

GETTING YOUNG ADULTS BACK TO CHURCH: CAN MARKETING PRINCIPLES HELP?



Church membership among young adults is decreasing at a rapid rate. Younger members of society have enormous work pressure and unlike previous generations, ample choice for leisure, relaxation and social activities. Increased work pressure and vast entertainment choices may be distracting them from attending church.

A question that begs answering is whether marketing principles could be used by churches to attract and retain young adults. A study was conducted by a research team, including [Michelle van der Merwe](#) in the [Department of Marketing Management](#) to determine whether physical and non-physical atmospheric cues in the servicescape could be applied to the church servicescape to encourage young adults to return to church.

The research was conducted among 200 young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 in three different church denominations – the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Church and Doxa Deo. The respondents' attitude towards their church service experience was measured using six factors, namely: music experience, layout and design, functionality, appropriateness, atmospherics and signs and symbols, which combined, refer to the servicescape.

The findings of this study indicated that young adults agreed that music was the most likeable aspect of the service, and a strong motivator to attend church services. There is a strong preference for modern music compared to organ music. The ideal servicescape should make use of a good combination of colours and use inspiring and sophisticated signs and symbols. Attributes of layout and design should ideally be inviting and comfortable, uncluttered, provide sufficient space and be functional, cosy and welcoming. A key finding was that atmospherics relating to a welcoming, cosy, homely and friendly atmosphere are more important than the physical aspects of layout and design.

The study concludes by suggesting that superficial changes to the church servicescape may be very limiting in increasing church attendance. A positive servicescape could improve church attendance, but investments in the servicescape alone are not sufficient. The possibility exists that the actual message and sense of fellowship are more likely to determine whether or not young adults attend church.

The full reference for this study is:

[Van der Merwe, M.C.](#), Grobler, A.F., Strasheim, A. & Orton, L., 2013. Getting young adults back to church: a marketing approach. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 69(2):1-12. [Online] Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i2.1326>.