

How African Churches Africanise Modernity and Modernise Africanity on their Websites

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Abstract

Christian churches in Africa are increasingly launching websites to take advantage of the ubiquity associated with the Internet. Striving to reach a global audience, they modernise African practices and Africanise modernity for African participants. However, the extent to which this practice constructs Africanity or Africanises modernity is yet to be understood. This study, therefore, examines African church websites with a view to explaining how they walk the tight rope of modernising Africanity and Africanising modernity. An available sample of websites belonging to churches based in Africa was taken. Using content analysis method, 271 church websites were observed and analysed. Findings indicate that 271 churches have website presence portraying African models, motifs, flags and sundry images. On the one hand, with African worship styles and cultural adornments, they Africanise modernity; on the other hand, they modernise Africanity with massive use of foreign languages, musical instruments and orchestra.

Keywords: Globalisation, Africanity, online religion, African churches, African culture

Introduction

In 2015, a study encouraged Africans to seek a middle ground at which they could merge their traditional communication methods with exogenous influences to engender more realistic communication experiences for their local and evolving global audience (Nyamnjoh, 2015)¹ and it appears that the Internet offers a suitable platform to achieve this. The convergence of text, images, audio and moving elements on web pages enamours the Internet to present a clear picture of the constructions of religion and race from a vantage perspective unavailable or incomplete on other media such as journal, book,

¹Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies* Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43. <https://www.researchgate.net/>



newspaper, magazine, television and radio (Brugger, 2010)². In response to this development, different cultural organisations, especially churches, are currently migrating online, perhaps also with the vision of fulfilling the biblical Great Commission.

The characteristics of the Internet recommend it as a platform on which the biblical command to go to all parts of “the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) may receive a boost and, globally, this seems to be the case currently. Understandably, therefore, more and more churches in Africa launch corporate websites, maintain active online presence and reach out to global audiences through their websites (Aje, 2016)³. But the extent to which these websites construct, project, sustain or deconstruct Africanity is hardly mentioned in African Studies literature.

Observing and analysing websites in search of such socio-cultural constructions and portrayals is increasingly becoming common among researchers. Website contents, according to Brugger (2010)⁴ may be examined in terms of their written elements, that is, textual elements expressed through writings such as heading or body text. The static image elements such as textual element expressed through shapes, lines and colours which together form photographic or iconic images may also constitute object of analysis. The moving image elements and textual elements expressed through shapes, lines and columns, which together form moving images or animations, such as a videos or animated banner advertisements, are identified as components worth studying. Sound elements or textual elements expressed through sound, such as piece of music or voice-over have also become integral parts of the web environment the study of which may provide answers to gaps in knowledge as well as life challenges (Brugger, 2010)⁵.

These characteristics of the Internet recommend it for an exploration of cultural concepts such as Africanity. Notwithstanding, there is curiously a dearth of African studies on media constructions of Africanity, and scarcely any empirical study relying on Internet data for the interrogation of the clashes and convergence between Africanity and modernity.

The Problem: African studies research has paid some attention to issues concerning the notion of Africanity. Most of the studies, however, centre on explications on the concept itself (Laremont and Seghatolislami, 2003⁶;

²Brügger,N (2010). Website Analysis: Elements of a conceptual architecture. Aarhus:TheCentre for Internet Research, <https://www.academia.edu/919893/>

³Aje, F. (2016). What are Nigerian Churches Doing Online? An Exploration of Uses and Gratifications, A thesis submitted to Redeemer’s University.

⁴Brügger,N (2010). Website Analysis: Elements of a conceptual architecture. Aarhus:TheCentre for Internet Research, <https://www.academia.edu/919893/>

⁵Brügger,N. (2010). Website Analysis: Elements of a conceptual architecture. Aarhus:TheCentre for Internet Research, <https://www.academia.edu/919893/>

⁶Laremont, R.& Seghatolislami, T. (2003). *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui, Volume I*, Africa Research and Publications : Trenton, United States. <http://africaworldpressbooks.com/>

Nyamnjoh, 2015)⁷, paying inadequate attention to media portrayals and constructions of Africanity. The task of this study, therefore, is to explore the extent to which manifest communication contents on African church websites construct or deconstruct Africanity. The study strives to attain this objective by answering the following questions:

1. To what extent are African churches present online?
2. To what extent do the websites display contents reflecting Africanity?
3. To what extent do the website contents Africanise modernity?
4. To what extent do the website contents modernise Africanity?

Current discourse on Africanity and African Churches

The Concept of Africanity: Attempts have been made by scholars to conceptualise Africanity. For instance, Maquet (1972)⁸ explained that Africanity is the unique cultural face that Africa presents to the world, and this boils down to the articulation of some cultural features common to African groups. These features include polygamy, double descent, kinship bond, unique weapons, unanimity of African democracy, bride wealth, ancestor worship, life before and after this life, absolutism of monarchs and sacredness of power. In relation to religion, a study attempted to set forth some principles, recommending that a comprehensive hermeneutical approach recognising and retaining the essential culture and character of Christianity, retaining freedom within boundaries, respecting church history and opting for an African Christiantheology in which God is not short-changed. He argued that the main objective of Africanisation and modernisation should be the glorification of God (Van der Merwe, 2016)⁹.

The ways and manner in which various media of communication (newspaper, magazine, radio and television) construct and project this unique cultural face has been debated by scholars. Nyamnjoh (2015)¹⁰ argued that journalism practices in Africa are guided by foreign precepts which are at variance with main features of African culture, often assuming that there is one best way of doing journalism to which African journalists must aspire. The study encouraged media entrepreneurs to seek a middle ground at which Africans could merge their traditional communication methods with exogenous influences to engender more realistic communication experiences for their audience. This sounds like encouraging them to attempt to Africanise their modernity and modernize their Africanity (Nyamnjoh, 2015)¹¹.

⁷Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43*. <https://www.researchgate.net/>

⁸Maquet, J. (1972). *Africanity: the Cultural Unity of Black Africa*. New York and London: Oxford University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/161627>

⁹Van der Merwe, Dirk (2016). From Christianising Africa to Africanising Christianity: Some hermeneutical principles, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol. 2 no2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2016.v2n2.a25>

¹⁰Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43*. <https://www.researchgate.net/>

¹¹Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43*. <https://www.researchgate.net/>

An example is presented in an article entitled *Dancing an Open Africanity: Playing with Tradition and Identity in the spreading of Sabar in Europe*. Sabar is a Senegalese dance that seems to clearly say something about Africa and being proudly African (Aterianus-Owanga, 2019)¹². Describing contemporary African dance as post-colonial communication, other studies stated that African artists and worshippers were located not only in Africa (Burnett, 2014) and the African diaspora, but as well as in virtual, inter-medial forms such as video art and the Internet, implying that constructions of Africanity may occur in the Internet environment which offers a kind of hybridization currently providing appropriate answers for intercultural processes (Cekwana, 2010)¹³. In this direction, Adedeji (2017)¹⁴ observed that local artistes were already leveraging on African music to reach out to Afro music lovers online.

But the question posed by some scholars is: how, in the religious communication context, could churches use their web communication skills to accomplish such expansive objectives? (Casey, 2001¹⁵; Osrowski, 2006¹⁶; Merrit, 2015¹⁷; Stetzer, 2015)¹⁸. According to Oosthuizen (2000)¹⁹ certain demands of modern society cannot be met in the traditional African context, therefore, one way could be to make conscious effort to adapt and blend while another way could be by consciously projecting what has been described as African-style worship—energetic, musical and emotional—through their websites (Burnett, 2014)²⁰. This is because websites, increasingly playing the role of showrooms for organisations, present an appropriate platform for constructing images and telling one's own story.

¹²Aterianus-Owanga, A. (2019). Dancing an Open Africanity: Playing with "Tradition" and Identity in the Spreading of Sabar in Europe, *Open Cultural Studies*, Volume 3, Issue 1, Pages 347–361, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0030>.

¹³Cekwana, B. (2010). Contemporary dance from Africa as creative opposition to stereotypical images of Africanity, <http://www.buala.org/en/>

¹⁴Adedeji, W. (2017) Africanity and new wave popular music style in Nigeria "Afro hip hop" Revisited, *Scholars Bulletin* www.researchgate.com

¹⁵Casey, C. A. (2001). Online Religion and Finding Faith on the Web: An Examination of Beliefnet.org, *proceedings of the Media Ecology Association*, volume 2, P. 32-40. <https://media-ecology.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/Proceedings/v2/v2-04-Casey.pdf>

¹⁶Osrowski, A.O. (2006). Cyber communion: Finding God in the little box. *Journal of Religion and society*, 1-8. <https://dspace2.creighton.edu/xmlui/handle/10504/64523>

¹⁷Merrit, J. (2015, december). *can "church" happen online?* Retrieved from qideas.org: www.qideas.org/articles/can-church-happen-online

¹⁸Stetzer, E. (2014). Online Church Really a Church? *Ed Stetzer*. Retrieved from Ed Stetzer.com: www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/april/is-online-church-really-cchurch.ht on december 23rd 2014

¹⁹Oosthuizen, G.C. (2000: 280) in Jacob K. Olupona (Ed.), *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions*, pp. 277-283. Available @ <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/2985981>

²⁰Burnett, J. (2014 May, 18). Nigerian church spreads african-style zeal across north America. <https://www.npr.org/2014/05/18/313612376/nigerian-church-spreads-african-style-zeal-across-north-america>

Laremont and Seghatolislami (2003)²¹ interrogated the Africanity notion, arguing that Africanity should be viewed as an idea rather than as a point of origin. Nina Sylvanus, in a study that supports this view, examined it from the biography of wax fabric which is sometimes produced outside Africa but commonly consumed in Africa, making it an authentic African product called African wax. Though she suggested, in line with this thinking, that Africanity should be viewed as a conceptual construction whose validation depends more on the observer's gaze than on the object of that gaze, current literature seems to gloss over this significant suggestion (Sylvanus, 2007)²². Observers' gaze in today's information age is often focused on the media, especially the Internet which largely serves as a platform for the construction and deconstruction of culture.

Landman and Yates (2017)²³ observed that it is only in the past two decades that black scholars have been using the term 'Africanity' frequently, and then mainly in a generic way to denote racial identity. The study presented three major constructions of Africanity in South African churches. The first is sensitising the self and 'the other' towards power relations by equalisation of power relations. The second is to respect indigenous values within group identities and the third is that churches invited the youth to construct themselves. It follows, therefore, that if churches are offering people the opportunity for self-construction offline, they can do even much more online, either through individual representations or through corporate appearances. This is more so considering that the digital environment offers them control of what content should be seen by the audience.

Lamola (2016)²⁴ reflected on the challenges of African identity within the context of the persistence of European modernity as the ideal of globalisation. He concluded that Léopold Sédar Senghor who devoted his literary talent and intellectual prowess to the nurturing of the 'French way' not only deliberately nurtured an imperialistic French globalism, but betrayed an opportunity to make a case for an enduring de-colonial African epistemology during that critical period in the history of Africa's relationship with Europe. Currently, globalisation has been redefined by the Internet, and the African churches migrating online can only repeat the error of Senghor or construct and portray an image which will advance Africa's Africanity. However, studies recommend

²¹Laremont, R.& Seghatolislami, T. (2003). *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui, Volume I*, Africa Research and Publications : Trenton, United States.

<http://africaworldpressbooks.com/>

²²Sylvanus, N. (2007). The fabric of Africanity: Tracing the global threads of authenticity, *Anthropological Theory*, Vol 7: 2, 201-216 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607077298>

²³Landman, C. & Yates, H.(2017) Africanity and research: A case study in rural South Africa *Theological Studies* 73(4), 47-75. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4775>

²⁴Lamola, M.J. (2016) Senghor, globalism and Africanity. *Phronimon* [online]. vol.17, n.2, pp.51-67. ISSN 2413-3086. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2413-3086/2016/1967>

that desired modifications should be situated in the African contexts that give them meaning (Idang, 2015)²⁵.

In doing this, they would benefit immensely from the writings of Laremont and Seghatolislami (2003)²⁶ who stated that Africanity should be viewed as an idea rather than as point of origin. The idea was that such thinking would force Africans to reposition themselves in the debate on Africa's place in global cultures and civilizations and prepare them to take a more active role in social and political affairs of Africa and the world. Thus, when churches attempt to modernise or Africanise, they blur the thick line between Africanity and the rest of the world, thereby partly obliterating the point of origin picture in people's minds. Sometimes it requires a radical separation from a historical church, a mother church or a western-controlled church to implement such innovative ideas. Such was the case in western Kenya where a twenty-year old Luo girl stated that she was called by God to help introduce some Afro-centric changes in the local Catholic assemblies in 1963. Disagreements with fundamentalist Catholics forced her to break away from the Catholic Church and formed the Legion of Mary Church (Oosthuizen, 2000)²⁷.

Culturally, the blurring of that line is currently taking place in different aspects of African life. African nuclear family system, for instance, which, according to Andrew Miller (1998) is structured around children is increasingly tending towards fewer children and more emphasis on marriage just like their Western counterparts, whose nuclear families are typically centred on marriage. Contributing to this development are televangelism programmes on the web (Ihejirika, 2008²⁸; Okon, 2011)²⁹ and innovative adoption of new media by churches in Africa (Obayi et al. 2014³⁰; Wyche, 2013)³¹.

²⁵Idang, G. (2015). African Culture and Values *Phronimon* Volume 16 | Number 2 | pp. 97–111 <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/phronimon/v16n2/06.pdf>

²⁶Laremont, R. & Seghatolislami, T. (2003). *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui, Volume 1*, Africa Research and Publications: Trenton, United States. <http://africaworldpressbooks.com/>

²⁷Oosthuizen, G.C. (2000: 280) in Jacob K. Olupona (Ed.), *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions*, pp. 277-283. Available @ <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/2985981>

²⁸Ihejirika, W. C. (2008). In-Line Religion: innovative Pastoral Applications of new information and communication technologies by the catholic in Nigeria. *Politics and Religion, volume 2*, 79- 98. <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/>

²⁹Okon, G. (2011). Televangelism and the socio-political mobilization of pentecostals in portharcourt metropolis: A kap survey. *Religion, Media and politics in Africa, volume 5*, 63-80. Retrieved from okon.godwin@ust.edu.ng

³⁰Obayi.P; Godfrey.O; Onyebuchi. C, & Samuel, A. (2014). Audience perception and use of the new media in christian pastoral communication in Southern Nigeria. *Newmedia and Mass communication, Volume 26*, 1-14. Retrieved from www.iiste.org

³¹Wyche, S. P. (2008). Church share: Investigating Technology use and adoption among culturally different Religious Groups. P.13-51. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/>

African theatre is also an aspect of Africanity that has found expression in religion both online and offline. Musical and dramatic consciousness among African ministers of the gospel has enabled them to deliver their messages with dramatic intensity and resplendent displays (Flory, 2005)³². This dramatic posture has helped African preachers to live the act by giving personality to liturgy, and delivering it with authority (Campbell, 2012)³³. And the power of the tongue and dramatic gesture becomes a soothing balm with distinctive element as it offers sacred responses to human limitations and vulnerability (Kersting and Kroker, 2010)³⁴. Dramatization in some African church ministrations often come with a clear purpose to deconstruct certain imposed strictures arising from imported liturgical preferences. One of these aspects of scion is in the area of church music which, in Africa, is interwoven with theatrical performances. This is unlike the inherited European style characterized by serenity uncommon to African socio-religious gathering (Babarinde, 2017)³⁵.

Another aspect of African life where the blurring of the line has been visible is architecture. There are arguments that western architecture alienates some Africans from Christian congregations and similar meetings, especially as the promoters of Christianity worry and wonder why some Africans feel satisfied gathering in houses, shacks, open spaces and in school classrooms. Rather than view such gatherings as a reflection of an inner need for fellowship as was the case in the biblical wilderness and a reflection of the extended family system in the ecclesiastical context, they view it as evidence of poverty and attempt to supplant them with Western secular and ecclesiastical structures. By so doing, they entrenched a deep sense of alienation with many in Africa rendering the vast sums spent on these Western-oriented constructions an obstacle to the African concept of religion as a sharing and caring phenomenon (Goliama, 2011)³⁶. The role of the media in this should be unmistakable since these churches receive constant coverage and prominent positions in the media, especially church websites.

Churches and Media Portrayals: The public image of religious institutions depends greatly on their portrayal in the news media: radio, television, newspaper, magazine and the social media. Shaw (2005)³⁷ stated that church representatives do not have control over how these secular media portray the church, and it follows that no continent or race has such control over media

³²Flory, R. (2005). Religion Online: Finding faith on the Internet *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 44(3), 364-365. Retrieved June 8, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/3590605

³³Campbell, H. (2012). Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80(1), 64-93. Retrieved June 8, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/41348770

³⁴Kersting, Annette & Kristin Kroker (2010). Prolonged Archives of Women's, Specifically Affecting Female Health. *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 13(1): 27-28

³⁵Babarinde, D.M. (2017). The Hybridisation of Christian Gospel Music in South-West Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, submitted to the University of Ilorin.

³⁶Goliama, C.M. (2011). Where are you Africa? Church and Society in the Mobile Phone Age. Oxford: African Books Collective Available @ <https://books.google.com.ng/>

³⁷Shaw, R. (2005). *The News Media and the Catholic Church Notre Dame, J.L. Ethics & Pub. Policy* 45(5) <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?>

portrayals. Shaw cited a study whose findings constructed a negative picture of the church, indicating that controversial issues were frequently presented as conflicts and journalists frequently reported their religious stands from a secular perspective, presenting their coverage of theological issues along the familiar lines of politics. By so doing, they described the church in terms that constructed the image of authoritarian control and anachronistic approach to contemporary society.

A similar study observed that despite the fact that the devolved grass roots structure of the Church of England was deemed to align well with media fragmentation, there had been too little study of the way the church had adapted to the challenges of the mass media (Brown, 2010)³⁸. Some of the adaptations included holding more public, televised events and commemorations in cathedrals and churches, and supplying spokespeople to represent communities at times of tragedy. This implies that media constructions of groups and organisations may sometimes not reflect the actual happenings due to inadequate understanding of their activities (Brown, 2010)³⁹.

There are indications, however, that social media offer interactivity that mesh with the structures and objectives of religious organisations. For instance, Lewis (2016) observed that many churches are engaging their followers online, sometimes in realisation that online interaction involves more than just setting up a website and offers a wider pedestal for congregations to actively engage with sermons by asking questions, sharing photos or continuing religious conversations throughout the week. This suggests that online activities of churches have great potentials to construct and deconstruct images of institutions, peoples and races (Christian, 2012⁴⁰; Chilwa, 2015)⁴¹.

Crow (2016)⁴² contended that the daily lives of Christians help to construct not only the public perception of those Christians and their churches but also that of God because they are the newspaper that their friends and neighbours read, the social network that joins disjointed communities together. In other words, whatever image a religious group desires to project in the media should ultimately be a reflection of their conducts. But, not even the daily conducts of churches and their members are correctly portrayed on a good day according to

³⁸Brown, M. (2010 Dec. 6) Church and the media: a moment's reflection, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/dec/06/church-and-the-media>

³⁹Brown, M. (2010 Dec. 6) Church and the media: a moment's reflection, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/dec/06/church-and-the-media>

⁴⁰Christian, A. B. (2012). The church in the contemporary world: Information and communication technology in church for growth. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, volume 4 (4), 80-94. doi:10.5897/JMCS11.0887

⁴¹Chilwa, E. U. (2015). Texting and Christian Practice, *Encyclopaedia of Mobile Phone Behaviour*. DOI: 10.13140/2.1.3656.5769

⁴²Crow, L. (2016) The Church: God's Media Representation, Generals International <https://www.generals.org/articles/single/the-church-gods-media-representation/>

Vaters (2015)⁴³. Vaters drew attention to Hollywood portrayal of churches, describing it as story- telling: “Not only do they keep getting it wrong; they regularly get it really wrong. Hollywood doesn't even get the everyday church stuff right.”

Media Portrayal of Races: Empirical evidence demonstrate that the manner in which racial groups are represented in the media can be either harmful or beneficial to different racial groups, a fact which necessitates an enquiry into how and how often different races are portrayed across the media landscape. So far, quantitative content analytic studies reveal that there is variation in depictions of race, depending on the group, the medium, and the genre. Mastro (2017)⁴⁴ stated that whereas Blacks receive almost the same quantity of coverage on primetime U.S. television, there is often a variation in the quality. In this study, the relevant genre is the Internet and chances are that the way traditional media depict Africa as a race may differ from the way African worshippers depict their Africanity on their own websites.

With the understanding that exposure to these representations could have dire consequences, especially on the World Wide Web, allowing global access to the portrayals associated with Africa in the media may contribute to the perpetuation of negative racial. Such contents may also lead to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes which may in turn lead to unsympathetic policy positions to active or passive harming behaviours (Mastro, 2017)⁴⁴.

Theoretical Perspectives: The expression “modernisation of Africanity” immediately situates the study in the region of modernism theory, a theory defined as a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge, or technology. It encourages a re-examination of every aspect of life with the aim of replacing old ways with new methods in order to reach the same goal (Lewis, 2000⁴⁵; Everdell,1997)⁴⁶. Scholars had suggested that Modernist concepts were fundamental to the growth of a culture and literature of decolonization in anglophone Africa. Thus, African scholars such as Rajat Neogy, Christopher Okigbo, and Wole Soyinka, have “repurposed” modernism to accommodate autonomy to assert freedom from colonial bondage, racial discrimination and post-colonialism (Kalliney, 2015)⁴⁷.

⁴³Vaters, K. (2015). When Hollywood Goes to Church: 18 Stereotypes, *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2015/august/when-hollywood-goes-to-church-18-stereotypes.html>

⁴⁴Mastro, D. (2017) Communication: Critical/Cultural Studies, Communication and Culture, Media and Communication Policy *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, <https://oxfordre.com/>

⁴⁵ Lewis, P. (2000). *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 38-39, <http://assets.cambridge.org/>

⁴⁶Everdell, W.(1997). *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth Century Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, <https://press.uchicago.edu/>

⁴⁷Kalliney, P. (2015). Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War *Modern Language Quarterly* 76 (3): 333–368. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-2920051>

The idea of Africanising modernity seems to align with the efforts of these African scholars on the one hand. On the other hand, it aligns the study to the globalisation theory within which scholars have identified three global tendencies – the hyper-globalist tendency, the sceptical tendency and the transformational tendency (Parjanadze, 2009)⁴⁸. Hyper-globalists claim that the world has entered a 'truly global age' legalising the dominance of 'global capitalism' with logic underpinned by neo-liberal agenda regarding open markets. The sceptical approach views globalisation from historical stance and questions the effectiveness of trading blocs which simply reinforce existing economic divides. The transformationalist perspective views it as a contradictory historical process, promoting economic, cultural and political integration on the one hand, and on the other hand increasing stratification and widening global socio-economic gaps (Parjanadze, 2009)⁴⁸.

Methods

To answer research question one, an exploratory search for African churches online was conducted using five search engines—Google, Yahoo, Alta Vista, Web crawler and Meta crawler. To answer research question two, website content analysis was employed to ascertain the extent do the church websites display contents reflecting Africinity. To answer research questions three and four, identified contents were analysed in search of evidence of merging or blending of Africinity and modernity, focusing on five major units of analysis.

Unit of Analysis: Five units of analysis were identified. These are: textual content, iconic content, graphic/artistic content, motion picture/still-image content and general cultural content.

Content Categories: Africinity contents on the sites were operationalised in terms of the following mutually exclusive content categories:

Textual Content: African language, African proverb, corporate motto couched in African language or proverb/philosophy, African quotes. **Graphic/Artistic and Iconic Content:** artworks, designs as well as African symbols, motifs, models and flags. **Motion pictures/still Images:** Images and video rendered in a manner depicting African energetic, musical and emotional worship styles and greeting.

Cultural Content: African dress, African hairdo, hats, headgear, musical instrument, dance, architecture, weapon, kinship bond. *A list of churches and their website addresses is attached as meta data.

Reliability of Instrument: Drawing from the mutually exclusive content categories, a standard 22-item coding sheet was designed and was used to collect data from 271 websites, and inter-coder reliability was calculated using Holsti's formula:

$$R = \frac{2M}{N1a + N1b}$$

⁴⁸Parjanadze, N. (2009). Globalisation Theories and Their Effect on Education, *IBSUSJ* 2(3).P77-88. Available @ <https://www.econstor.eu/obitstream/10419/54631/1/644238321.pdf>

2M= Total items agreed upon by two coders
N1a= Coding scores for the first coder
N1b= Coding scores for the second coder.

Details of the inter-coder reliability coefficient are: textual content (.926), graphic/artistic and iconic content (.857), motion picture/still images (.714) and cultural content (.864). Reliability coefficients between .60 and 1 are generally considered acceptable. Therefore, from these reliability coefficients, it is clear that the website observation instrument was reliable. Data were analysed quantitatively and discussed in the context of the indicators of Africanity identified in the literature.

Data presentation and analysis

To what extent are African churches present online?

An exploration of the World Wide Web through the Google search engine, in search of the web presence of African churches indicates that their web presence occurred at four levels: Online mentions, listing in online directories, social network presence and website presence. However, only websites were analysed because they generally present not only more and richer information but also publish information that could be rightly attributed to the churches. About 322 websites were identified but 51 were not analysed either because they were not functional or because they seemed to be linked to and be controlled by mother churches outside Africa. Functional church websites clearly linked to African churches were 271.

To what extent do the church websites display contents reflecting Africanity?

To ascertain the extent to which communication contents on the church websites reflected Afro-content, all content categories and their sub-categories were observed. Findings indicate that there was no presence of African Language text, Google translation burton, African proverbs, African quotes or corporate motto couched in Africanity; and there was no indication of African symbols, artworks, designs, church logo, African greeting posture, African weapon and African extended family system. However, other categories of Africanity content were available. They are presented in two sections beginning with iconic, graphic and artistic contents.

Presence of iconic, graphic and artistic content: The icons observed indicated that African models, motifs, flags and maps had a scanty representation on the sites while photographs portraying African art and graphics were common as Table 1 shows:

Table 1: Extent of Afro-Iconic, Graphic/Artistic Contents

| SN | Iconic Contents | Frequenc y | Percent |
|----|-----------------|---------------|---------|
| 1 | African Motifs | 107 | 39.48 |

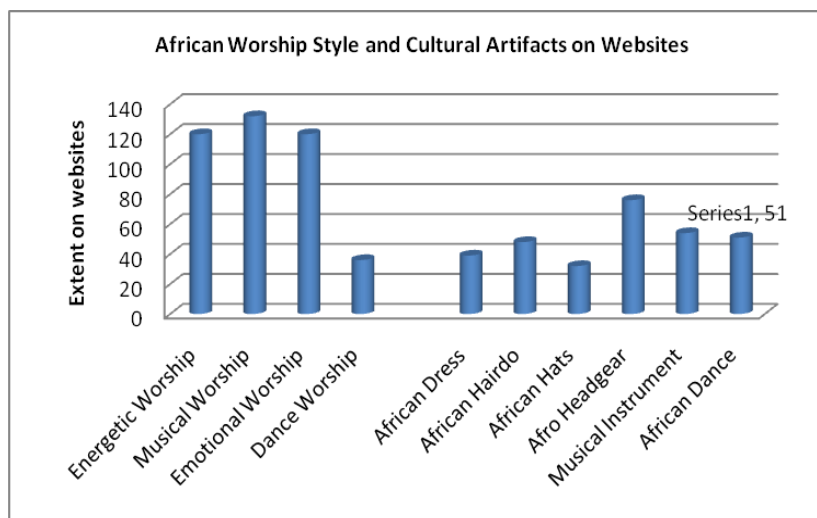
| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 2 | African Models | 119 | 43.91 |
| 3 | African Flags | *NA | NA |
| 4 | Map of Africa or African Nation | 12 | 4.42 |
| 5 | Motion and Still Images | 189 | 69.74 |
| | Total | 271 | NA |

source: observed field data by authors

*NA= Not Applicable

Extent of African Worship Style and Cultural Artifacts on Websites: On the 271 websites, there were more displays of energetic worship (44.28% of websites) emotional worship (44.28% of websites), musical worship (48.75% of websites) and African headgear (28.04% of websites), than dance worship (13.28% of websites), African dress (14.39% of websites), African hat (11.80% of websites), African dance (18.81% of websites) and African musical instruments (19.92% of websites). Details are presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: African Worship Style and Cultural Artifacts Observed on Websites



source: observed field data by authors

Extent of African Worship Style and Cultural Artifacts on Websites

To what extent do the website contents Africanise modernity and modernise Africinity?

To answer research question three and four, worship contents, cultural artifact contents and iconic/graphic contents were subjected to further analysis to find

out the extent to which the churches modernized Africanity or Africanized modernity with them. Many sites had several indications of each of these variables whereas others had one or none. On the whole, 1125 items across 16 sub-content categories were examined for indications of Africanising and modernizing contents. Findings indicate that there is clear evidence of a conscious effort to Africanize worship style by engaging in more of dance worship, wearing of African dress or a hybrid version of Western dresses, emotional worship, and musical worship on the one hand. On the other hand, there is clear evidence of trying to modernize African hairdo, hats, musical instruments and African modeling styles. Details are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Extent of Africanity and Modernity in Website Contents

| SN | Content Categories | Africanising Contents | Modernising Contents |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Energetic Worship | 112 (9.95%) | 70 (6.22%) |
| 2 | Musical Worship | 123 (10.93%) | 81(7.2%) |
| 3 | Emotional Worship | 142 (12.62%) | 129 (11.46%) |
| 4 | Dance Worship | 158 (14.04%) | 15 (1.33%) |
| 5 | African Dress | 212 (18.84%) | 187 (16.62%) |
| 6 | African Hairdo | 86 (7.64%) | 101(8.97%) |
| 7 | African Hats | 72 (6.4%) | 122 (10.84%) |
| 8 | African Headgear | 98 (8.7%) | 22 (1.95%) |
| 9 | Afro Musical Instrument | 64 (5.68%) | 211(18.75%) |
| 10 | African Dance Style | 43 (3.82%) | 88 (7.82%) |
| 11 | African Motifs | 89 (7.91%) | 118 (10.48%) |
| 12 | African Models | 96 (8.53%) | 123(10.93%) |
| 13 | Photographs/illustrations | 101(8.97%) | 138 (12.26%) |
| 14 | African Architecture | 7 (0.62%) | 42 (3.73%) |
| 15 | Afro Language and Pidgin | 22 (1.95%) | 22 (1.95%) |
| 16 | African Theatre | 14 (1.24%) | 125 (11.11%) |
| | Total Websites | 1125 | 1125 |

source: observed field data by authors

Discussion of findings

Areas in which massive Africanisation has taken place include dressing, music and dance worship whereas more of globalisation has taken place in hairstyling, headgear, musical instruments, illustrations and images. Though there were a few sites that presented contents in African languages, it is important to note that simultaneous interpretations of English to African languages and pidgin are beginning to be available on the World Wide Web, especially in video contents.

This broadening of base looks more like a blending of cultures tending toward globalisation, which suggests that there is a gradual shift from Africanity as a point of origin to Africanity as a way of life shared by Africans in Africa, Africans in the diaspora and other people that buy into Africanity. This is consistent with the views of Sylvanus (2007)⁴⁹.

The findings partly answer questions raised in literature as to whether African communicators are prescriptive, promoting Western canons of civilisation, or not (Nyamnjoh, 2015)⁵⁰. In most instances, blending and merging practices come as natural responses to needs and challenges. An example is seen in the dressing behaviour of church members whereby many put on Western blouse on African wax, some use African wax to sew Western-style shirts and a pastor wears western-style suits during cold weather, native African wears and Afro native designs made with Western suit materials during hot seasons. This is more a necessity than it is a reflection of an articulated Africanisation agenda, or an attempt to be prescriptive, and seems to support the thinking that modifications should be situated in the African contexts that give them meaning (Idang, 2015)⁵¹.

In what ways do the website contents construct African culture and God for their visitors as Crow (2016)⁵² argued. African culture is sufficiently presented as a musical and dance-loving culture in which God is not presented only as a central figure but a music-loving, dance-loving benevolent being. Though it could be argued that this construction of God is Africanising, it is also important to recognise that biblical music, songs of praise, psalms and hymns are neither African nor Western in origin, but of Hebrew origin. In other words, there are points of similarity between bible culture and African culture which are hardly recognised or interrogated as such.

Are the website contents presenting Africa as being at the very bottom of a global cultural hierarchy as Nyamnjoh(2015)⁵³ queried?The answer is no. This is because there is a bold move to introduce African cultural dressing, music, musical instruments, language and pidgin in some religious communication contents in some Nigerian, Ethiopian, Botswana and sites. Are they apologetic, manifesting colonial mentality? There seems to be a gradual shift from colonial mentality to global mentality, for instance, in the sense that church auditorium architecture is almost slavishly tending towards standards available on the World Wide Web and perceived as global standards or world class. Also, female dress sense which previously excluded trousers in many congregations in now increasingly tending towards trousers; and this is arguably perceived as a

⁴⁹Sylvanus, N. (2007). The fabric of Africanity: Tracing the global threads of authenticity, *Anthropological Theory*, Vol 7: 2, 201-216 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607077298>

⁵⁰Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies* Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43. <https://www.researchgate.net/>

⁵¹Idang, G. (2015). African Culture and Values *Phronimon* Volume 16 | Number 2 | pp. 97-111 <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/phronimon/v16n2/06.pdf>

⁵²Crow, L. (2016) The Church: God's Media Representation, *Generals International* <https://www.generals.org/articles/single/the-church-gods-media-representation/>

⁵³Nyamnjoh, F. (2015). Journalism in Africa: modernity, Africanity. *African Journalism Studies* Vol. 36 Issue 1 pp. 37-43. <https://www.researchgate.net/>

necessity in some deliverance churches where ladies are made to fall under anointing during ministrations.

Conclusion

This study set out to describe how African churches Africanise modernity and modernise Africanity on their websites; and the findings indicate that there is evidence of Africanity on nearly all the websites. It could be said with certainty that both Africanity and modernity are increasingly finding meeting points in the dressing, songs, worship styles, language (code switching) and musical renditions and translations. However, Africanising and modernising contents, rather than reflect an articulated creative opposition to stereotypes as Cekwana (2010) stated, or an attempt to pursue a programme of Africanisation in some directions, portray the reality of fast-globalising faith communities engaged with local as much as they engage with global audiences.

Thus, on the one hand, it might be more appropriate to describe the tendency towards external cultures as globalisation rather than modernisation because they target a global audience made up of Africans, African diaspora and other races rather than a specific Western civilisation as modernism theory often assumes. On the other hand, the increase in Africanity contents in songs and worship, for instance, signify a tendency towards “glocalisation”, a term now used to describe the tendency to think global while operating locally.

List of churches and their website addresses

| | |
|---|---|
| ABUNDANT-LIFE GOSPEL CHURCH | http://abundantlifegospelchurch.net/ |
| ALL NATIONS EVANGELICAL CHURCH | http://www.anecgardenofsuccess.org/ |
| APOSTOIC FAITH CHURCH | http://www.afcchicago.org/ |
| APOSTOLIC CHURCH | http://theapostolicchurch.com/ |
| CALVARY LIFE ASSEMBLY | http://www.calvarylifeassembly.org/ |
| CELESTIAN CHURCH OF GOD | http://www.celestialchurch.com/ |
| CENTRALIA CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE | http://www.centraliachurch.com/ |
| CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH | http://www.cacworldwide.net |
| CHRIST CHAPEL INTERNATIONAL CHURCHES | http://www.ccicvi.org |
| CHRIST EMBASSY | http://www.christembassy.org |
| CHRISTIAN CENTRAL CHAPEL INTERNATIONAL | http://www.emmahisong.org |
| CHRISTIAN PENTECOSTAL MINISTRY INTERNA... | http://www.cpmng.org |
| CHURCH OF GOD MISSION INTERNATIONAL | http://www.christembassy.org |
| CHURCH OF NIGERIA | http://www.anglican-nig.org |
| CITY OF LIFE CHRISTIAN CENTER | www.isaiahchristfoundation.org |
| COMMON WEALTH OF ZION ASSEMBLY | http://cozanigeria.org.ng/ |
| CONVENANT OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH | http://mycog.org/ |
| DAYSTAR CHRISTIAN CENTER | http://www.daystarnig.org |
| DEEPELIFEBIBLECHURCH | http://www.deeperlifeonline.org |

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|---|---|
| DIVINE GLORY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH | http://dgccinternational.org/ |
| DOMINON CITY | http://www.dominioncityonline.org |
| DOXA CATHEDRAL | http://www.doxacathedral.org |
| FAMILY HOUSE BIBLE CHURCH | http://www.fathershousebiblechurch.org |
| FOUNTAIN OF LIFE CHURCH | http://www.tfolc.org |
| FOURSQUARE | http://foursquare.org.ng/ |
| GLOBAL HARVEST | https://ghmission.org/ |
| GLORIOUS KING CHRISTIAN CENTER | http://www.gloriousking.org |
| GLORY CHRISTIAN MINISTRY | http://www.glorvland.info |
| GOSPEL LIGHT INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY | http://www.glimcovenant.org |
| GRACE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL CHURCH | http://www.gfconline.org |
| HIS PURPOSE CHURCH | http://www.hispurposechurch.org |
| HOUSE ON THE ROCK | http://www.hotrng.org |
| HOUSEHOLD OF GOD | http://www.householdofgodchurch.com |
| INCORRUPTIBLE SEED CHURCH | http://alcl.com/the-incorruptible-seed/ |
| INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF HIS PRESENCE | http://www.houseofhispresence.org |
| JEHOVA WTNSS | https://www.jw.org/en/ |
| JUBILEE CHRISTIAN CHURCH INTERNATIONAL | http://jubileechristianchurchinternational.org/? |
| KINGDOM CENTER INTERNATIONAL CHURCH | http://kccci.org/ |
| KINGDOM LIGHT MINISTRIES | http://www.klmngr.com |
| KINGS WORLD INTERNATIONAL | http://www.kingsword.org |
| LATER RAIN ASSEMBLY | http://www.latterrainassembly.org |
| LIBERATION CITY CHURCH | http://liberationcity.org/ |
| LIBERTY FOUNDATION GOSPEL MINISTRY | http://www.helenukpabio.org |
| LIVING FAITH TERBANACLE(WINNERS) | http://www.winnerscanaanland.org |
| LIVING SPRING CHAPEL INTERNATIONAL | http://www.livingspring-chapel.org |
| LIVING WORD MINISTRIES | http://www.lwmii.org |
| LOGOOS MINISTRIES INC | http://www.logosiw.org |
| LOGOS AFLAME MINISTRIES | http://www.gracejohnsonministries.org |
| LOVE AFLAME MINISTRY | http://loveaflameministries.com/ |
| METHODIST CHURCH OF NIGERIA | http://www.methodistchurchnigeria.org |
| MINISTRY OF LIFE | http://www.ministryoflifechurch.org |
| MOUNTAIN OF FIRE MINISTRY | http://www.mountain-of-fire.com |
| NEW EDEN WORSHIP CENTER | www.newedenworshipcentre.org/church.htm |
| NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION | http://www.nigerianbaptist.org/ |
| PEOPLE OF POWER CHRISTIAN CENTER INT | http://ppccinternational.org/ |
| POWERLINE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL | http://www.powerlineministries.org |
| REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD | http://www.rccg.org |
| ROYAL HOUSE OF GRACE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH | http://www.royalhouseofgrace.com |
| SALEM INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CENTER | http://www.saleminternational.net |
| SALVATION MINISTRY | https://smhos.org/ |

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| SURE WORD ASSEMBLY | http://www.surewordassembly.org |
| SWORD OF THE SPIRIT MINISTRIES | http://www.sotsministries.com |
| SYNAGOGUE CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS | http://www.scoan.org/ |
| THE LIGHTED CHURCH | http://www.thelightedchurch.org |
| THE PRESENT HOUSE | http://www.thispresenthouse.org |
| THE RADIANT CHURCH | http://www.emmaomon.org |
| THE REDEEMED EVANGELICAL MISSION(TREM) | http://www.trem.org |
| UNITED CHURCH OF GOD | http://www.ucgnigeria.org |
| VICTORY CHRISTIAN CHURCH | http://www.frmwo.org |
| WORLD EVANGELISM BIBLE CHURCH | http://www.world-evangelism.org |
| WORLD OF LIFE | http://www.oritsejafor.netfirms.com |