
Miracle as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic among neo-Charismatic churches: a comparative study

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Abstract

This article explores how neo-charismatic churches use miracles as spiritual events and as a marketing tactic to draw 'unbelievers' or 'miracle seekers' to church. This study examines the significance of miracles among neo-charismatic churches as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic. The data is derived from interviews with Black and Indian research participants from Pentecostal churches based in the Phoenix area of Durban, South Africa. The data showed that miracles do play a major role in drawing unbelievers to church and thus boosting the numbers

of congregation members. It is observed from the data analysis that the connection with God is miraculous or spiritual and the emotionality associated therewith cannot be compared to marketing. The use of evidence of a miracle as a marketing tactic to attract unbelievers has a positive association with marketing, but the results revealed that for the Word of God to be spiritually understood by the congregants, there must be a conscious and constant dependence upon the Holy Spirit. This study recommends that the church should master the concept of services marketing, particularly when marketing characteristics of church services like miracles to congregants.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek hoedat neo-Charismatiese kerke wonderwerke as geestelike gebeurtenisse gebruik, veral as 'n bemarkingstaktiek om 'ongelowiges' of 'wonderwerksoekers' kerk toe te lok. Die gewigtigheid van wonderwerke onder die neo-Charismatiese kerke as 'n geestelike gebeurtenis, sowel as 'n bemarkingstaktiek, word ondersoek. Die gegewens is verkry deur middel van onderhoude met Swart en Indiër navorsingsdeelnemers van Pinksterkerke geleë in die Phoenix-omgewing van Durban, Suid-Afrika. Die gegewens toon dat wonderwerke wel 'n belangrike rol speel om ongelowiges kerk toe te lok en sodoende die getalle van die gemeentede te verhoog. Uit die gegewens word afgelei dat die kontak met God wonderbaarlik of geestelik is en dat die emosionaliteit wat daarmee gepaard gaan, nie met bemarking vergelyk kan word nie. Die klaarblyklikheid van die gebruik van wonderwerke as bemarkingstaktiek om ongelowiges te trek, toon 'n positiewe ooreenkoms met bemarking, maar die resultate openbaar dat vir die gemeente om die Woord van God geestelik te verstaan, daar 'n bewustelike en volgehoue afhanklikheid van die Heilige Gees teenwoordig moet wees. Die studie beveel aan dat die kerk die konsep van kerkdien-bemarking sal moet bemeester, in besonder wanneer kenmerke soos wonderwerke aan gemeentes bemark word.

Keywords

Services marketing, physical evidence, spirituality, miracles, church congregants

Sleutelwoorde

Dienste-bemarking, fisiese bewyse, geestelikheid/spiritualiteit, wonderwerke, kerkklidmate

1. Introduction

The marketing concept suggests that market offerings are not limited to physical products, but also include services, activities or benefits offered for sale that are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010:20). The services offered by the church are no exception from a marketing point of view, as they also communicate the benefits of the product to prospective congregants. Christian religious activities in the Durban area of South Africa are becoming more diverse and more commercialised. Neo-Charismatic churches are gaining popularity. Neo-charismatic churches are a category of churches found within the Christian renewal movement. The Christian renewal movement incorporates Pentecostal, charismatic and neo-charismatic churches (Burgess & Van der Maas, 2009:1), with adherents usually being tagged as “born again Christians”. The inclusion of miracles in the services of these neo/new charismatic/Pentecostal churches provides options for people seeking miracles to choose from among a range of denominations. However, this inevitably leads to competition, with such churches making every effort to providing suitable services to the congregants and their leaders relentlessly searching for features that can differentiate them from other denominations (their competitors).

Considering the competition for membership among the neo-charismatic/Pentecostal churches, this study explores how these churches apply marketing principles to retain existing congregants, attract new congregants and encourage those who have left to return to the church. This article discusses the church as a self-serving community or a body serving people’s desire to fulfil God’s mission. Further, this article discusses miracles as a characteristic of the neo-charismatic church service/product but one which should be separated from commercial services/products. Questions are

asked regarding whether churches should participate in the commodification of faith and how the church can disciple its congregants to achieve personal wants and needs, and comfort in the way of sacrifice or deep discipleship. The structure of the article follows the development of seven propositions based on the discussions of the study, and the conclusion of the article.

The working of miracles has been identified as one of the characteristics of the neo-charismatic/Pentecostal churches. This perhaps can be linked to the prophetic declaration that was made by Jesus Christ: "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." (John 4:48 NIV). According to Resane (2017a:7), a miracle is when God (not an apostle, prophet, evangelist or pastor) breaks the rules of nature to reveal his power or will in a humanly impossible situation. The miracle occurs unassumingly and unconsciously and can be linked to belief, truth, and values within the context of spirituality. Some pamphlets, magazines, and posters used to capture the attention of the public and show evidence of the nature of the services that are available to Christians mention miracle as a feature of the services. Resane (2017a:2) adds that these pamphlets are mostly from churches that are charismatic with Pentecostal features such as casting out of demons, healing the sick, deliverance from any form of bondage such as poverty and unemployment, marital needs, a promotion at work, childlessness, bewitchment, etc.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Services marketing*

Services marketing is different from traditional product marketing. The term 'services' has many meanings and is used in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this article, the description by Bitner, Ostrom and Morgan (2007:3) is employed, i.e. that 'service' or 'services' refer to service offerings provided for and/or co-created with customers. Frequently, organisations offer both services and goods, making it difficult to decide if a company is in the goods or the services sector because the distinction between goods and services is not always perfectly clear (Hoffman, Bateson, Wood & Kenyon, 2009:5). In fact, providing an example of pure goods or pure service is very difficult, if not impossible. Churches provide goods (spiritual goods) and services to be consumed within a spiritual marketplace.

Services, in the case of a church, for instance, are the performance of any duties or work for another, a helpful or professional activity between two parties, implying an exchange of value between seller and buyer in the

marketplace (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007:15). The key to any selling is to focus on the needs of the prospective customer. However, the seller needs to ascertain how the service uniquely benefits customers and show the ways in which the service they offer provides value to the customer. Comparatively, this article explores the fundamental association and the variance between services marketing and the neo-charismatic church services, using the four characteristics of services marketing, namely, intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007:15). These are the characteristics which distinguish services marketing from product marketing. According to An (2014:567), *intangibility* refers to the inability to assess the value gained from engaging in an activity using any tangible evidence. Intangibility has become a central concept in the marketing of services. Many authors have analysed the impact of intangibility on the ways that services are managed. However, Berry (1980), Wolak, Kalafatis, and Harris (1998), and Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch (2002) suggest that intangibility cannot be used to distinguish clearly between all products and services.

Boundless (2014:1) asserts that when customers are buying a service, they perceive a risk related to the purchase. It is difficult for customers to know in advance what they will be getting. To reassure the buyer and build their confidence, marketing strategists need to provide some kind of tangible proof for the quality of service. In the Christian world, the proof of living by the spirit (holiness) is the outward manifestation of the spiritual event in the form of actions and speech, i.e. the “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV and Ephesians 6:12-18 ESV). The Bible reveals that Paul removes much of the intangibility of spirit-fruit by cataloguing precisely what he meant in Galatians 5:22-23, namely, “love, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”. This collective list of fruit identifies the character of Christ; therefore, this is what a church should use to connect with its congregants.

Inseparability refers to the fact that the delivery and consumption of services happens simultaneously, so consumers can assess the performance and the quality of the service simultaneously (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011:19). Senthil, Dharmalingam, and Panchantham (2011:38) state that inseparability reflects the interconnection among the service provider, the customer involved in receiving the service, and other customers sharing the same experience. According to Black, Childers, and Vincent (2014:279), when the production and consumption process occur concurrently, many additional factors can change the service outcome and, therefore, the perceived service quality. These factors include the customer’s role as co-producer, their connection with the employee and the customers’ connection with other customers.

Due to the principle of inseparability, the success of a service-based business largely depends on the quality of its salespeople, customer service representatives or other front-line employees who deal with the customers (Vance, 2014:1). In the context of this paper, the preacher/evangelist/pastor stands as the main salesperson/front-line employee of the church. Therefore, the preacher must reflect the attributes of God (such as holiness and love) because God is the owner of the service, is the producer and the source of power. Thus, one can say that inseparability, in terms of services offered by the church, involves the power of God. The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatever He pleases, whatever his infinite wisdom may direct, and whatever the infinite purity of his will may resolve.

Senthil, Dharmalingam, and Panchantham (2011:38) note that service providers are often in constant contact with their customers and must construct their service operations with the customer's physical presence in mind. A broken-hearted individual, sinner, or a sick person yearning for deliverance is involved physically in receiving the service from the service provider (preacher) as they perform their duty which involves connecting the sinner to God with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, the customer (congregant) is also part of the product (Dhenak, 2010:2) in the sense that the inseparability of service involves delivery and consumption at the same time during a religious encounter.

Heterogeneity or *variability* of service arises from the fact that it is impossible to rigidly standardise services (Moeller, 2010:363). This is because services cannot be standardised in the same way that goods can, and different people are involved in delivering the service. Roy and Sivakumar (2014:47) opine that the greater the labour and knowledge content, the greater is the variability, therefore organisations deploy considerable operant resources to ensure that heterogeneity is well managed. Likewise, in the provision of both services and tangible output in the body or society of Christians, it is important to point out that God's servant is mandated to effectively communicate God's message. In this regard, it is inevitable that there is heterogeneity in the Christian world because of individual differences, perceptions, and personalities of both the preacher and the congregant.

According to Moeller (2010:364), *perishability* is not only associated with the outcome of service, but also with the service provider's capacity. Perishability in the Christian world can be viewed in two ways: in relation to the service provider (a preacher/pastor) and in relation to the consumer (congregant/unsaved). The former is believed not to force the truth upon the hearers nor

attempt to impose the right action upon the congregants. The perishability or the sustainability of the word of God may not only be the message that answers the congregant's needs but also the possession of a power that gets the message through to the congregants. This implies that the word of God is not perishable.

Interestingly, from a marketing point of view, there is a master and there is a servant in every service. This relationship is in line with Friesner (2014:1) who states that a service is an act of doing something for someone or something, a commitment. Jesus Christ himself is a typical example of commitment. He says he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45 NIV). He demonstrates this by the way he lived. He lived in service and ultimately served by giving his life for many. Furthermore, he was also serving God and was committed to doing God's will (John 6:38 NIV).

A church service can be categorised as a missionary service/sales service, equivalent to an entry-level sales job in the world of business. Missionary selling involves persuasion and relationship building. Kokemuller (2014:2) confirms that missionary selling is a great fit for many entry-level sales representatives. There are various services in church organisations such as anointing services, Holy Communion services, Sunday school services, worship services, deliverance services, healing services, and Holy Ghost services. For example, in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a particular denomination involved in this research, there are prominent monthly (Holy Ghost services), quarterly (conventions) and annual (Congresses) services designed to attract both churched and unchurched members (www.rccg.org).

3. Miracle as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic

Recently, many religious and congregational activities have embraced *miracles* not only as an acceptable practice but also as an extension of their mission as this enables the church to reach the world for Christ. Thus, it becomes imperative for churches to provide some miracles to supplement their theological practices. The campaign for the spreading of the gospel and miracles are inseparable. However, the motive behind the miracle, authenticity and the balance between performing of miracles and miracles as a marketing activity are relevant for this study. On the one side, it is important to understand that the unsaved (and/or people seeking a miracle) have expectations of something and will go to any lengths to achieve a miracle and on the other side, churches will sometimes go to any length to satisfy it.

This has resulted in non-liturgical, un-biblical images and objects, antiquated forms of worship, and elaborate forms of marketing being disguised as a theology of miracles.

For example, Resane (2017a:1) states that South Africa is currently seeing some astonishing activities in the neo-charismatic churches. The devotees are made to eat grass, drink petrol, eat flowers, etc. Naledi Shange and Nico Gous of *Timeslive* (2019) called attention that: recently, miracles are attacked and ridiculed, incidents such as resurrection of a dead man at a particular Pentecostal church in South Africa which was debunked after criticism, called for an instant solution in South African Pentecostal Churches (Shange & Gous, 2019:1). There are other examples from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya, etc., where preachers are seen standing on prostrated bodies of people, licking naked women, breast sucking to cast out demons, etc. Resane (2017b:6) points out that “miracles are events that involve a suspension of the established laws of nature”. However, the practices referred to above are extreme so their theological authenticity is questionable. It is a theological understanding that miracles have the capacity to transform the hearer, create the element of marvel, and empower the recipients (Speckman, 2007:118-135).

In a church service, a miracle is associated with worship, the Holy Spirit, and faith, and is evidence of having a real experience with God. For instance, in the famous revival that was begun by the black evangelist William J. Seymour at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles (USA) in 1901, a small band of worshippers underwent the ecstatic experience of being filled with the Holy Ghost which led them to speak in tongues and perform daily miracles of healing, both spiritual and physical. This band of worshippers grew in size to more than 50 000 and a century later, surveys show that at least four million Americans have been added to the denomination (Steinfels, 2001:1). This example suggests that a miracle can be used as a marketing tactic with an evangelistic component that appeals to non-Christians and unbelievers in the congregation.

One point that is worthy of note is that social issues such as health and wealth are central to the miraculous among the neo-charismatic churches. The role of miracles is central in the work of getting rid of problems associated with health and wealth issues like deliverance from curses and freedom from oppression and miracle of abundance or riches. According to Njoh (2012:6), religious influence can be successful in promoting social change in two directions: radical change, in which a society is pushed in a new direction, and conservative change, in which a society is encouraged to return to the

social arrangements of the past. A growing church is committed to reaching the unreached for Christ and using evangelical methods that work. The evangelical mandate was given with the assurance of that miracles would accompany its fulfilment. Thus, believers are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he has commanded them. Aggressive evangelism can be employed in churches just as it is in any marketing oriented/driven organization. There are, however, divergent opinions regarding this approach with some Christians claim that aggressive evangelism is not suitable for Christians (Steinfels, 2001:1). Christians should display the fruit of the Spirit, not be aggressive (Nesher, 2014:1). Doctrinally, aggressive evangelism, if employed, should be a process whereby the presentation of the gospel is done zealously, compassionately and in a Christ-like manner.

It is obvious that there are challenges in church marketing, but one can state that there are opportunities for marketing oriented activities for church services. According to Appah and George (2017:104), church marketing is ideally placed as a sub-domain of social marketing and is regarded as an intervention designed to produce behavioural change with the purpose of improving the personal, social and economic wellbeing of people. Conrad (2008:8) states that the church can be promoted through the use of modern marketing instruments with promotional mix and advertising principles, while Adebayo (2015:16) examines how marketing principles are being transferred into the church and church growth with the use of marketing communication elements and media such as TV, radio, etc. A study by Jefkins (1995:70) shows that in KwaZulu-Natal many churches have adopted posters, bill boards, and banners as a means of reaching out to people walking or driving along the road. A major concern of this paper is how the church considers “ecclesiastic marketing” which refers to the application of marketing in order to spread the gospel, to attract proselytes and to obtain their loyalty.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample and data collection procedure

This study employed a qualitative methodology to analyse how neo-charismatic churches use evidence of miracles or spiritual healings (Louw, 2013:3) as marketing tactics to draw ‘unbelievers’ or ‘people seeking miracles’ to church. Therefore, the study was designed to explore a range of issues involving the Christian practice of spirituality, faith, miracle, and

servicescape (Kim & Moon, 2009:144). Individuals who practice a faith other than Christianity were excluded from the study. The data for this study was derived from Black and Indian research participants of Pentecostal churches based in the Phoenix area of Durban, South Africa between 2017 and 2018. The study population was distinct with all pastors and members being either Black or Indian, English-speaking, and at least 45 years of age. Six churches out of about 100 churches within the area were sampled for focus group interviews, with a total of 12 focus group interviews conducted. The sampling criteria for this study were specific and the researchers were clear about the people to be interviewed, hence judgemental and convenience sampling was used where the researcher selects units to be sampled based on their knowledge and professional judgment (Megan, 2013:1). Pastors of the selected churches were requested to identify local spiritual congregants, assistant pastors and any coordinators of sub-groups that exist within the church or individuals who are easily accessible to the researchers and could provide the data needed for the research (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016:2).

Six pastors and six assistant pastors were interviewed to gain first-hand information about some of the church activities and their practices of faith relating to miracles. The interviews were conducted in the pastor's offices and focus group discussions were conducted at the boardroom of the churches. The interviews ranged from 20 to 50 minutes while focus group discussions ranged from 35 to 45 minutes. Six elders (one from each parish) were also interviewed face to face. These six elders were the leaders and coordinators of groups and departments originated from Pentecostal churches based in the Phoenix area of Durban. While conducting the focus group interviews and information gathering via observation of church activities, field notes were taken which became an additional source of data for the study. Data gathered from focus groups and interviews were transcribed and organised into manageable themes, analysed, and presented as findings. All data were collected and analysed by the researchers. The transcripts were read by the researchers for the thematic analysis to find the ideas of the respondents relevant to the discussion in this paper on the use of miracle as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic among neo-charismatic churches. In order to shed additional light on the study, participants from the churches have also been characterised according to their denominations and language group.

5. Discussion of findings

Interviews conducted with pastors revealed that miracles play a major role in drawing unbelievers to church, and boosting the numbers of their congregation members. For example, it was discovered that every illness has its physical, emotional, and spiritual dimension. One can also note in the services of most neo-charismatic Pentecostal churches these days the miracles referred to in the New Testament, including tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:10 NIV). Thus, as the number of church services available has been increasing, intangibility factors have become less prominent and tangibility factors more prominent. One of the research participants said:

In the process of making up miracles, we have seen absurd and weird activities that go on in our spiritual communities today. One of them is the strange display by a pastor in his church drinking water and then splashing the water in his mouth into the face and mouth of some naive women seeking miracles during service. Therefore, we are aware of all these happenings.

From the above assertion, the tangibility factor is more important than the intangibility factor. In addition, Abela (2014:53) asserts that religions make claims about many things, most of which are unseen (intangible) because they relate to the faith factor. It is evident from the empirical findings that one of the most common services marketed to congregants is miracle in the form of healing, and deliverance. Healing is a term that is multifaceted in meaning, ranging from medical to spiritual but is invisible in nature. Louw (2013:3) states that spiritual healing means more or less to be delivered from sin or showing remorse and confession of sin. Louw (2013:7) further presents the following theological perspectives on healing:

- Spiritual healing as a new state of being: healing represents the fact that “if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation ...” (2 Cor. 5:17 NKJV);
- Spiritual healing as a shift from sin into the eschatological realm of redemption and salvation;
- Spiritual healing as a new state of mind: peace. Shalom describes a contentedness with God and life. “For he himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:14 NKJV);
- Spiritual healing as a new attitude and way of doing and living. “Live by the Spirit ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:16; 22-23 NIV); and
- Spiritual healing as wholeness, purposefulness, and direction.

From the foregoing, it is evident that healings and miracles are part of the church today as many congregants have found themselves in situations that require divine intervention. In addition, it can be noted among Christians that the Bible establishes that “except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48 KJV) as expressed by one of the research participants. A ‘sign’, as described by Christians in the course of the research interviews, “*is the impossible becoming possible and describes ‘wonders’ as being something one sees that makes one open-mouth in utter surprise*”. Miracles are described biblical in terms, which point to them being a supernatural, non-natural occurrence or manifestation, i.e. ‘signs’ and ‘wonders’. One of the research participants, however, claimed that:

The miracle is based on a myth that the universe operates according to “supernatural” rules and forces, rather than scientific ones. Stories of miracles and people rising from dead etc. remain unproven.

However, the three associated terms (miracle, sign, wonder) as they occur in the Bible, for example, in Acts 2:22, the Bible says: “*Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know*”, signify that God works outside the law of nature or works from a source that cannot be produced by natural agents and scientific means. This implies that only Jesus of Nazareth was a supernatural man that God accredited for the working of miracles, wonders and signs. In marketing terms, Kotler and Keller (2012:389) reveal that service companies try to demonstrate service quality through physical evidence and presentation for the customers to see and to believe. Neo-charismatic churches also demonstrate miracles through spiritual event and presentation as noted from the findings.

It appears in the empirical findings that members of the general public are less willing to be exposed to a church without signs and wonders. This is evident even in early manifestations of the church as recorded in Acts 8:5-6 KJV: “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in the city*”. One of the research participants notes that many congregants are after miracles at any cost and some churches have “blessed products” for healing miracles:

Some churches and their false prophets pray on products and sell them to congregation inside their churches. They tell people that they have 'fire' in them and that they will receive their miracles when consuming the blessed product. One should be aware that buying the blessed product is like buying the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we receive freely when we are baptised. People who are buying such products are guilty of buying God's power, besides; it shows that one lacks faith because one needs healing/blessing from an object being prayed for.

He (research participant) further asserts that:

Some general overseers are known on socio-media as Bible scholars and renowned international speakers and could declare that through their ministry, people are saved, healed, delivered, families restored, and many miracles take place. They have also showcased themselves as accomplished businessmen and icons in the marketplace.

In addition, the findings show, negative associations concerning John 6:5-13 of how Jesus Christ provided food for a multitude emerged from the above. A small meal (five barley loaves and two small fishes) was multiplied supernaturally as it was shared among 5000 people. After everybody had eaten, there were 12 baskets of extra food left over. These were typical examples of creative miracles – bringing into existence what was not available before. On this note, one of the research participants affirms that *“it is imperative that the pastors and preachers of the gospel follow these precepts in order to show evidence and effective service delivery”*.

Furthermore, the findings show that the level of spirituality in the services of some of the churches researched does indeed aid connection with God and aid miraculous events. The results indicate that pastors believe that connection with God is a process and that the Spirit of God and the word of God are inseparable from the miracle process. This was affirmed by one of the research participants as follows:

When an inspired pastor steps forward to declare God's Word, God validates or endorses the pastor's remarks by empowering the pastor to perform a miracle. Many New Testament passages articulate this fact quite clearly. For example, Mark 16:20 KJV states that the apostles “went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed”. In other words, miracles legitimise the teaching of God's messengers, distinguishing them from the many false teachers who can mislead people (like Simon in Acts 8:9, or Pharaoh's magic in Exodus 7:11).

This implies that some research participants believed that the connection with God is indeed intangible. *“When it is tangible, it becomes merely ‘magic’*”, as stated by one of the research participants. One can assume

that it is difficult to assess the level of spirituality in church services in this present milieu as seen in the empirical findings. There are a number of societal problems ranging from HIV/AIDS, eating and addictive disorders, anxiety and depression, medical illness, violence, as well as sexual abuse and divorce issues. Louw (2013:7) describes these as the “illness of the human soul” which can even become a threat to one’s being human and transform the beauty of life into the ugliness of ‘hell’. These are management challenges for the church and underlie the need for spiritually innovative techniques including prayer, meditation, spiritual visualisation, support, journaling (articles, rejoinders), scripture reading, preaching, deliverance services, forgiveness activities and encouragement of spiritual virtues such as sharing, empathy, gratitude and appreciation (Meichenbaum, 2008:22). The need to accommodate these spiritual techniques in church services has encouraged some churches to engage in varied religious activities and to systematically combine spiritual/non-physical techniques with physical cues.

In the same vein, Kotler and Keller (2012:387) assert that many pure service firms provide many services that do not include physical/invisible products and are using many forms of communication to reach customers. The study finds that the church is invisible because it is essentially spiritual, and its spiritual essence cannot be discerned by the physical eye. The union of believers with Christ is a mystical union; the Spirit that unites them constitutes an invisible tie. The blessings of salvation such as regeneration, genuine conversion, true faith, and spiritual communion with Christ, are all invisible to the natural eye.

From the perspective of marketing, there are five categories of service types as distinguished by Kotler and Keller (2012:387) which provide a pragmatic understanding of spiritual service accompanying physical miracles:

- Pure tangible good. This offering consists primarily of a tangible good such as soap, toothpaste, or salt. No services accompany the product.
- Tangible good with accompanying services. This offering consists of a tangible good accompanied by one or more services. Typically, the more technologically advanced the product, the greater the need for a broad range of high-quality supporting services.
- Hybrid. This offering consists of equal parts goods and services.
- Major service with accompanying minor goods and services. This offering consists of a major service along with additional services or supporting goods.
- Pure service. This offering consists purely of a service.

With regards to investigating whether emotionality (in search of a commercial product) can be compared to spirituality (in search of a spiritual product), a close relationship is seen between a consumer in search of a product and a congregant in search of a spiritual product. One of the respondent congregants avers that the word of God says that "... if you believe, you will see the glory of God" (John 11:40 NIV), so if one believes that there is a performance of miracle (answers to prayers) in a church, and one is desperately in need of a miracle in one's life, one is bound to search for such a church to get the product. In other words, there is a pre-condition for that belief or faith (intangible) while a commercial product is tangible (e.g., the performance of the product, quality of the product), and may result in a consumer being emotionally involved.

From the empirical findings, one can see there are also categories of church service types. Church services vary in how services they meet a personal need, business need and spiritual need (Zeithaml, Bittner & Gremler, 2009:452). Scripture makes it clear that services in the kingdom of God must be based on the Word of God, not on personal experience or on the basis of human comparison. Nevertheless, the images of deacons, pastors, Sunday school classes, and worship services are crucial to church service types. Kotler and Keller (2012:389) note that service companies try to demonstrate their service quality through physical evidence and presentation. Therefore, church services include bringing people in and building bigger buildings. These are attractive church services with no accompanying spirituality and the goal is to entertain and make money (business need). There are other church services with accompanying minor goods and services. The offering consists of spirituality along with spiritual objects (e.g. spiritual water), physical services and personal efforts (personal need). There are pure church services with accompanying great things from God (spiritual need). The offering consists of the Holy Spirit empowering the believer for a witness, enthusiasm and boldness in witnessing, divine guidance, enablement and miraculous manifestations of God's power.

While agreeing that a customer with a long-term relationship with a particular business gets tangible incentives, a believer with many years in the church stated that he also gets tangible incentives from God. One of the pastors interviewed revealed that the answer to the question can be considered in two ways: (1) a believer with many years in the church can get tangible incentives; (2) a believer with many years in the church can lose tangible incentives. A believer who falls short of giving satisfaction to God in the area of fellowshiping with God may be denied many blessings (incentives in this

case). Another pastor interviewed supported the view that receiving tangible incentives is seeing the manifestation of God's glory in the life of a believer. He further believes that this is as a result of a believer keeping company with the Lord (e.g. customer relationship, keeping a customer database), answering the call to communion and not just being a churchgoer.

It is supposed that better service will make marketing easier, cheaper and more profitable. However, in an attempt to provide answers to the assessment of the level of spirituality in the service of churches, it would be of interest to establish whether or not the services are modified. One of the respondents expressed that *"Our service will have no meaning if he (God) doesn't have access to our souls in fellowship. It would not be pleasing to him (no incentives) if we are not carrying his presence to the point of service delivery – come together in worship, praise, prayers, studying and learning of his word."* This is in line with Angheluta, Strambu-Dima and Zaharia, (2009:186) who state that in order not to compromise the core values and the fundamental activities of the church, the product cannot be modified in its essence and its fundamental components must not change. They agree that to a certain extent it is possible to innovate within a religious organisation, but marketing must not involve the adjustment of theology to the demands of the market but must adopt the way of communicating the doctrine, the mission and its programmes (Angheluta *et al.*, 2009:189).

Regarding which aspect of a church service attracts a tangible connection with God, it was determined in this study that there are various church services that attract tangible connections with God. In a more practical sense, current experiences reveal the truth that God's power alone can bring connection, life, and physical manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit. One of the respondents indicated that God's power is available to all who submit to his leading, just as any product is available to any consumer of a supermarket. Another respondent slightly disagreed with this viewpoint, stating that to provide a tangible connection, i.e. an unprecedented miracle, there is a need to enter into a working relationship with God with uncommon commitment. He stated that heaven opens to those who sacrificially call upon Him, making the impossible become possible. The interviews generally revealed that healing or whatever type of miracle occurs is more than just a purely physical process.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

It is evident from the findings that religion has become yet another product sold in the consumer marketplace. This study finds that combining faith and evidence of miracles, signs, and wonders, is justified and necessary. However, when the content becomes obscured, the church may lose its unique characteristics which place religion above marketing. This empirical study also reviewed the connections between miracles and physical evidence. It was determined that walking with God can be rewarded with miracles if one can pay the price just as a consumer of a convenience shop can be rewarded (customer relationship management). In the same vein, it was discovered that a life of obedience enhances the supernatural intervention that can result in a miraculous event.

The majority of the participants in this study reported that they had been convinced by the Holy Spirit and not by the physical cues of the church (e.g. size, aesthetic design or atmospheric condition). From the above analysis, churches are increasingly using marketing concepts, consciously or unconsciously, in their promotion efforts (Appah & George, 2017:117). However, the following critical observations can be made regarding the use of miracle as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic by the church:

- The church should understand that God is the determinant of what is a miracle, not a human.
- Healing, miracle, or salvation is an individualised good, while the manifestation of miracle is a marvellous display of God's power.
- The moral position plays an important role in the life of anyone seeking miracles. This implies that the length of involvement in the church as a believer is not a determining factor for miracles, but rather it is the personal relationship and moral standard that may attract miracles.

Commercial product marketing involves selling something (product) that people want, but the connection with God is intangible and emotionality can be linked to spirituality. This, indeed, provides a response to the association between marketing and religion. This article argues that a blend of faith and the miraculous has become increasingly evident in church activities, perhaps as a result of the mandate of the church to win souls and provide health services to the local community in which they operate. This article holds that there are a number of shifts in church activities, practice and ethics because of the influence of fabricated miracles.

The use of evidence of a miracle as a marketing tactic to attract unbelievers has a positive association with marketing, but the results reveal that for the word of God to be spiritually understood by the hearers (congregants), there must be a conscious and constant dependence (inseparability) upon the Holy Spirit. This study recommends that the church masters the art of marketing, particularly when advertising characteristics of church services (i.e. miracles) to congregants. This study suggests that the responsibility of a preacher is to help people see life from God's perspective and to see the church as a solution to personal problems (health, poverty, etc.). Therefore, a preacher senses the need for power outside of himself/herself and develops a walking relationship with God. Walking with God requires living a holy life in order to restore the lives of people through the transformative message of re-creation and redemption. The study recommends further that when one (either preacher or congregant) lives a holy life, one is in agreement with God, just as a consumer is in agreement with a seller. Thus, a miracle can be used as a spiritual event and as a marketing tactic depending on the motive of any neo-charismatic church.

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