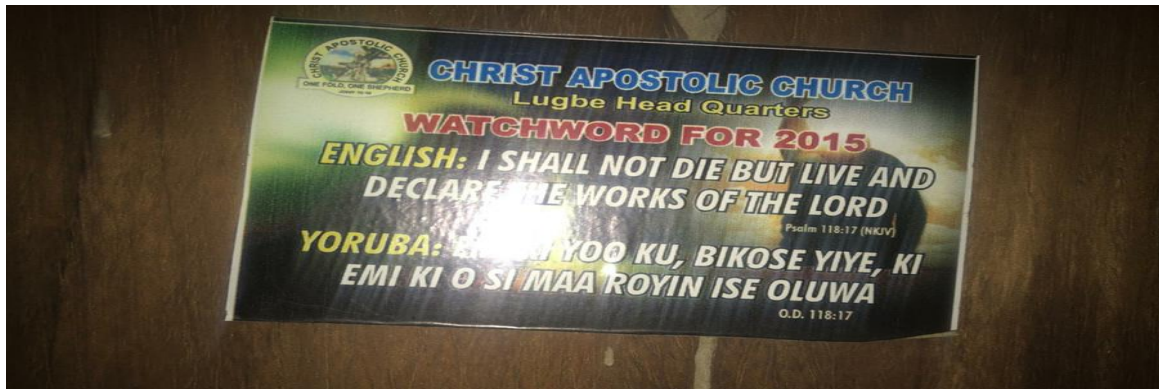
Figure 11: NCRS 14: Sticker posted on a wooden wall (Produced by Christ Apostolic Church)
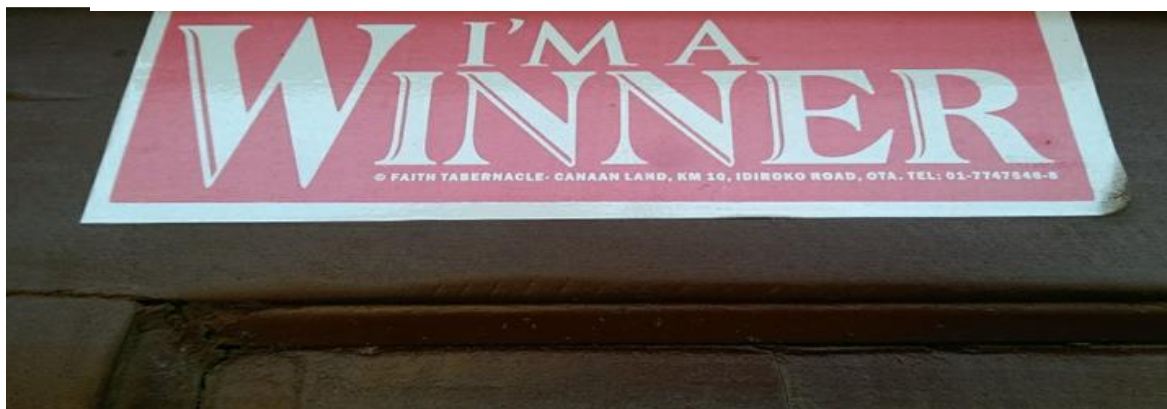

Figure 11: NCRS 15- Sticker posted on the rear windscreen of a vehicle

A closer examination of the religious stickers reveals a range of possible meanings that reflect the context of situation of each of the texts. Both images and text when taken together construct the ideological position and perception of the worshippers as well as how they interpret events as coloured by their belief and doctrinal convictions.

It is noteworthy that some of our respondents provided reasons for using the stickers on their cars, apartments, offices and laptops etc. The reasons given include, to (i) personally appropriate the results of the message, (ii) express their belief in what they profess (iii) identify with the particular church or pastor that generate the quotation, (iv) publicise the expressions to make others benefit from the expected blessing in believing in the statement (v) project the image of the source in a more positive light

The stickers discussed below are coded, Nigeria Christian Religious Sticker (NCRS). The sections use the approach of content analysis to describe and discuss the stickers based on principles drawn from semiotics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. The overarching goal is to portray the stickers as vehicles for identity construction, denominational labelling, membership recruitment drive/evangelism/proselyting, profession of radical faith among other socio-pragmatic and discursive meanings.

Christian Stickers as Gospel Marketing Strategy: Persuasion Through Iconicity

The iconic dimension in some of the images and symbols in the stickers exhibits similar to product advertisements. For example, the manipulation and use of graphology, illustrations, symbols provide visual communicative appeal complement the written mode in the text. The interplay of symbols and text in the sticker thus provides the persuasive message communicated through the sticker.

From a close study of the data, we find that sometimes the line is blurred between stickers that are used to portray identity, market the group identity and those that profess faith. The demarcating line is also thin among stickers that warns and the ones that exhorts Christians to be of good behaviour, uphold the ethics and core values of their faith or is usually a cross-boundary advocacy strategy.

The analysis attempts to uncover the pragma-discursive devices used to produce the range of meanings expressed in the text. From the physical architecture of the texts to the choice of lexico-grammatical items deployed in the stickers, we find a creative combination of linguistic and non-linguistic items for meaning negotiation. The texts

deftly combine visual images as with other semiotic elements to elicit the intended socio-pragmatic meaning. These are carefully constructed not only to advertise the 'product' brands but also to project the ideological beliefs of the promoters.

(a) Graphology as Socio-Discursive Strategy

The style of presentation of the messages on the stickers rely largely on the use of graphology as attention-getters and to foreground important issues. Wales (1990, 213) says graphology "can refer to the writing system of a language, as manifested in handwriting and typography; and to the other related features such as: size of print and capitalization in newspapers and advertising lay-out; different typefaces and sizes….".

In some of the texts, the use of graphological device can elicit or convey more meaning beyond the isolated linguistic elements that make up the text. Sometimes the user of this device makes phonological, morphological lexical, syntactic, and semantic features interact to produce the intended effect on the audience (Opeibi 2004, 312). All the fourteen stickers used for analysis demonstrate the use of graphology for stylistic, discursive and pragmatic effect. A few of them are discussed below.

NCR 1: "God You're Good to Me and my Family. Ps 145:9. Good Morning Jesus Family"

NCRS 2: "There Shall be No Lack, No Loss, No Limitation in My Life and Family"

NCRS 3: 2015: "My Year of Divine Speed. The Mantle Prayer Ministry (OKE ISINMI). Ewu Oliwo, Off Shagamu/Benin Express Road Behind Forte Oil Filling Station, Sagamu, Ogun State. Email: okeisinmi2012@themantleminstry.org. Website:www.themantleministry.org"

NCRS 10: Faith in Christ Assembly. 2015- My Year of Testimonies. Am Blessed TO BE IN THE FAMILY OF F.I.C.A. Name & Picture of Overseer, Phone numbers, Email and Physical Location]

NCRS 11: I bear the Mark of CHRIST. LET NO MAN TROUBLE MAN

(Elliptic directive statement as a subtle marketing strategy designed to provide vital information on where and how to visit the church/attend its programmes as it is common in product advertisement). The ultimate aim of the advertiser is not only to create a desire for the product but to guide the consumer on a step-by-step information in purchasing the product.

In NCRS 1 uses a combination of upper and lower cases in different fonts and colours. "GOD" is crafted in upper case letters as headline to foreground the uniqueness of the Supreme Being and His centrality in the Christian faith and in the religious organization. The body contains three lines couched in different font and graphic appearance. "YOU'RE GOOD TO ME" is in bold upper-case letters while "AND" that serves as the link between the individual and collective is written in different font and colour. "My Family" is written in bold but in sentence case letters with yellow. The abbreviated Bible passage, "PS. 145:9" is written in white over a black background.

It is difficult to determine the motive for choice of colours used in the stickers. However, it is obvious that some represent the colour codes of the religious organisations while at other determines they are combined to provide the necessary visual appeal and attraction that will make the written texts to stand out from the background or sometimes for artistic/aesthetic effects. The poor quality of some of the graphics and colour notwithstanding, the graphological devices make the copies to ossify towards accomplishing the primary objective of communicating the messages of invitation, information, awareness creation, programmes advertisement, evangelising or proselyting, faith building and covert membership recruitment

In another copy, NCRS 5, it opens with a headline "Sin Sinks Sinners" written in bold sentence case letter with red colour and shaded white colour. This is followed with "into" arranged sideway, written in white colour. "Last Warning" is couched in sentence case letters against a background of yellow. The body copy has "HELL" written in red in bold caps and bigger font shaded with white edges. "You are warned" is written in lower case letters and embossed in yellow. "Don't say you are not told" is written in yellow colour and arranged under the word, 'Hell'. The coda has "ACCEPT JESUS NOW" with an imperative tone deliberately foregrounded at the end of the message. It is written in upper case letters with different font to make it stand out as the most important message the author wishes to convey. The white colour and foregrounding at end of the message draws special attention to itself, and suggest an offer of hope against the backdrop of the negative tone in the previous expressions in the text. At the left side of the sticker has the image of an individual supposedly in agony in hell. The visual reinforcement is designed to graphologically complement the written texts to enhance memorability.

Another interesting example is found in NRCS 12 where a combination of different font sizes and physical structure and arrangement of the words provides a striking attraction of people's attention to the message. The multilingual context of the socio-religious ecology is expressed in the choice of Yoruba and English within the copy. It begins with Yoruba expressions and concludes in English. The example of codeswitching (CS) motivated by sociolinguistic and pragmatic considerations as speech accommodation strategy (Giles & Smith 1979) and deconstruction of meaning of the English version in a predominantly Yoruba-speaking community. It opens with a headline: "ODUN 2015" [YEAR 2015], followed by body copy with the expression: "Odun Imupadabo Mi LATOKE

WA [My year of Restoration/Recovery from Above] and a relevant Bible passage, "Awon Oba Keji 8:6" [2 Kings 6:5] . Here the Ministry attempts to communicate the annual theme for 2015 in order to offer hope and assurance of God's power restore all that they lost in the previous years. Notice the deliberate use of upper case in bold font in "LATOKE WA" as a way to point the attention of every one to heaven or God where Christian adherents believe they can always receive help through prayers. The foregrounding strategy attracts attention and forces the import of the message on the readers.

The logo of the church placed on the right hand of the advert copy projects identity branding with an underlying message of invitation and covert proselyting.

(b) Colour Combination for Visual Appeal

Kress and Leeuwen (2002,348) argue that the use colour in visual communication allows us to realize 'colour acts' as language allows us to realize speech acts. An iconic element in colour can suggest a range of meaning based on the context of use. Colours are said to be determined by several factors largely based on the meaning and impact the user wishes to achieve. Kress and Leeuwen further argue that "the meaning of colour rests on association, and any colour can clearly be associated with different sources or carriers of that colour."

The affordances in the use of colour rely on socio-cultural context. The associative value plays out more frequently in the construction and interpretation of the colours in the data.

In the copies, the adverts also demonstrate creative use of colour to reinforce the graphic style adopted. At some instance, different colours are employed in crafting different lines or words in the copies. The excerpts below demonstrate different combinations of colours in the two of the copies.

In NRCS 1, 'GOD' and 'My Family' are written in yellow while, "You're Good to Me", "Ps 145:9", and "GoodMorning Jesus Family" are couched in white colour. 'AND' is the only word written in red but shaded at the edge with white colour. In ecclesiastical economy, white usually stands for purity, divinity, holiness. Surprisingly, 'God' is written in yellow.

(ii) NCRS 14: CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH. Lugbe Head Quarters. WATCHWORD FOR 2015. ENGLISH: I SHALL NOT DIE BUT LIVE AND DECLARE THE WORKS OF THE LORD (Psalm 118:17(NKJV)

YORUBA: EMI KI YOO KU, BIKOSE YIYE, KI EMI KI O SI MAA ROYIN ISE OLUWA(O.D. 118:17)

NCRS 14 makes use of five different colours: golden yellow, black, red, blue, and white, to project the message and the advert. In constructing its identity, the headline is written in blue, and sub-headline in yellow. Watchword is written in red while the two versions of the watchword are written in white colour.

One may safely argue that there is an indiscriminate use of these colours in NCRS 1, suggesting a driving concern to project the messages only without being deliberate in communicating any deeper stylistic or pragmatic undertone. The background colours are creatively chosen to push up the visual attraction in the expressions. It has purple, yellow, black and red in the background with words appearing in colours that contrast the one in the background of each. The sticker does represent a typical advert copy where potential consumers are able to read the short, crisp and pungent message in one glance due to the effect of graphology.

In some of the copies, it is possible to argue semiotically and discursively that the use of colour is indicative of discourses around the following issues: identity construction(blue and white), depiction of royalty ascribed to deity(purple), hope, positive mind-set about life and confession of faith (green, yellow, purple), confidence and assurance(green and blue), warning and judgement(red, black, orange yellow), purity and holiness(white), blood of Jesus Christ (red). It is observed that there appears to be no consistent uniform pattern of colour combination used by the different sponsors of the religious advert copies. The riotous combination of some of the colours indicate that a few of the groups seem to be more concerned about foregrounding the written text through the combination of different colour modes rather than on meaning construal through the colours. However, many of them stick to their house (brand) colours in the copies.

(c) Images and Illustrations as Semiotic Modes

A combination of graphological devices and visual appeal enhances the capacity of some of the stickers to communicate compelling messages to the people. The use of pictures, photographs and illustrations as brand representation and message re-inforcement strategy. The church logo, colour and symbols function to highlight the ideological position of the parties.

In the copy Sin, Sinks Sinners to Heel, the presence of an image of an individual drowned in a pit full of fire and stretching up the hand with a cry of anguish is meant to complement the written text. The illustrations and pictures are used to escalate the message of warning (e.g. Sin Sinks Sinners to HELL), to provide assurance of the prophetic message from a man of God (e.g. NO LACK, NO LOSS, NO LIMITATION) where the real picture of the Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, the General Superintendent of the Deeper Christian Life Ministry is embossed on the copy. It is interesting to note that the choice of his picture where laughs heartily is meant to communicate hope, confidence and assurance of a better year/life for whoever uses that sticker.

Lexico-Sematic Choices as Socio-Pragmatics

Persuasive mechanism in advertisements is couched in language deliberately skewed towards appealing to the logical, emotional and physical circumstances of the consumers. The advert copies demonstrate creative selection of words and expressions that are designed to force attention on the message and to communicate the intentions of the producers.

Many of the messages on the stickers address the social and spiritual health of the adherents. This all indicate the central place that religion occupies in the lives of a lot of the citizens and adherents. The research report of Meyer (2013) on the African Pentecostal Aesthetics comes into very sharp focus in the proliferation of the stickers on cars, bags and other platforms.

(a) Identity and Branding [re-]construction

Straddling between individual and the collective, some of the messages on the stickers, try to carve special identity of the user and the group he or she represents. The philosophical and religious perspective represented is ventilated through the image the stickers are made to project. Both the verbal and the visual symbolic systems combine to externalise the internal and subtle identity

The stickers are also used as branding and connecting strategies with the people within and outside the sub-Christian community. Brand recognition and brand marketing strategies coupled with faith profession are played up more prominently in many of the stickers. In some of the stickers, we find a clear demonstration of identity construction and branding strategies. Examples from the available corpus include the following:

(i) "I'm a winner" (ii) 'Oke Isinmi' (v) "No Lack, No Loss, No Limitation" (iv) "Anglican Family" (vi) "Jesus Only is Our Message"(Deeper Life Members). At other instances, they merely display the stickers with the names and logos of their churches/denominations (sub-groups) on their vehicles, bags, laptops, offices, market stalls, business premises, property and homes

The study reveals that the basic motivation for the display of these stickers is to [re]-construct their identities as Christians, as members of the denomination to which they belong and to demonstrate that that they are believers in the messages crafted on the stickers. Religious and denominational affiliations as well as doctrinal leanings of the carriers come forth forcefully in the stickers. The socio-religious significance of the branding is encoded in the possibility that the stickers will attract sympathy, solidarity and support from other members of the church at public events, when they are in need of assistance or even in traffic accidents. It may thus be described as faith-professing and identity-accommodation strategy.

(b) Presupposition as Socio-Semantic Configuration

Presupposition generally refers to assumptions that language users implicitly make to create necessary signals for the correct interpretation of an utterance. It seeks to establish the relationship between the utterance and the context in which it is used or the configuration of the prior shared knowledge between the producer and the interpreter of the discourse. The religious stickers rely on presupposition in crafting the short, crisp phrases and clauses in the advert copies. The context in which the sentence is uttered, might be the pragmatic presupposition. Finch (2000, 175) contends that in any communication there is a certain amount of presumed knowledge, independent of purely semantic knowledge. The degree of this assumed knowledge is sensitive to contextual features (cited in El-samar and Al-azwy, n.d.).

In the following copy, the full implication of the message is located within the contextual framework and mutually-shared knowledge of the social circumstances that circumscribed the message.

I Bear the Mark of Christ

A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

Basically, religious messages and discursive practices usually reflect and respond to some socio-cultural variables and socio-linguistic dynamics especially when viewed from the prisms of pragmatics. It is possible to see how social meanings are communicated beyond the textual level. The copies reveal that they draw on an array of socio-cognitive and cultural properties to communicate their messages. They are semiotically and discursively constructed to achieve socio-pragmatic meanings that can be fully understood and interpreted by, first, members of that community, and second, by members of the same larger society. The functions that these stickers are meant to perform range from self-representation, identity [re-] construction, crowdsourcing/evangelisation, persuading and mobilising support, marketing religious messages and building an inclusive community. A few examples are illustrated in the table below.

S/No	Type	Platform	Category of Sticker	Pragmatic Meaning/ Message/Goal

1	No Lack, No Loss, No Limitation	Doors	Faith-building/Faith Profession/Prophetic Belief	A prophetic message that addresses perennial problem of poverty. Provides socio-psychological relief
2	2015: My Year of Divine Speed	Bags, Cars, Church Pulpits, Vehicles	Socio-economic Solutions through Supernatural Promotions	It communicates a message of divine support and supernatural promotions for members and supporters
3	I am a Winner	Doors	Identity Construction/projection Proselyting	Identifies the user as a member of the Living Faith(a.k.a. Winners), one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Nigeria
4	Jesus Only is Our Message	Vehicles,	Doctrinal Positioning/Persuasion/ Philosophical Projection	Projects Jesus Christ as the foundation, focus and fullness of the messages being propagated by the Deeper Christian Life Ministry, another influential Pentecostal church in Nigeria
5	Odun 2015: Odun Imupadabo Mi Latoke Wa(2015: My Year of Recovery from Above)	Vehicles	Physiological Remedies	Provides members with assurances of God's power to make them recover their losses in the previous years.
6.	I Bear the Mark of Christ	Vehicles, Bible/Bags Covers	Spiritual Warfare/ Confidence Building	A message of warning to perceived enemies at the person or property is being protected by Jesus Christ and cannot be harmed or must not be fought against.
7	2016: My Year of Next Level	Vehicles, Pulpits, Doors, Wardrobes, Bookshelf	Prophetic Message	Encourages members to believe in divine assistance to enjoy promotion and upliftment in every area of their lives and endeavours

8.	Sin Sinks Sinners into Hell		Warning	Evangelistic in contents with the aim of warning sinners against the danger of eternal damnation. By implication, it encourages sinners to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in order to avoid the danger of Hell.
9.	Exceeding Grace 2014	Vehicles	Prophetic Message/Faith Building	Encourages members to believe in the availability of exceeding grace for greater spiritual and social accomplishments in that year.
10.	I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord	Wooden Wall	Positive Confession of faith	Helps members build confidence in the power of God to preserve them from untimely death

Table 1: Pragmatic Interpretations of Select Christian Stickers

The various stickers establish a common feature of Christians' conception of the nature and power of God, their object of worship. It also demonstrates the countless benefits that the adherents can derive through their devotion and commitment to this deity in relation to the world around them. This forms the basis of their approach to society and help them to configure their minds towards a particular way of life. This notion also influences how they react and respond to the socio-economic and environmental challenges around them.

Broadly speaking, the messages conveyed in the copies reveal how they perceive and (re-) construct events around them; their insights of the meaning of life and capacity to handle those challenges of life. The participant-observation results show that a greater majority of these Christians are of the opinion that with their faith in God, many of the problems of life will be solved. That informed the annual mantra of faith as shown in the slogans and annual themes and watchwords in many of the texts.

The copies also present a picture of a community of religious adherents constantly engaged in an attempt to alter the dynamics of life through absolute reliance on a divine being who they believe superintend the affairs of man and possesses a supernatural power to intervene. If taken from a philosophical perspective, one may see the conveyance of a deterministic or fatalistic mind-sets where events in the lives of the adherents are considered to be totally beyond their human control.

Another important finding shows that the stickers also play the role for moral advocacy and evangelism which also forms the persuasive thrust of some of the stickers. For example "JESUS ONLY IS OUR MESSAGE"; and "NO HOLINESS, NO HEAVEN" popularised by members of the Deeper Christian Life group are a portrayal of their identification with a corporate philosophy and doctrinal convictions about the centrality of righteous living as a prerequisite to inherit eternal life in heaven. As promoters of the messages, they are known in Nigeria for their strict compliance with Bible injunctions on holiness and righteous living anchored on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Sometimes they are heavily criticised by other Pentecostal Christians for being too rigid, fanatical and for their hard-line position on some secular/social issues. They however argue in return that Jesus remains their example and the message they preach and they would not focus on earthly material pursuits and practices. Some other argue that the aspiration for an inclusive religious-civil society based on moral rejuvenation, social justice, transparency and accountability in private and public spaces drives them to develop messages that project this position.

The study has also demonstrated a discourse phenomenon where there is a transition from annual watchword to annual prophetic proclamation. This is replicated and reproduced in sticker formats posted in conspicuous locations that can enhance memorability and regular recitation.

Examples include (i) ***"There shall be No Lack, No Loss, No Limitation in my Life and Family"***; (ii) ***"I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord***;   (iii) ***"I bear the Mark of Jesus, let no man touch me"***; and (iv) ***2015 –my year of divine speed***

Some believe that by keeping the stickers in visible locations will make them to see and remember the prophetic pronouncements regularly and appropriate them. This recent practice is reflective of the generational shift in religious membership and practices among the new Pentecostal churches. While many of the earlier conservative Christian organisations like Methodist Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Anglican Church still maintain the use of annual watchword, most of the new generation Pentecostal churches use annual prophetic proclamation such as 2014, my year of breakthrough, and 2015-my year of divine speed.

Within the larger Nigerian public space, this recent phenomenon has been described as a component of the 'prosperity gospel'. This is the undue emphasis on material prosperity of Christians above the basic modest, holy and Spartan life style preached and demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

Semiotic metaphor

Multimodal resources in advertisement of products boost the marketability of the products by projecting certain properties of the products which might be the selling point of the product. Semiotic resources employed in the composition of the religious stickers studied in this article contain text, images, photograph, painting, colours and symbols with semantic extension which projects meaning that superimposed the logical meaning.

In NCRS 1, there is a metaphorical mapping of text "GOD and GOOD". The mapping takes place between two lexical concepts. The first concept could be described as both concrete and abstract concept at the same time while the second concept is purely abstract (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).
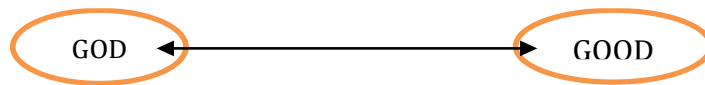

The mapping is a projection of attribution of goodness out of several personalities ascribed to God. This attribute serves as the focus of marketing in the sticker.

In NCRS 2, the hypertext "NO" overshadows other linguistic elements in the text – LACK, LOSS, LIMITATION to depict semiotic metaphor. The visual presentation of the typography interacts with textual meaning which relates negativity in the semantic realization of metaphorical nature of the meaning of the text. The photograph of the General Superintendent of the Deeper Christian Life Ministry against the white background with a smiling face is a complementarity of the textual resource. It presents laughter as a metaphor of absence of lack, loss and limitation.

In NCRS 3, the symbol ⬑ stands as the visual metaphor of the text "Next Level" in the upper sticker. The combination of the symbol, image of a man lifting up a leg as a sign of climbing a step, and the text "Next Level" create experiential meaning of elevation. The whole semiotic resources in the first sticker formulate metaphor of elevation. The second sticker shares the same metaphorical interpretation with the first sticker. The text, image and symbol also correlate through semiotic mixing, adoption and cohesion (O'Halloram, 2008) synchronized to make semiotic metaphor of progress which is in tandem with metaphor of elevation.

In NCRS 5, metaphor of sin is explored to demonstrate the attribute and operation of sin which is an abstract entity. Sin is metaphorically presented as a heavy weight which has the capacity of pulling down its carrier "sinner" forcefully into a destination. The metaphor, sin, has the cognitive models – sink, sinner, hell – which are in its cognitive profile (Evans, 2010; 2013). These attributes help in interpretation of the metaphoric concept "sin".
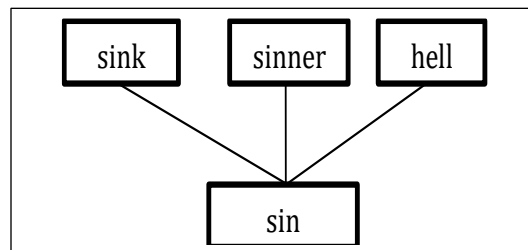
Cognitive model for sin (Evans 2009)

In NCRS 6, the text depicts holiness as a metaphor of heaven. Therefore, the text NO $\frac{Holiness}{Heaven}$ interprets holy living as the pathway to heaven by mapping the abstract concept "holiness" with the concrete concept "heaven" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002/2010).
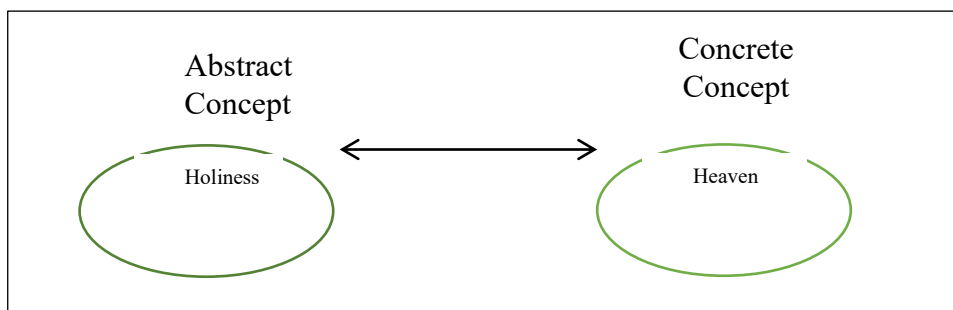
In NCRS 11, semiotic resources are multimodal. The text contains typography through which hypertext is employed to pronounce a part of the text with salience above others. Colouration of the hypertext is the focus of attraction. The text "**I Bear the Mark of CHRIST**" is a metaphor of identity. The metaphor depicts the deity and personality of Christ meaning Anointed, which is untouchable. The second clause is the declaration of the potency of the identity of Christ which is a metaphor of protection.

In NCRS 13, the sticker employs multimodal resources of text bilingualism, typography, symbolism and colouration. The text, which is the focus of attention, is a semiotic metaphor. The text "**Odun Imiupadabosipo Mi LATOKEWA**" written in Yoruba meaning "**My Year of DIVINE Restoration**" is a metaphorical expression. Typography, demonstrated through capitalization, emphasizes salience of the source of restoration. The text is a metaphor of time (Sobola, 2016), the time for restoration to take place. The metaphor focuses on the relevance of time, and time in this instance refers to year 2015, which was the year the watchword was meant to fulfil.

The use of metaphor in religious marketing demonstrates relevance of figurative language in the field of marketing. As illustrated in above, the metaphors in the stickers reveals a deeper and unique dimension of language use which appeals to and engages the cognitive ability of the target audience to interpret the text in relation to the writer's intention. Therefore, it involves emotional approach to convince the audience reason with the writer.

Conclusion

The findings agree with the view of some scholars that the stickers as a medium of mass communication are obviously taking over the role of religion in mediating the sacred in the course of propagating the religious messages of faith and hope. Hjarvard (2011,124) observes conceptualises the 'mediatisation' of religion as a process through which "the media have taken over many of the cultural and social functions of the institutionalised religions and provide spiritual guidance, moral orientation, ritual passages and a sense of community and belonging" (2011, 124).

The representations of Christianity and secularity in the stickers appear to douse the natural tension found in more critical sacred literature. Most proponents and users of the some of the stickers with loud messages on prosperity, good life, appear to draw a thin line between strict compliance with scriptural injunctions and biblical interpretation of the good life in modern society.

The study finds that modern Pentecostalism is conceptualised as that which believes and propagates that Christians must enjoy the best of life here in this world and in the life to come. While it believes in preaching the truth of the Bible, it also accepts that Christianity is not synonymous with poverty. They equally argue that prosperity is in line with the will of God for them. The messages of the stickers are thus couched against the backdrop of that perspective to propagate that new worldview.

However, some conservative Christian organisations stand at the other edge of the debate arguing that following the strict examples of Jesus and his teaching on holiness, winning souls, true discipleship that incorporates self-denial and self-crucifixion, separation from the world and preparing for heaven should be the focus of Christians. Some of these views are equally expressed in stickers (e.g. Jesus Only in Our Message)

The stickers cover a range of contemporary issues within the micro and macro discourse community. The church as a sub-set of the larger society consists of members with shared social challenges seeking individual and collective solutions to these myriads of social problems confronting them individually and collectively. The study has shown that the linguistic items used by the promoters of the stickers are designed to shape the ways adherents perceive their God and themselves. Sometimes they are meant to challenge the stereotypes, question the status quo, and re-orientate their mindset towards a revolutionary and radical way of expressing their beliefs. The lexical choices in some

of the stickers sometime appear to strengthen the stereotype of the group as being rigid, uncompromising and typically dogmatic

In some other cases, the language and tone of the stickers suggest that the group embraces a moderate religious philosophy that accommodates both secular and liberal influences in their religious practices. Our findings thus suggest that most of these adherents also engage in group branding as part of a proselyting or evangelising mechanism and to equally portrait a deeply religious life dependent on a supreme being. The stickers have shown features of a public space where common beliefs and ideological positions are ventilated through the various outlets. The stickers construct reality from the viewpoint of the religious organisation that produces them. The study has shown how the stickers construct and project individual and group identity, ideological beliefs and shared communal socio-religious relationships.

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