

Influence of Marketing Strategy on Church Sustainability: The Anglican Church of Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) is the oldest church in Kenya and the largest protestant denomination in the country. Since religions were liberalized after the attainment of political independence in AD 1964, the church has experienced declining congregations due to the registration of new denominations, especially the Pentecostal ones. The decline has been noticeable from the beginning of the 21st Century but there are no reports of strategies to resolve the phenomenon. Since congregation members are the customers for a church, the declining phenomenon indicates a marketing problem that requires a marketing strategy. This research investigated how the ACK is operationalizing a marketing strategy and its influence on its sustainability. The ACK operates on standardized structures and a diocese is the highest independent unit. This research was conducted in the diocese of Kirinyaga as the unit of analysis with Wanguru Archdeaconry as the unit of observation. The independent variables were the elements of the marketing mix, namely Product, Promotion, Position and Price strategies while the dependent variable was the church sustainability. Data collection involved 308 participants drawn from the 19 parishes in the Wanguru archdeaconry and included the church leadership and the congregation members. The research instruments were a semi-structured questionnaire and interviews. For the Product variable, the research applied the Maslow Hierarchy of needs theory while for the promotion variable, it was the AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action). For the positioning strategy, the Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning (STP) Model was applied while the Value-Based Pricing theory was used for the price strategy. For church sustainability, the research applied the Triple Bottom Line model. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results indicated that the ACK has not operationalized an effective marketing strategy for while the Gospel as the marketing product of the church was highly rated, there were low scores for Promotion, Position and Price strategies.

Keywords: Congregation, Marketing Concept, Marketing Mix, Strategy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Anglican Church of Kenya

Christianity is the religion for 32.6% of the global population but it first came to Kenya at the end of the 15th Century as European explorers, led by the Portuguese, were seeking a possible sea route to India (Zurlo, 2019). They landed at Mombasa on the Kenya coast in AD 1498 and established a Christian mission station but after encountering many problems, especially the challenge from the dominant Islam religion and the African traditional religions, they closed the station and wound up their missionary work. It was not until the 19th Century that new European explorers returned to the East African coast but this time, their efforts were not only to establish mission stations but also to establish new colonies in East Africa. The new missionaries were led by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) who established a station at Mombasa in AD 1844 and it was the CMS which later became the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). The CMS was soon followed by other missionary groups who founded the Methodist Church of Kenya (MCK) The African Inland Church (AIC), the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and the Roman Catholic Church which became the mainline churches in Kenya. After the Treaty of Berlin in AD 1878, Kenya became a British colony and the Anglican Church of Kenya was viewed as the official church in the colony and was given maximum cooperation by the colonial government and as the two organizations worked in synergy, the ACK was able to establish its stations in all parts of the country (Nthamburi, 2019). During the Mau Mau insurgency (1952-1959), a state of emergency was declared and Africans were forced to live in villages which enabled the missionaries to reach out to more Africans and the ACK grew tremendously

(Owino *et al.*, 2017). However, when Kenya became an independent nation in AD 1964, the new African-controlled government liberalized religions and within a short time, new churches, especially the Pentecostal denominations were registered and these have grown rapidly until they are more than the mainline churches. The new denominations acquired their members from the converts in the mainline churches while gaining the upper hand from the external markets. With the combined efforts of all the churches, Christianity is now the religion for 85.5% of the Kenya population (Faria, 2022).

The ACK is a province within the global Anglican Communion founded in AD 1534 and which has a population of 80 million members while in Kenya, 10.6% of the population are its members (Gathogo, 2020). The Anglican Communion, including the ACK operates on standardized structures and a diocese is the highest independent unit, headed by a bishop. A diocese is made up of archdeaconries headed by an archdeacon and the lowest independent unit is a parish which is headed by a vicar who is an ordained priest with the authority to conduct church rituals such as weddings, Holy Communion and baptism. The parish is the most important unit for it is at that level that the church leaders are in direct contact with the congregations (Webukala, 2011).

B. Church Sustainability

Sustainability is when an organization is able to execute its present strategies successfully but without utilizing its resources in a manner which negatively affects future performance (Batista & Francisco, 2018; Hammer & Pivo, 2016). A sustainable church is one whose members are united and demonstrate obedience to the teachings of the Bible and Ananyan (2016) describes it as “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic”. In the Great Commission, Jesus Christ, on whose teachings the religion of Christianity was founded, commanded the first disciples to spread the Gospel to all nations (Mathew 28:18-20). A sustainable church has no geographical boundaries and is constantly reaching out to members of the society to transform them to Christian ethics (Acts 2:44-46; Creech, 2016). With the rising competition in all markets, including religious ones, the formulation for sustainability strategies have become a continuous process. Up to the end of the 20th Century, it was the normal practice for secular organizations to be concerned with profits only but the 21st Century organizations are approaching sustainability from what Ellington (1997) calls the “Triple Bottom Line” (TBL). In this model, organizations must consider not just the profits which are essential for funding the organization operations but also the social effects of the operations on the society and the environment. The TBL model has been recognized as important in sustainability because when an organization shows concern in social affairs and the environment, it shows that it cares for the people who are the reason for its existence as customers and how those customers live. This creates loyalty and commitment to the organization which are important for sustainability (Correia, 2019).

1) The social element in TBL

The Church in Kenya has been involved in the social issues in the country since its establishment in the 19th Century and the ACK has played important roles during the colonial period and after independence (Kioko, 2020). ACK was involved in the social roles before the colonial government for it was the ACK which established the first school in Kenya, the first technical training college, the first medical center and the first Theological College, all which have grown into recognized institutions in the country (Akattuet al., 2020). These early activities by ACK have contributed to its sustainability as most of the national leaders have attained their leadership positions through their studies in those institutions and they are loyal to the organization which facilitated the achievement (Akambi & Beyers, 2017). Despite the Kenya government taking over the running of the former missionary initiated schools, they are still identified with the church and local church leaders are members of the school Board of Governors (BOG). The church has also established its private schools and because of the church discipline and morality, they are popular and perform very well. The church hospital charges are also reasonable and are fully covered by the government National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) with the church encouraging the members to subscribe to the fund to take care of emergencies. Through the social involvement of the ACK, the members have been economically empowered for through their education, they have managed to be employed in the government and the private sectors while others have established successful businesses. The leaders are involved in fund raising for the church and due to their high positions, they are able to invite other senior members of the society who contribute to the required funds (Akattu *et al.*, 2020). The ACK has also been involved in assisting poor families to pay for school fees, medical bills and during times of draught and famine, the church is involved in food distribution. The church has been involved in the rehabilitation of drug addicts, prostitutes and released prisoners (Ayiemba *et al.*, 2015; Nyamperi *et al.*, 2015).

2) The economic element in TBL

A church needs funds for its sustainability, to retain its current operations and to expand the operations to gain further market advantage (Falaye, 2022). The ACK has developed various methods for its financial sustainability. The leading method is through donations during church meetings in obedience to the exhortation that one should not go to the house of God empty handed (Deuteronomy, 16:10-17). Church

members are asked to donate generously for God's work and when a member does not have the money especially in the rural areas, the church accepts gifts from the flocks and farms which are then sold after the church service. During the church service, Members are also encouraged to give their tithes or 10% of their income to the church. The ACK also encourages the members to give thanks to God for the blessings they have received (Bururia *et al.*, 2014; Leviticus, 27:30). These three are the major sources of funds but in most cases, the funds raised are not sufficient and the church turns to fund raising and the most common method is through what Kenyans call "*Harambee*", a term introduced by Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya immediately after the country attained political independence and which means "pulling together" (Ochanda, 2013). The church invites a guest of honor who raises money independently and together with friends, they go to the church meeting where the congregation is asked to support the guests. It is with this method that the ACK has managed to build schools, hospitals, buy land, establish technical training institutions and build beautiful church sanctuaries. The church has also ventured into business and has built rental houses, vocational and retreat centers, hospitals and is involved in insurance brokerage and the sale of bottled water. The ACK Diocese of Kirinyaga has also established a television station which has played major roles in the church promotion but also as a source of funds from the advertisements (Kagumu, 2016).

3) *The environment element in TBL*

The church views the concept of environmental conservation as a direct command from God for the first human beings according to the Bible were instructed to take care of all God's creation including the environment (Genesis 1:28-30). The early missionaries encouraged environment conservation and they brought to Kenya timber trees that were common in Europe but not found in Kenya such as pines and fruit trees like apples, pears, plums and oranges. They also introduced flowers like roses which were planted at the mission stations and converts were encouraged to plant the same in their homesteads. It was easy to identify a Christian's homestead from the beauty of the compound and many Africans converted to Christianity due to that attraction (Pillay, 2012). The missionaries also encouraged Christians to be involved in the annual tree planting day in the country and they established tree and flower nurseries where the seedlings were offered free on that day. This is a tradition that has been maintained and ACK churches are made conspicuous by the beauty of their compounds. The missionaries also taught on the importance of soil and water conservation and the dangers of using chemicals carelessly for farming purposes (Soyapi, 2019).

C. *Marketing Strategy*

According to Kottler (2019), marketing is "the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit". The rapid development of technology especially from the last quarter of the 20th Century has turned the world into a global village due to the ease in communication and production, leading to a proliferation of goods and services which are available from every part of the world and with fast delivery, the market has become very turbulent (Jain & Yadav, 2017). The 21st Century organizations are market and technology-driven with the need to innovate products that satisfy the customer needs otherwise products with the same characteristics are available from competitors. To ensure a market advantage, with agility in innovation and delivery, modern organizations have transformed to flat structures and globalization. Churches are facing the same turbulent market environment with the numerous churches being registered annually and a rise in the use of the radio, television and mobile phones to reach out to those in the most remote parts of the country (Cochrane, 2014).

Marketing strategies are based on the marketing concept that the customer is the most important element. The word strategy is derived from the Greek word "*strateia*" which means "a war" and the term marketing strategy denotes an organization's plans to reach its customers with better innovated products or services and with more perceived value than from the competitors (Bozkurt & Engen, 2016). The marketing concept applies what has been termed as the "marketing mix" or the "4Ps of marketing". These are namely the Product, Promotion, Position and Price strategies. In a marketing strategy, the organization needs to innovate a quality product which meets the needs of its customers and according to Junianto (2018), the congregation members are the customers in a church organization. The product of a church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible and the church has promoted the Gospel through evangelism to both the internal and external markets and over the two thousand years of its existence has positioned it through the construction of church buildings, fellowships and pastoral care services (Baeza, 2013; Mathew 28:18-20). Technology has become an important tool for not only the promotion of the Gospel but also in positioning it. This was appreciated at the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in AD 2020 when social gatherings were prohibited globally and so congregations could not meet physically in church buildings or fellowships but those churches which had invested in technology such as radio and television stations actually experienced growth with their congregations (Osei-Tutu *et al.*, 2021; Sulkowsky & Ignatowsky, 2010).

The mainline churches have resisted the call to transform to market orientation with the argument that the church is a spiritual organism and cannot be related with secular organizations whose interest in marketing practices and customers is for profit purposes whereas the church is interested in the congregation spiritual well-being. Indeed, Guinness (2012) asserted that for the church to apply marketing practices in its propagation of the Gospel is tantamount to “dining with the devil” and would secularize the church. Church leaders have been cautioned against the use of marketing as a tool for their growth strategies because Jesus cannot be a brand to be marketed and neither can His Gospel and applying marketing practices would secularize a spiritual organism (Cronshaw, 2004; Stevenson, 2009). However, Kotler (2019) asserts that the main objective of the church is to transform society to Christian ethical characteristics and so marketing strategies are appropriate for reaching out to the targeted society. According to Gokani and Caragata (2020), the Great Commission by Jesus Christ to his disciples was a marketing assignment in which they were instructed to promote the Gospel to the whole world. The growth of the evangelical churches has been attributed to their operationalization of the Great Commission for they have made it the leading church policy. It is through the Great Commission that Christianity is the religion for 35% of the global population (Zurlo *et al.*, 2019).

1) Product strategy

The marketing concept is that the customer is the most important element in a marketing strategy and an organization should introduce a product which meets the needs of the customers following the Maslow hierarchy of needs (Bowen, 2021; Kehinde, 2016). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the product for the church and should meet the spiritual needs of the members by encouraging, strengthening, comforting and edifying them at their points of those needs (1 Corinthians 14:2-5; Junianto, 2018). Before the preparation of the Gospel message and choosing the right passage to base the sermon delivery, there is the need to know the spiritual needs of the church members and then seek the passage from the Bible that meets the needs (Brown, 2012; Pillay, 2017). This demands the contextualization of the Gospel which would consider the audience, the environment and the prevailing needs of the community (Ogunbanwo, 2020). According to Nkonge (2011), the Anglican clergy are well trained in Theology and Homiletics which includes the art of preparing a sermon and preaching. The topic of a sermon is announced by the preacher at the beginning of the sermon.

The relevance of the Gospel message as the church product has been complicated by the advanced technology of the 21st Century where the customers have a wide selection from global sources and it has become easy to listen to the sermons even on a mobile telephone. Consequently, if the customers do not consider the topic of the sermon as meeting their spiritual needs, they quickly change to other sources (Malmstrom, 2016). At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in the early months of AD 2022, it was normal for someone to be on a communication gadget all through the day and only those churches which were making marketing research on the needs of the congregations were able to retain their members and when the restrictions were lifted, those who had migrated continued attending services in their new congregations and so many churches lost members while those which were market-oriented gained more members from a global market (Osei-Tutu *et al.*, 2021).

2) Promotion strategy

The promotion of the Gospel has always been through preaching and like in any marketing promotion, it follows the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action). The attention of the congregation is first attracted by the attire of the leaders. In the ACK, the clergy and Lay Readers wear church uniforms that are well maintained. When the laity are the preachers, they would normally wear smart clothes and the men will wear ties. Ladies are not allowed to preach when wearing clothes that are deemed to be indecent (Maran *et al.*, 2021). Preaching is public speaking and the voice of the speaker matters in gaining attention. Members of the clergy in the ACK undergo voice training but not the laity including the lay readers. The next element of attracting attention in sermon presentation is the topic of the sermon. If the topic is not relevant, the listener will not pay any more attention and it is possible to see the members chatting among themselves during the sermon, talking or browsing on their mobile phones or even sleeping (Castillo, 2010). If the preacher has gained the congregation's attention, the next step is to develop interest in the contents of the sermon. Jesus used to gain the attention of his listeners by using parables that they could relate with. Good preachers still use examples that the audience will understand from current affairs and media reports (Stuart, 2014). Public speakers also use gestures not only to gain attention but also to illustrate or give emphasis to spoken words (Cravotta *et al.*, 2019).

For a customer to develop a desire for a product, there is need to show the characteristics of the product in relation to the customer's need. The needs of congregational members are psychological and could be the cause of fear and uncertainty. A preacher speaks words which encourage, strengthen, comfort and edify the audience (1 Corinthians 14:2-5; Edward, 2017). By developing the desire for the Gospel, they would like to acquire it and the Bible states that through faith, the words are written in their hearts (Jeremiah, 31:33). With this desire, a person takes the step of accepting the teachings of the Gospel and becomes a

“born-again” Christian. In the Pentecostal churches, it is normal practice to call for those who have accepted the Gospel to identify themselves to be prayed for but it is not a common practice in the ACK and other mainline churches (Krause, 2020).

3) *Position strategy.*

Once the existence of a product has been brought to the attention of the customers, then there is need to ensure the easy availability of the product. In business organizations, the normal practice is to establish warehouses and shops and for service providers, they open offices in the most accessible locations (Adigure, 2020). Different segments in society have different needs which are influenced by various factors including gender, age, education, and cultures. The ACK applies the Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning (STP) Model and has segmented its congregations by age and gender (Camilleri, 2018). Those members of any gender between the ages of 16 and 35 years are classified as youths. The members between the ages of 36 and 60 years are in two segments according to their gender as women and men while all those over 60 years of any gender are grouped into one segment. This enables the preachers to prepare sermons aimed at the different groups with particular days reserved for each group.

The church has positioned the Gospel by building churches where the members can attend the church services and these buildings are easily identified by the symbol of a cross, being the emblem for Christianity (Johns, 2019). In this case, it is the customer who looks for the product and the church building identifies where the product can be found (Zoelen, 2019). There are times when a customer cannot access the Gospel in a church sanctuary for various reasons such as disability or sickness and for such cases, the Gospel is taken to the customer through pastoral care visits (Jibiliza, 2021). The Bible states that a church is where two or three are gathered for worship (Mathew 18:19-20) and where Christians live in the same neighborhood, they are encouraged to form fellowship groups where the Gospel is preached and this has brought close unity among Christians and has attracted other neighbors who are not members of the ACK (Li et al., 2019). With the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in AD 2020, congregations and fellowships were prohibited and churches turned to technology including radio and television to reach out to their members. During the peak of the epidemic, Christianity grew even more as people now had time to listen to the Gospel since the entertainment centers had been closed and watching television became a form of relaxation and church broadcast channels were available even on ordinary mobile telephones (Moyer, 2015),

4) *The price strategy*

The price of a product is important to the customer because there are other products available for the same price. The marketing price strategy is based on the Value Based Pricing theory in which customers evaluate the various options available for the same price and choose the best one that meets their needs (Porcheva, 2011). The church was founded for the transformation of society to Christian ethics as taught by Jesus Christ and there is a price for the transformation and it can cost heavily (Pillay, 2012). The Bible narrates the story of Zacchaeus who met Jesus and decided to follow him and as a tax collector, it was a costly decision for he declared that he would refund all that he had obtained using unethical means and would give half of his wealth to the poor. The same happened when a rich young man wanted to be a follower of Jesus and was told to give all his wealth to the poor before he could be a disciple (Luke 19: 1-10; Mcleary, 2007). In Kenya, drugs have made some individuals very wealthy but transformation to Christian ethics would mean the end of that lucrative business. The same applies to corruption which has had devastating effects on Kenya’s economy while making some leaders to be millionaires through corrupt land deals, tenders and theft of public funds (Mungathia, 2020). Immorality has become a common feature in Kenya with prostitutes even advertising their services openly, yet prostitution is a criminal offence in Kenya. Young boys are also turning to homosexuality as a means of earning income. A Christian convert has to forfeit all the benefits from such unethical but financially rewarding practices.

Christian ethics however has benefits which make the conversion worthy. Christian families are known for peace and stability and because of not wasting money through alcohol, drugs and immorality, they tend to have more wealth and are admired for their stable families pleasant homesteads. They are also liked at their places of work because of their devotion to their tasks, love for peace with the workmates and when involved in trade union negotiations, they are known to be reasonable (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017). Christian business leaders are also successful for the customers trust their products and prices (Buren, 2019). During the post- election violence of AD 2007 and AD 2017 in Kenya, it was the Christian converts in the various locations who intervened between the fighting groups and persuaded them to go back to their normal peaceful lives with the Christian leaders, especially from the ACK going to great lengths to bring back peace in the country (Mwaura & Martinon, 2010).

The price for the Gospel is appreciated when the converts give testimonies on how God has blessed them in life since they got transformed to Christian ethical characteristics and as they narrate how God has taken them through periods when they had lost all hope. The other price one has to pay in conversion is the cost

of evangelism as the converts pay for the cost of maintaining the church in the fulfilment of its mission as per the Great Commission by Jesus Christ (Krause, 2020).

II. METHODOLOGY

The research was qualitative and applied the philosophy of interpretivism with explanatory and descriptive designs. The target population was the Anglican Church of Kenya and because ACK operates on standardized structures, the unit of analysis was the ACK Diocese of Kirinyaga while the unit of observation was the Wanguru Archdeaconry. A total of 308 participants were targeted and the sample selection was through purposive sampling for the church leaders who included the clergy, lay readers, evangelists and the church executives with 28 targeted participants. For the congregations, the sample selection was through random sampling technique. The ACK congregations are segmented according to age and gender with the youth segment being members of any gender who are aged between 16- and 35 years. The rest of the congregation is segmented by gender into women aged between 36-60 years and women aged over 60 years. The same applies to the male segments which were for those aged 36 to 60 years and those aged over 60 years. The objective of the research was to determine the influence of marketing strategy on the sustainability of the ACK by investigating the impacts of the product, promotion, position and price strategies as the independent variables on the dependent variable of church sustainability. The research instruments were a semi-structured questionnaire with open ended questions and interviews. The response rate was 76.3%. The data analysis used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for linear regression between the independent and dependent variable with multicollinearity for the combined marketing strategy variables.

III. SUMMARY OF DATA ANALYSIS

The participants responded to the questionnaire on a Likert scale of 1-5 and to obtain the characteristics of the data, the measures of Central tendency of the mean and the standard deviation were applied to each variable. The results are indicated in Fig. 1.

The mean score for the marketing strategy was 2.87 which on a Likert scale of 1-5 is a low figure. The indicators for the product strategy were the participants' evaluation of how the Gospel as the product of the church encouraged, strengthened, comforted and edified them and it had a mean score of 4.06 with a standard deviation of 0.66. The data indicated that the ACK had a product which was attractive to the congregation members and was meeting their needs. The promotion variable was evaluated on the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action) on how the preaching gains the congregation's attention, their interest developed a desire for the message of the Gospel and motivated the members to take action by accepting the teachings of the Gospel and transforming to Christian lifestyles. The promotion strategy had a mean score of 2.34 with a standard deviation of 0.13. The youth had the lowest score for ACK Gospel promotion with a mean score of 2.1. To the young people, the promotion was boring and did not attract their attention or interest, especially with the use of the vernacular languages whereas in schools or places of work, they used the national languages of Swahili and English. The positioning strategy had a mean score of 2.30. While the score for the indicator of church buildings was 3.52 there was a low score of 1.97 for conducting outreach missions to the external market and 1.63 for the use of technology to position the Gospel. The mean score of 2.04 for pastoral care practices was also low, considering that pastoral care was a direct command by Jesus Christ and is considered an important role for church leaders (John 21:16; Magezi & Nanthambwe, 2022). The Price strategy had a mean score of 2.77. The participants gave a low mean score of 2.3 for donations and explained that whereas they like donating their financial resources to God's work, the finances were not being utilized for their spiritual benefits for it included overseas touring trips for the clergy and buying them cars for personal use. Testimonies had a low score of 1.99 with the explanation that it is not normal for ACK preachers to call for testimonies unless someone requests for special permission to give the testimony before the church service starts. It is also not a common practice for the preacher to call for those who have accepted the Gospel and would like to be prayed for to identify themselves. For the dependent variable of church sustainability, the mean score was 2.04 with the highest score being on environmental cleanliness at 3.24 and social amenities at 2.5. However the scores were low on Corporate Social Responsibility (1.88), business projects (1.38), soil conservation (1.94) and forest conservation at 1.38.

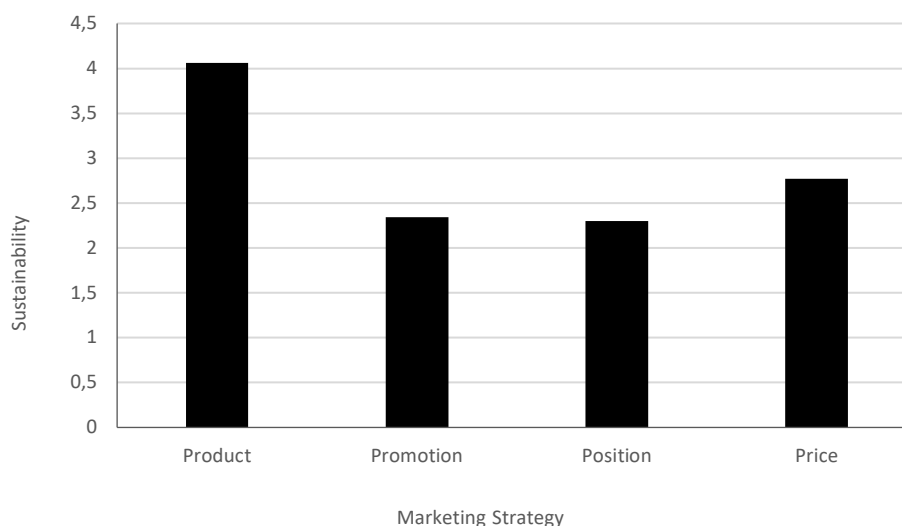


Fig. 1. Summary of Results for Marketing Strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data analysis revealed that the ACK was not effective in its operationalization of the marketing strategy. The church had a good and desirable product which could meet the needs of the congregation. However the other elements of the marketing mix were not effective. The reasons given for this difference was that the clergy, who are the main marketers in the church are well trained in theology which includes the subjects of Homiletics, Missions and Evangelism as core subjects. There are five Theological training colleges for the ACK and they use standardized curriculums. However, the subjects of Leadership and Management are not part of the curriculums. The students are not taught on the relationships between the subjects they learn at the colleges and the concepts of marketing. Since the 21st Century organizations are market driven, the church should also transform to market orientation and this study recommends that leadership and marketing studies be introduced as part of the curriculums for the clergy to appreciate their role in the operationalization of a marketing strategy for the sustainability of the church and for the ACK to be a 21st Century market driven organization. This would enable ACK to resolve the declining phenomenon which has been observed in the church.

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