UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

MASS MEDIA USAGE BY INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES IN GHANA

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THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

JULY 2018
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of research undertaken by Isaac Kwadwo Boadu under the supervision of Prof. Elizabeth Amoah and Rev. Dr. Cosmas E. Sarbah of the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana. Any mistakes or errors found in this thesis are solely that of the researcher.

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, there has been a remarkable rise in the use of the mass media by all religious groups in Ghana. This is largely due to the recent liberalization of the Ghanaian media. Focusing on these developments, this study has examined the usage of the media by traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana. The study examines the influence that the appropriation of modern media technologies has brought on the current face of the indigenous religion in Ghana. The most popular among the media used by the traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana are the television, radio, internet and social media. This study, has particularly highlighted how the traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana have employed the use of the mass media to advertise and promote the African traditional religion in Ghana. In discussing the issues at stake, the study employed the phenomenological and qualitative approaches in the analysis of the issues that emerged from the study. The study also relied on interviews that basically focused on three selected traditional priests for the study. The theory of mediatization was employed as a framework to guide the analysis of the study.

In highlighting the development and the effects on the use of the media on religion in general, the study has discussed the influence of new media technologies on African indigenous religious practitioners. Some of the impact and/or influence discussed centered on advertisement, the role of mediation, economics of brand names as well as the transnational networks emanating from the use of the media. Some of the findings made in the study show that not all traditional priests and priestesses undergo the normal or stipulated time of three years in the training of traditional priesthood as espoused by some scholars. The study also found out that, not all the people displaying themselves in the media can be properly designated or categorized as traditional priests. The study found out that the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana are purposely to make themselves relevant by responding to modernity and at the same time, promoting the African traditional religion. The study recommends the need to introduce courses in religion and media especially within the study of African Traditional Religion at the Universities to see how the indigenous traditional religion is responding to modernity through the appropriation of modern media technologies.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late Father, Samuel Kusi Boadu, my mother, Veronica Birago, my siblings, my Bishop, Most Rev. Dominic Yeboah Nyarko and all the Seminarians of the Catholic Diocese of Techiman. May God’s grace continue to be enough for us all.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am most grateful to God for his love and mercies to me and the grace of travelling mercies throughout this moment of my studies and research work. My profound gratitude goes to my supervisors Prof. Elizabeth Amoah and Rev. Dr. Cosmas E. Sarbah, lecturers at the Department for the study of Religions. Prof Amoah was more than a supervisor for me. She encouraged me and urged me to work harder when the going became very tough. Without her constructive criticisms, suggestions and recommendations, I would not have had the courage to complete this piece of work. I am grateful to Rev. Dr. Cosmas E. Sarbah for taking time out of his busy schedule to read through my work and for offering concrete and constructive suggestions. I salute all the Lecturers of the Department for the study of Religions for their time, patience, corrections and their constructive comments and encouragement throughout the period of my study.

I am grateful to all the traditional Priests and priestesses that I interviewed namely, Nana Akosua Anto, Okomfo Mary, all of Anyinaso in the Ashanti region, Nana Ankomah Adjei of Bredi, and Nana Kwaku Bonsam of Afrancho. Their sense of respect, hospitality, and openness was tremendous. I will also like to thank and acknowledge the support I received from two of my classmates who did the arrangement for me to be able to get in touch with three of the traditional priests I interviewed. I am grateful to you Frs. John Adjei Boamah and Joseph Louis Antwi-Boasiako.

I wish to thank in a special way, my Bishop, Most Rev. Dominic Yeboah Nyarko, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Techiman for his keen interest in the education of his priests and for nursing and ensuring that this dream of my study comes to pass by providing all the needed funds. I thank all my parishioners for their constant support and prayers. To everyone I say thank you for your immense contributions and prayers. May the merciful God bless and keep you all.
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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In recent times, throughout Ghana, there has been a marked rise of the use of the electronic media such as radio, TV, Video, internet etc.¹ by the adherent (particularly the leaders, that is the priest, priestesses and the divine healers) of the African Traditional Religion. This has attracted a lot of public attention and invariably, increased the activities and the patronage of their services by interested individuals. Today’s popularity and accessibility of the media means that the boundaries of religious communities are being constantly redefined. Today, unlike before, traditional priests, healers and diviners freely advertise their services on the television, radio, internet especially the social media, and offer various therapeutic substances and rituals for those standing in need of help.²

In Ghana today, spiritual healers and/or traditional priests and priestesses are asserting their presence through advertisement in the media. They are mounting billboards and signposts across the country to promote their services. From larger structures to miniature signposts; the traditional priests and priestesses are advertising their shrines and services which include advice on career success, wealth, good marriages, booming business, as well as problem-free visa acquisition. Major Highways in Ghana such as Accra-Kumasi, Kumasi-Sunyani, Koforidua- Bunso, Kasoa-Cape Coast among others are lined with such billboards.³ On the Accra-Nsawam road, one such noticeable billboard is that of the

¹ The word “media” is used in this study to generally refer to both print and electronic media. Electronic media in this study specifically refers to television, radio and the social media and/or the internet while the print media is used in reference to signpost or billboards or posters.


³ These notifications were made by the writer as a result of his personal tour on these roads. Some of the information was also given to me by friends who usually use these roads.
enigmatic priest Nana Kwaku Bonsam. Nana Bonsam’s billboard standing defiantly on the Accra-Nsawam road, describes him as a “powerful spiritual man” and “the great authentic man”.

Evidently, religions and cultures have their own means of communication in one way or the other. Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons, argue that “in traditional cultures throughout the world, interpersonal communications took place within a universe constituted by the symbolic discourse of religion, and was, in large measure, the product of that discourse.”

They further postulate that, “although the realms of the sacred and the profane in individual and social experiences could be distinguished from each other, both realms, as well as their demarcation, were essentially ordered by symbolic constructs.”

Thus, ordinary life events, including techno-economic and subsistence activities, could and did serve as media for the transmission of religious postulates. This means that over the years, there have been different medium of communication that aided and enhanced the existence and activities of people and their cultures.

The use of the media by the indigenous religion is not a novel practice. Priests/priestesses and practitioners have used traditional media like symbols, art, dance, drum language, body language, sign, items, proverbs etc. in their religious activities. However, the recent expansive interest in the modern media technologies and the public display of most of the practices and ritual activities of the indigenous religion which takes place in the public domain raises, a lot of academic and scholarly interest of how such new developments are helping in shaping the public image of the religion as well as its impact or influence on

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people. Some of these priests and priestesses are advertising their services on Facebook, twitter and other social media appealing to people to come to them for spiritual enhancement. Some of the priests and priestess come on the screen of the various Television stations such as Multi TV, Metro TV, Angel TV to display their powers, sometimes producing money through religio-magical means and making their viewers believe that they make instant money for people.

This research attempts to investigate and find out what is propelling or has necessitated the modern forms of media usage by indigenous priests and priestesses. It seeks to investigate whether the indigenous priests and priestesses use of the media such as television, radio, and social media is in confluence with Birgit Meyer’s assertion that “the media [such as television, radio and internet] are substantial ingredients through which the power of God is made tangible.” That is to say, these indigenous priests and priestesses are making use of the media due to the fact that they have come to understand the importance of the media to their beliefs and practices, and so, they are employing its usage to promote the worship of the traditional religion. Attention would be paid to how well they have appropriated the various forms of the media and the significant role and/or influence they are making or have already made on the practice of the traditional religion among the Ghanaian populace. The prolific use of electronic and even digital mass media by the traditional priests and priestesses in most parts of the country is fascinating and raises a lot of interesting scholarly attention and discourse.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Every religion in one way or the other uses various forms of media to transmit information. In Ghana today, there are numerous radio and television stations scattered across the length and breadth of the country. Interestingly, most of these stations are owned by some religious leaders or practitioners. The radio and television stations owned by these religious practitioners are used to air and/or transmit their religious activities and services throughout the day. However, the indigenous religion until recently has not had the huge media publicity they now enjoy today. Recently, some traditional priests and priestesses’ engagement with the modern forms of the media has been very pronounced. This can be explained partly due to the liberalization of the Ghanaian media. Interestingly, some priests and priestesses of the indigenous traditional religion like their Christian counterparts have gone to the extent of owning radio and television stations that market their products and display their activities for public consumption. Even though this is an emerging feature of the indigenous African Religion, very little attention has been given to this new trend in indigenous religion by scholars. Again, whereas some traditional priests and priestesses support the use of the media for advertising and promoting the traditional religion, others do not. In this study, the researcher seeks to unravel the reasons that have influenced the use of media by some traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana.

1.3 Research Question(s)

In looking at the above research problem, the main research questions derived from the study are:

i. What factors have accounted for the recent usage of the mass media by indigenous traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana?

ii. What forms of the mass media are currently being used by traditional priests/priestesses in Ghana and how do they use them?
iii. Are the priests and priestesses’ usage of the modern media being influenced by modern religious market system or trend?

In order to achieve the objective of this study, other more overarching questions will be asked including; is the usage of modern media by the priests and priestesses influenced by other religions such as Christianity? Are they trying to compete with the other religions who are marketing themselves? Or is it a way of rebranding themselves?

1.4 Objective(s) of the Study

The research aims at the following;

i. To investigate the factors that have motivated the use of modern forms of the mass media by the indigenous priests and priestesses in Ghana.

ii. To identify the various forms or types of the mass media used by traditional priests and priestesses.

iii. To find out whether or not the usage of the mass media by Ghanaian traditional priests and priestesses is influenced by modern religious market system or trend which are highly influenced by the use of modern media.

1.5 Scope and Focus of the Study

Generally, the study focuses on the use of the modern media technologies by selected priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion in Ghana. As mentioned earlier, the priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion have, in recent times, taken a frontal role by displaying and advertising their services on different media outlets such as television, radio and social media in Ghana. This phenomenon has given the indigenous religion somewhat a new public outlook and raised the public awareness and the visibility of the traditional religion on the Ghanaian airwaves. As pervasive agents of communication, the radio and
the television, as well as the internet have helped to publicize the indigenous religion in the Ghanaian public sphere.

In order to give a general overview of the Ghanaian situation as it pertains to the use of the mass media by the adherents of the indigenous religion, this study focuses on traditional priests and priestesses in two different geographical contexts, namely; the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study particularly focused on three renowned traditional priests and priestess from these two regions. They include Okomfo Bright of Bredi-Nkoranza, who is the “Akomfohene”, chief traditional priest of the Brong Ahafo Region; Nana Kwaku Bonsam in Akomadan Afrancho, Kumasi and Okomfo Mary of Sekyere Dumase in the Ashanti Region. These priests and priestess were selected because they have gained public visibility for their use of the mass media. Okomfo Bright’s family for instance, is known to own the Akyea FM in Nkoranza whereas Nana Kwaku Bonsam is popularly known for his usage of the social media especially Facebook, twitter and Instagram. Nana Kwaku Bonsam is arguably one of the most publicized traditional priest in Ghana. He has also gained popularity for the use of social media network such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram. Again, they were also selected because of the importance people attach to their shrines and their popularity in their various locations.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

In combing through literature, one major theory that the researcher found appropriate and very central to this study is the concept of “Mediatization”. The researcher sought to place the study within this concept which emanates from the study of religion and media because it helps in bringing to the fore, a better understanding of the practices of traditional priests and priestesses and their usage of the mass media.
1.6.1 Mediatization of Religion

According to Luis Mauro Sa Martino, the concept of “mediatization refers to the set of transformations that have been taking place in contemporary society and are, in at least a very general level, to the development of media communication, particularly digital and virtual media”. Martino has postulated that, a preliminary definition, taken from a dictionary of media refers to the influence of the “logic” and the “form” of media, especially electronic media, in the communication process. He is of the view that the concept stresses the ubiquitous presence of media communication, from mobile phones to the broadcasts and the internet, as a fundamental aspect of contemporary life.

In an earlier study Stig Hjarvard, a scholar of religion and media, has argued that the studies of Joshua Meyrowitz are of particular importance and/or useful to better understanding the concept of “mediatization”. As highlighted by Martino, in his attempt to explain what “media” are Meyrowitz develops three metaphors to explain their multi-dimensional aspects. These include media as “channel or a conduit”, the media as a “language” and finally, the media as an “environment”. Among these three, what is of particular importance to this study is the media as a channel or a conduit. In the first metaphor, which sees the media as “channel” or a “conduit” through which a sender can pass a message to a receiver, to some extent, highlights the message as free from the constraints of the medium, since it would simply carry information from one point to another. In the view of G.P. Gomes, mediatization takes the media not only as technological element, but as a social issue that goes beyond technology itself to reach the sphere of culture, economy and

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personal relationship. In another media dictionary, Abercrombie and Longhurst define mediatization as the way people have incorporated into their own perceptions, sensations and how it affects the way media communication represents reality. It’s close to what Goffman defines as “frames”, that is, the cognitive and perceptual structures that individuals use to encompass reality.

As argued by Martino, if one considers the understanding of mediatization to mean the articulations between this “media logic” and other instances of everyday life especially as found in the argument raised by scholars like Hjarvard and Livingstone, then one can argue that “mediation” is a sort of core of the mediatization, which is a “meta-process”. For instance, Lynn Schofield Clark stresses the importance of the concept of “mediation” to understanding the relationship between the media and religion. She argues that there is no religion without a kind of “mediation” between the two elements: religion itself claims to be the “mediator” between ordinary life and the transcendental experience that can be reached only through certain practices monopolized by religion. As a mediator, religion thus presents itself as a bridge between the ordinary and the transcendental. According to her, this mediation, however, is only one aspect of religious practice. Thus, religion is not only a matter of communication with the transcendental, but also of sharing the experiences with other people, creating a community, spreading the transcendental message as widely as possible. In this way, religion is also a mediator between the transcendental and the community of worshippers. The notion of “media” and “mediation” denotes an impression

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14 G.P. Gomes, From the Electronic Church to a Mediatized Society, (Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 2010), 111.
18 Clark, Religion Media and the Marketplace, 3.
19 Clark, Religion Media and the Marketplace, 3.
20 Clark, Religion Media and the Marketplace, 3.
that there is a distance that needs to be bridged.\textsuperscript{21} So, intrinsic to religion is a mediation process that both conditions the manifestation of the transcendental and serves as a bridge between the immanent and the transcendent.\textsuperscript{22} So, this extends the definition of media beyond the traditional ones like television, radio and the internet to include but not limited to prayers, phones, medicines etc. As a “mediator” – that is, “something that stands in the middle” – religion is by definition a communicative entity that should be able to get in touch with both extremes of experience – the transcendental, on the one hand, and ordinary people, on the other.\textsuperscript{23}

As Asamoah Gaydu explains, in traditional libation prayers, for example, two types of audience from different realms are distinguished. The primary, but unseen, audience is of deities and spirits for whom the prayer is meant and who form the beneficent audience. The secondary audience is of the human realm and contains the potential beneficiaries of prayer. As the political and religious head of his or her people, the traditional chief (often represented by the linguist or priest) constitutes the link between the human and ancestral worlds. In his capacity as mediator and with eye to see into the supernatural realm, the religious functionary has to invoke the help of the spirit world through libation prayers on festival days and at times of crisis.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, “between the realm of existence – natural and supernatural, physical and spiritual, seen and unseen – are those with ability to invoke and communicate with the benevolent and powerful supernatural realm, in order to bring from

\textsuperscript{22} Francis Khek Gee Lim, “Mediating Christianity in Contemporary Asia”, Studies in World Christianity Vol.18.2, 193.
\textsuperscript{23} Martino, \textit{The Mediatization of Religion}, 41.
there meaning, explanations, strength, health, protection, guidance and direction to those who stand in need of these salvific values.”

In this context, the “Okomfo” or the traditional priest/priestess who is regarded as one with the “eyes to see” beyond the physical, play a much bigger role in the understanding of the religious mediation. The processes of leading to the calling, making and operations of the “okomfo” are particularly important for understanding religious mediation in Africa. Thus, the “okomfo” (priest) is always a person of “sacred power” with eyes to see into the supernatural realm, and the ability to communicate with supernatural reality. He or she can secure meaning and help from there for people and communities in their search for answers to the uncertainties, enigmas and perplexities of life. John Ekem shows why this mediatory role would ensure the survival of such an institution:

"Precisely, akomfo are who they are because of their mediating role in the fight against different forms of evil in Akan communities. Their rigorous training prepares them for this important role as mid-persons between the empirical and meta-empirical worlds. Apart from invoking the supernatural through their akom, Akan traditional priests and priestesses bring supplicants closer to the spirit world by means of their role in sacrificial rites… it is reasonable, therefore, to argue that as long as needs of the above nature remain in Akan communities, traditional priesthood will hardly lose its value for many Akans."

Like all religions, the traditional or indigenous religions that is been discussed here is a mediated phenomenon. Thus, through media such as the radio, television and the internet, the African traditional religion has gained increased visibility in the Ghanaian public sphere. The adherents and/or the functionaries of the indigenous religion are able to use the media as platform or medium to transfer their services or engage the general public. They

25 Asamoah-Gyadu, Sighs and Signs of the Spirit, 98.
are also able to call for blessings and ask for benevolent powers from their deities to heal and bless their audience.

1.7 Methodology
The method of research employed by the researcher in this study is the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. In the study of African Traditional Religion, much emphasis has been placed on the need to adopt the phenomenological approach. Several African scholars have recommended and applied the phenomenological method in their investigations into the indigenous religions of Africa. Their observations appear to underscore phenomenological approach to the study of the indigenous religion as a suitable method.

The researcher employed the phenomenological approach to help him suspend judgements about the phenomenon being studied, by bracketing out potentially distorting presumptions that might distort the actual meaning and/or reasons for the usage of the mass media by Ghanaian traditional priests and priestesses. Thus, using the phenomenological approach in the study of religion does not seek to discredit the significance of, nor the important contribution to knowledge. However, this is to help explain fully, the meaning of religion and avoid evaluative judgements. Again, it is to enable the researcher to open up and take a critical look at the use of the mass media by indigenous priests and priestesses as a “cultural insider” and ‘religious outsider.” Thus, the application of this methodology will

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afford the researcher an opportunity to report and interpret the research results without any biases.

1.7.1 Methods of Data Collection

The researcher employed both the primary and secondary sources as a means of data collection.

1.7.1.1 Primary Sources

The researcher used structured and unstructured interview. The personal interview included having a personal interaction, ‘one on one’, with the respondents. The interview centered on two traditional priests and two priestesses that were selected for the study. Attention was however give to three of them. This is because the researcher only solicited the views of one of the priestesses and did not write much about her. The interviews enabled the researcher and respondents to develop a personal friendship and rapport which also created a conducive environment for friendliness and easy access to information. Again, the researcher by this method interacted and sought further clarification to validate pieces of information already gathered. In such interviews, permission was sought from the respondents to record relevant parts of the interview. The recordings were later transcribed and analysed for the work. As an essential method to the research, it offered the researcher the opportunity to seek the meaning or clarity on some of the reasons of their presence or usage of the media. In all, the researcher interviewed four traditional priests/priestesses which included Okomfo Bright, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, Okomfo Mary and Nana Anto.

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1.7.1.2 Secondary Sources

Looking at the focus and scope of the study, the researcher had to consult different secondary sources including books, journals and articles which were relevant to this study. Due to the focus of the work, the researcher also had to rely on newspapers, the internet and other social media network for some of the data. The electronic media such as the radio and the television was also, largely relied upon.

1.7.2 Samples and Sampling Procedure/Techniques

In this study, the researcher employed the purposive sampling technique to select his respondents. In his work, Research Methods Techniques of Social Research, Tom K. B. Kumekpor argues that in purposive sampling, “the units of the sample are selected not by a random procedure, but they are intentionally picked for study because they satisfy certain qualities which are not randomly distributed but they are typical or they exhibit most of the characteristics of interest to the study.”\textsuperscript{32} The categories of people that were interviewed included traditional priests and priestesses who were the focal point of this study. These respondents were selected on the basis that they possessed relevant information and the researcher drew opinions that were considered to be essential to the study.

1.7.3 Data Analysis

Looking at the nature of the work, a qualitative approach is used in analysing the data. This method relies on the quality of the information based on its relevance to the subjects being studied rather than on the quantity of responses to a particular issue.\textsuperscript{33} Data analysis is a central step in qualitative research. Whatever the data is, it is their analysis that, in a decisive

\textsuperscript{32} Tom K.B. Kumekpor, Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research, (Ghana: Son Life Press and Services, 1999), 72.

way, forms the outcomes of the research. The reasons for employing this approach were because, it helped the researcher to describe the phenomenon being dealt with in this work in a greater and more detailed manner. This method of data analysis was also employed since the researcher dwelt largely on interviews which were intended to elicit detailed information from individual respondents.

1.8 Literature Review

Looking at the structure and focus of the work, the researcher has sought to review some of the existing literature on the subject under study on two thematic headings which include; Religion, Media and Culture, and the African Traditional Religion.

1.8.1 Religion, Media and Culture

In the last decade, a lot of scholars from various academic discipline such as sociology, religion, anthropology, cultural studies and media studies have contributed significantly to the academic study of religion and media. However, a large number of these studies have been focused on the appropriation of the mass media by various Christian traditions especially the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and the Catholic Church. Other religions such as Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism have also had its share. Some studies have also, generally, looked at the intersection of the religion and the media.

Scholars who have written extensively about religions’ engagement with the media in Africa especially, include; Birgit Meyer, J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, Marleen De Witte, Asonzeh Ukah, and Rosalind I.J. Hackett. People like Stewart Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark, Jeremy Stollow and Jolyn Mitchell have focused more on the western context. It is important to note that while most of these scholars have focused their work or concerned themselves with aspects of the media and the Christian or Islamic religious actors, they do
not pay close attention to indigenous/traditional religious actors and the media. Thus, there is no specific literature on the subject under study, but there are, however, enough related literature that are theoretically relevant and serve as a point of departure in most of the issues that are discussed in this study.

For instance, in his work “Religion and Media” Jeffrey H. Mahan, describes the emerging field of religion and media and outlines key issues at play in the field. According to Mahan, the field of religion and media “focuses both on the media and their content and on the reception of media among various publics, as ways to examine the location of religion, the nature of religious practice and the complexity of religious identity and authority.” He argues that with most studies on religion and media, we find “how religious institutions and leaders use traditional and new media; and command of emerging media grants some institutions and leaders increased voice and authority.” This book is very relevant to this study because it helps to understand the relationship between religion and the media and also how they interact. It affords the researcher the opportunity to place into perspective a better understanding of the media within the context of religious services and activities.

Again, in other literature on the subject, “we find evidence that in the emerging media culture, authority shifts from traditional locations such as sacred writings, traditions and religious authorities to the individual internal authority of religious consumers involved in religious self-construction.” He argues further that those in the field typically argue that religion has always been mediated and that studying the mediation of religion is necessary to the understanding of religion. Mahan postulates that in recent times, there is a great deal of religion, or something that looks a great deal like religion, to be found online and in

35Mahan “Religion and Media”, 14.
36Mahan “Religion and Media”, 16.
modern media. In Ghana, for example, videographers create popular melodramas that portray traditional African religious practice as spiritually powerful but evil.\footnote{Mahan “Religion and Media”, 15.}

What is very important and central from Mahan’s work to this study is the idea of religion as one that is intrinsic to the media. Thus, media and religion are inherent bounded to each other. A better understanding of the role and operation of the media helps one to capture succinctly, a better a understating of religion. They are both elements that allow a certain level of connection to place by bridging the distance between them. According to Mahan, we know of “religion” as a “complex phenomenon uniting diverse practices and beliefs.”\footnote{Mahan “Religion and Media”, 15.} He argues that the same can be said about the “media.”\footnote{Mahan “Religion and Media”, 16.} According to him, “we ought not to talk too easily about ‘the media’ in the singular as though there were a single media message, impact or interaction with religion.”\footnote{Mahan “Religion and Media”, 16.} He argues that “while together the various media may constitute media cultures, our examples are of a particular form of religion and a particular medium in cultural context.”\footnote{Mahan “Religion and Media”, 16.} The general theoretical issues raised regarding the fusion that exists between the two disciplines, it gives the researcher an opportunity to understand the key issues that confront him in this work and also, helps him to better relationship between the media and religion in this study.

Another notable scholar in religion and media is Stewart M. Hoover. Hoover has argued that there have been some remarkable changes in the world of religion and that has put to death the idea that religion was at the verge of decline in all sphere of its existence; much of these changes he attributes to the media.\footnote{Stewart M. Hoover, “Religion and the Media in the 21st Century”, \textit{Triépodos, número 29}, (2009), 29.} According to Hoover, “the media are the frame or the window through which we see and understand religions: both from ‘nearby’ and far
It is an undeniable fact that the media is indeed bringing to bare certain events and practices in especially the traditional religious believers. Today, it has become common to see practitioners on television with snakes that are believed to be producing money through magical means. This was considered a story some few years back. Hoover points out that in contemporary life, the ways of being religious have moved out of the protected sphere of religious institution and tradition, and into the open ground of the symbolic marketplace. For him, what this means is that religion now more than ever exists in the media sphere. Though Hoover, was not specific when he dealt with the issue, his claim is applicable to the study since the indigenous traditional religion, whose actors’ usage of the media rightly fall within the context of this study. Hoover, again laments that, ‘unfortunately journalism uses religious conflict, and the potential for conflict, as a way of attracting viewers and selling newspapers. The fact remains that the various media also depend on the activities of religious actors to make money. For Hoover, the fact is that the major religious issues and trends that are so important today cannot be fully addressed or understood without attention to the media. It is therefore not out of order to recognise the involvement of indigenous traditional priests/priestesses in media appropriations in recent times, especially in the Ghanaian context.

Again, another literature that has served a good purpose for this work is Luis Mauro Sa Martino’s work on Mediatization of Religion: When Faith Rocks. In this work, Martino deals with pertinent theoretical and methodological issues in the study of religion and

45 Hoover, “Religion in a Media Age”.
Most importantly, he discusses some of the meanings of the terms “mediation” and “mediatization”, and the relationship with religion. In chapter one of the book, Martino takes his time to painstakingly explore the fundamental meanings of the concepts of “mediation” and “mediated religion” by highlighting the idea of “mediation” as cultural and not technology-driven process. He frames the mediatization of religion in the broader picture of the mediatization of society. Particularly, this work helped the researcher in drawing out a relevant and most suitable framework to guide the entire study.

In another work, Rosalind IJ Hackett argues that the appropriation of the media as it were, has become a universal phenomenon in relation to religion. Hackett argues that “there is virtually no religious organization or community in Africa today, whether traditional, Christian or Muslim, or some other form of religious movement that has not embraced new modes of communication, information, expression, and representation one way or the other depending on their financial means.” It would be difficult for one to deny this assertion.

According to Musa Ibrahim, “media are transitional agencies, instruments, or channels used as means of communication”. He explains that “a ‘medium’ of a certain kind, whether personal, spiritual or technological, is needed in every religion” The media he observes, “create a connection between the present and the absent, or between the visibly present and the invisibly present, or between the physical and the spiritual”. One cannot deny the widely held assertion that the media is the most powerful tool of communication. It helps to promote right things on right time as well as gives real exposure to mass audience.

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50 Rosalind I. J. Hackett, *Religion And Social Tensions: Assessing The Role Of New Media in New Media and Religious Transformation* .
about what is right or wrong. Can we conclude that it is for this very reason that some traditional priests/priestesses in one way or the other are making use of the media? This would mean that, the dynamics of the media has caught up with all religions in Ghana without any exception. Why then has the appropriation of the modern media become only a recent phenomenon in the indigenous traditional religion? This is what Rosalind I. J. Hackett did not touch on which this work would try to find out.

Writing on the appropriation of modern media technologies by Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, Johnsson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu intimates that “the neo-Pentecostal streams of Christianity, have managed to develop a unique religious discursive practice suited to the demands of the media.” For him, ‘the theological discourse of the new churches that he speaks of in his article consists of a crisp, clear and direct message, which speaks to the concerns of broad masses of Ghanaians in terms that are fascinating and enchanting.’ This happens to be exactly the trend that the indigenous priests/priestesses are propagating in the media atmosphere of today. They present to the masses some striking and tantalizing issues of humankind, sometimes in a similar way as the Pentecostals do. They somewhat carry the prosperity messages just as that opined by Asamoah-Gyadu to be the practice of the television images associated with neo-Pentecostalism, which embodies the central theological themes of their movement; that is, theologies of prosperity and the presentation of God as a God of success, possibilities and breakthroughs. The difference is that the pastors normally associate their powers as being an anointing received from God or the Holy Spirit backed by the use of the Bible. The Christians normally have in mind membership drive. The indigenous priests/priestesses

54 J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, “Anointing Through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana” Studies In World Christianity, (2008), 10
highlight on their personal powers in different form and display real events like generating huge sums of money on the screens of Televisions. What Asamoah –Gyadu indeed talks about in his work cited is therefore very significant in this research work.

1.8.2 African Traditional Religion and its Features

African traditional religion has over the years proved very difficult to define; however, in spite of this difficulty, there has always been an attempt to explain it. For a better appreciation of the concept *African Traditional Religion*, there remains the need to analyze the primary words: *African* and *Traditional*. Situating key words or terms within the framework of a given study is an integral part of scholarship. This helps to contextually delineate such terms by clarifying their usage for understanding. The word *African* is used particularly because it speaks of a relation to, or characteristic of Africa, or its people, language, culture, geography, etc.

For the word *Traditional*, through it has been contended by because they argue it is suggestive of that which is ancient, and thus no longer practiced. However, in this study it is used to denote indigenous practices and beliefs, facts, customs, often handed down from generation to generation, unwritten or written. As such, it combines the idea of the past, present and the future. It is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. This is not a ‘fossil’ religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women. However, following extensive field researches in Africa as a continent, regularly occurring, constant, decimal features have been discovered in the

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religious world views of Africans; That is, Belief in a Supreme Being; Belief in spirit beings and smaller deities; Belief in ancestors, Belief in the finitude of the human person, and the Belief in mystical causality. Indigenous African religion often is a means to an end because it aims at fertility, health, rain, protection or relational harmony. ‘Religion is a part of a survival strategy and serves practical ends either immediate or remote, social or individual.’ In the Akan indigenous religion there is a strong belief in a community of spirits that are said to be capable of influencing the lives of people. These numerous spirits range from the creator god, Nana Onyame, gods/goddesses, Abosom, the earth deity, Asaase Yaa, to the ancestors, Nananom Nsam anfo. The general belief is that the diverse spirits harmoniously work together for the total well-being of humanity. There are also appropriate communicative mechanisms devised to establish continual and reciprocal relationships between persons and the spirit powers.

There is also a demonstrable cultural disposition that emphasizes the spiritual dimension of total human life. This finds expression in a certain specific conception of nature, of humanity and Nana Onyame’s (God’s) relations with the creatures of various types. It also finds expression in the relationships between persons and their physical environment and

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60 The ancestors are living elders of the clan who have transitioned from a physical existence into the realm of spirits. John Mbiti refers to them as ‘living- dead’ because although no longer physically alive, it is believed that they participate in the activities of the living as custodians of morality and sources of much help to their living relatives and kinsmen and women.

61 The human person is finite and vulnerable and therefore stands in need of the assistance and protection from the supernatural realm of spirits. Prayers, rites, rituals and sacrifices are thus organized as means of solicitation of help from the transcendent realms of health, power and protection.

62 Africans live in a world in which things do not happen by chance. In Africa, etiology and diagnosis often asks the following basic question: ‘who is the cause of my predicament?’ Events have causes and so the African universe is an intentional one in which misfortunes in particular occur through the evils of witchcraft, curses and sin. In Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, for example, when Okonkwo beat up his wife during the Week of Peace, his actions were said to have the potential of instigating supernatural consequences as the priest of the earth goddess made clear to him: ‘The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us his increase, and we shall all perish.’ Victims of misfortune therefore visit shrines in search of explanations and answers to their problems and others seek help from the same source either to reverse negative destinies or for power to succeed in life.


64 Parrinder, West African Religion, 35.
in the ways in which explanations are sought for the major problems of life, the problem of the meaning of life, the problem of suffering and the problem of evil. In this regard, misfortunes or mishaps are, in some cases, interpreted as arising from the activities of malevolent spirits, a typical example of which is reflected in witchcraft.  

Elizabeth Amoah has argued that “this demonstrated feature of African indigenous religion should be taken together with the fact that the religion has a more practical than meditative or philosophical slant.” In other words, she argues “the practitioners of the indigenous African religions in general do not devote much attention and time to prolonged and systematic arguments or dogmatic and other theologies with regard to the validity of their religious experiences. The humanistic and the pragmatic slant is also seen in the way that persons easily and effectively engage with the spirit world.”

Most importantly, religion, to the Akan, is generally perceived as a tool for survival and for enhancing life in its broad sense. Being religious in this sense implies active participation in types of rituals such as praying, sacrificing, consulting diviners, and seeking esoteric knowledge and power from the spirits as well as maintaining good relationships with people. In sum, it implies enlisting the support of as many spirits as possible: God, gods and the ancestors, etc., to overcome social problems and evil spirits believed to exist in the world. It is also maintaining the harmony between humanity, nature and the spirits. The ultimate goal of all this is to achieve the total well-being or the enhanced life, the signs of which are the following: prosperity, fertility, virility, children, good health, long and

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66 Amoah, “African Indigenous Religions and Inter-Religious Relationship”.

67 Amoah, “African Indigenous Religions and Inter-Religious Relationship”.

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peaceful life, total protection from any malignant spirit, peaceful death and final reunion with the ancestors.\textsuperscript{68}

As enumerated above, African Traditional Religion has a lot of distinguishing features. However, particular features such as receptive and fluid changing dynamic are those that are very central to this study. To describe African Traditional religion as receptive implies that the religion is able to receive new ideas, suggestions etc. By extension, this means that members of African Traditional Religion are open (borrow and accept) to ideas, beliefs, practices among others from other religious traditions provided such systems are useful to them. With regards to being fluid changing dynamic, the religion takes new shape in whatever it find itself. These particular features to the researcher, have largely affected the adherent of the African Traditional Religion in Ghana largely on the use of modern technologies like Video, print media and the Visual media.

\textbf{1.9 Significance/Relevance of the Study}

Marleen De Witte, observes that “Religion is not like political parties; we cannot regulate advertisement in that environment.”\textsuperscript{69} For her, you cannot stop people from using their money the way they want, sponsoring a religious programme or advert is not a crime. There are religious adverts and a lot more activities parading in and around the various media houses making people more confused than ever. The new trend in Ghana has to do with the indigenous traditional priests and priestesses’ appearance on the television and the radio which this work attempts to investigate. This work has contributed to the academic study of the intersection between indigenous religion and the media since there has not been any work in such specific context in earlier studies on the subject of religion and media. It also

\textsuperscript{68} Amoah, “African Indigenous Religions and Inter-Religious Relationship”.

\textsuperscript{69} Marlin de Witte, “Business of the Spirit: Ghanaian broadcast media and the commercial exploitation of Pentecostalism”, \textit{Journal of African Media Studies} Vol. 3. 2 (2011), 190.
contributes to the understanding of the reasons why the traditional priests and priestesses are employing the media to make their presence felt by the public. Thus, the study advances knowledge on the mass media in the traditional religion in Ghana and the influence that it has on practitioners and the public. The study will also serve as a comprehensive reference document on the indigenous religion and the media since there has not been any significant studies on the subject.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This work is organized under five different chapters. Chapter one deals with the introductory issues by giving the background to the study, the statement of the problem, research questions, aims and objectives, scope and focus of the study, theoretical framework adopted for the study and the methodology adopted to achieve the objectives of the research. Literatures on the subject under study has also been examined. This was followed by significance of the study and organization of chapters. Chapter two focuses on religion and media in general. Particularly, the chapter discusses some of the old forms or traditional forms of media used by the indigenous religion. The chapter again touches on the recent development in religion and the media and how that is affecting the activities of the indigenous religion.

Chapter Three concentrates on indigenous traditional priesthood in general. The chapter particularly focuses on the three traditional priests and priestess used as case study for this work. The chapter present the views of these selected traditional priests on the use of the mass media. There are also, discussions about how they were called into traditional priesthood. It also presents some of the activities carried out by the selected priests under study.
Chapter Four analyses the usage of the mass media by traditional priests and priestesses. The chapter further examines and discusses the intent of the indigenous priest and priestess on their use of the mass media and the influence this is having on traditional African religion. It also discusses the contributions, challenges and setbacks of media appropriation by religious groups and individuals.

Chapter Five which serves as the concluding chapter gives a summary and analysis of some of the outstanding issues that came out of the thesis. It provides some findings of the study and offers some recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO

RELIGION AND THE MEDIA IN GHANA

2.1 Introduction

In the last two decades or so, there has been a remarkable upsurge in the use of mass media by all religions in the world. This has led to the concentration of some academic research in this area. However, in the study of the indigenous religions, much attention has not been paid in the field of media, religion and culture as compared to Christianity. Rosalind Hackett has attributed this lack of interest in media on African traditional religion to the absence of interchange between African media researchers and the study of African religions. This chapter explores in details, the concept of religion and the media. Particularly, the chapter discusses how religion intersects with media and the general implication it has for the practice of religion.

In highlighting the development and the effect on the use of the media on religion in general, the chapter again discusses the impact new media technologies has had or is having on African indigenous religious practitioners. The most unique means of communication in the world in the last two decades has been the modern means of communication through social media such as Facebook, twitter and others. In this sense, this chapter explores some of the old traditional forms of media that were used by the practitioners of the indigenous religion. The enduring nature of the African means of communication has actually made them to subsist and be relevant in the contemporary world despite the emergence of organs of mass communication like television, radio, newspapers, internet and the social media.

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2.2 The Concept of Religion and Media

In today’s world, the growth, popularity, and the ubiquity of the mass media has almost made the media an indispensable commodity in the lives of individuals, organizations or institutions. Religious institutions and organizations are employing the media in various forms to make their presence felt in contemporary society. With regard to religion, one needs not be present at a religious function to enable one participate in a religious activity. One can participate in a religious activity or service with the help of the media. For instance, there is a great deal of online bible discussions, prayer groups and even the celebration of communion through online media. In Ghana, among Pentecostal/Charismatics, people report or claim to receive Holy Spirit baptism through a television broadcast and being healed through live-on-air radio prayers. These numerous forms of religious activities that take place within the context of media have not gone unnoticed by scholars of religion and media. In the last two decades or so, there has been a remarkable rise and a vibrant interdisciplinary conversation about religion and media. Academic disciplines including religious and theological studies, cultural studies, media studies, art history, anthropology and sociology have focused and engaged extensive discussion on the intersection of media and religion and its influence on religious practices socially and culturally.

Generally, scholars on religion and media have posited that media are intrinsic to religion. Thus, the two have inherent features that make their modes of operation similar and unambiguous. For instance, scholars in religion whose work focuses on media have

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argued that the connection between religion and media helps them to understand and define religion, and their colleagues in media studies also suggest that it helps them understand media more clearly. They argue that “media does not simply treat religion as a subject; but carry out some of religion’s ritual and interpretive functions.”

The “media” is commonly known as an instrument that helps in bridging a gap or a distance in “space and/or time. It makes it possible to experience the presence of another person, through his or her voice and/or image, even he or she is no longer there or is somewhere else.” Marleen de Witte, for instance, have argued that “religious practices and objects bridge an ontological distance between what is conceived as the ‘physical’ world and the ‘metaphysical’ world and thus make it possible for religious subjects to experience the presence of ‘divine’ power.” So, “religion, in other words, is a practice of producing a sense of connection, of connecting people and spirits.”

De Witte explains that this very conception or understanding of religion resonates with the etymological explanation of the Latin word *religio* as deriving from the verb *religare*, to bind (again), to reconnect, and referring to the bond (*liga*) between humanity and God, or between people and the divine in a broader spectrum. According to de Wiite, “one ought not to talk too easily about ‘the media’ in the singular as though there were a single media message, impact or interaction with religion.” In this sense, we come to the knowledge of understanding that both media and religion thus presuppose a practice of bringing together,

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73 Mahan, “Religion and Media”, 15.
or connecting. Evidently, as argued explicitly by de Witte, this idea of religion as media also resonates with emic discourses in Ghana about communication with the spirit world in terms of technology. For example, among Pentecostal/Charismatics, anointing with oil is believed to “establish points of contact”. Money offerings or seed sowing “create a divine connection” and auspicious atmosphere for God’s blessing and at the same time also, work as “spiritual electronics”.79

De Witte intimates that the reference to “juju” as “remote control” or “African electronics” are widespread.80 There is a widespread belief that people could be healed or harmed through their photographs.81 These experience makes the relation between media technologies and the spirit world not merely a metaphorical one.82 This is because the media shapes people’s imagination of the metaphysical, their experience of connecting to the invisible realm maybe be channelled through media technologies. According to de Witte, this is what Friedrich Kittler meant when he wrote that “The spirit world is as large as the storage and transmission possibilities of a civilization.”83 According to De Witte, the media creates means of accessibility with the divine. She argues:

They also enable and constrain the expression and experience of divine power. In their capacity of making the divine imaginable and rendering it present, then, modern media technologies such as television or radio are not so different from older or other modes of religious mediation such as holy books, sacred spaces, divine objects, or ritual performance. It would thus be misleading to assume that ‘media’ are some kind of external actor doing something to an already constituted religious formation. Any religious formation is the outcome of particular practices and technologies of mediation, which precede the ‘arrival’ or ‘adoption’ of modern media technologies. In other words, religion and media are mutually constitutive.84

79 De Witte, Spirit Media, 20.
80 De Witte, Spirit Media, 20.
83 De Witte, Spirit Media, 20.
84 De Witte, Spirit Media, 20 -21.
The argument here is that both religion and media constitute a space that allows the physical to experience the divine. They both play a role of binding and connecting. This helps to bridge any distance between the physical and the metaphysical. Certainly as argued by Jeremy Stolow and re-echoed by Jeffrey H. Mahan, “‘media’ in all their economic, symbolic, performative and techno-prosthetic dimensions, have become central to the terms of interaction within and among the embodied regimes and imagined worlds that constitute the sacred.”

But, Mahan articulate precisely that Stolow and other scholars further argue that while modern media attract one’s attention to religion and media, the relationship between religion, media and mediation precedes our journey with modernity. They pontificate that there is no religion apart from the process of mediation.

This assertion marks a significant shift in the field in the sense that earlier studies tended to think of media in fairly conventional terms: print, photos and illustrations, radio, television, film, computers and the internet. Thus, the media should not be only viewed in its conventional forms but as objects that make communication and/or connections between two different objects possible, whether physical or spiritual. Modern media have, however, come to augment the old forms of media by enhancing our understanding of the mediatory role that religion and media plays in our lives. A similar argument is made by de Witte when she asserts that media are not to be taken or conceived as mass media only. She proposes that media should not be thought of only in their conventional forms but that, it must be widened to capture the practices of mediation and analyse media as “intermediaries in processes of communication, of connection, of establishing, maintaining and

85 Mahan, “Religion and Media”, 15.
transforming links between people, and, in the case of religious mediation, between people and what they take to be the supernatural.”\textsuperscript{88} However, according to de Witte, this does not presuppose that modern media technologies cannot be assumed to be unproblematic extensions of older forms of religious mediation.\textsuperscript{89} Because, on the contrary, “media and mediation constitute inherently unstable and ambiguous conditions of possibility for religious signifying practices.”\textsuperscript{90}

But precisely because mediation is inherent to every form of religion, media (old or new) are always possible sources of caution, concern, and conflict, as in the cases of the rejection of the written bible by Masowe Apostolics in Zimbabwe.\textsuperscript{91} The point here is that the immediacy of the supernatural, as an extrasensory presence, always needs media for being experienceable and imaginable. These media may range from the bible to the body, from prophets to television, and from mini discs to cowry shells. But what classifies as immediacy and what as mediation is not given but negotiated.\textsuperscript{92} As argued by Webb Keane, texts, bodies, or objects are media or representations, or manifestations of immediate divine presence is contested and varies with religious traditions and their ‘semiotic ideologies’ that define the relations between words, things, and subjects.”\textsuperscript{93}

2.3 The Liberalization of the Media in Ghana

Until the adoption of the 1992 constitution, the media space or broadcasting scene in Ghana was strictly regulated and controlled by the government. However, the adoption of the 1992 constitution and subsequent presidential election in the same year, saw a shift from a

\textsuperscript{88} De Witte, \textit{Spirit Media}, 21.
\textsuperscript{89} De Witte, \textit{Spirit Media}, 21.
\textsuperscript{90} Jeremy Stolow, “Religion and/as Media,” \textit{Theory, Culture and Society} (2005), 125.
\textsuperscript{91} Mathew Engelke, \textit{A Problem of Presence. Beyond Scripture in an African Church} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
\textsuperscript{92} Engelke, \textit{A Problem of Presence}.
military regime to a new democratic governance. This means that the then President, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, now became the democratically elected president. As a result of the transition into a new democratic dispensation, a public debate ensued calling for the opening up of the Ghanaian media. As a result of this, the state loosened control over the media space and this consequently culminated in the springing up of private media houses. However, despite the fact that the 1992 Constitution guaranteed freedom and independence of the media and prohibits censorship and licensing of any media outlet, it was not until 1995 that the first private FM station started broadcasting, and not without challenges because an inbuilt “escape clause”, undermined this right “in the interest of national security, public order, and public morality” and enabled the government to require radio stations to apply to the state-appointed Frequency Control and Regulation Board for transmission frequencies.

When constant attempts by various individuals to acquire a transmission frequency had proven futile, a Ghanaian businessman, Dr. Charles Wereko-Brobey, began a trial transmission on Radio Eye on 19th November 1994. Conflicting with the rubrics of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), the new station played mostly American hits, interspersed with brief talks. Just after two weeks of operation, the new station’s premises were ransacked by the police and this led to the confiscation of the equipment used by the station and the arrest of the “owners and disc jockeys for operating a pirate radio station.”

When the case was taken to the High Court, the three directors and a technician were

95 Chapter 12, Article 164 reads: ‘The provisions of articles 162 and 163 of this Constitution are subject to laws that are reasonably required in the interest of national security, public order, and public morality and for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons’.
convicted of illegal broadcasting. The antagonistic nature of the public to this case opened
the gateway for a blistering public debate about need for the democratization of the media
in Ghana and ultimately put pressure on the government to allow private broadcasting in
the country. A subsequent appointed committee on private broadcasting suggested the
giving of frequencies to organizations that were Ghanaian-owned and not linked with
political parties or churches.98

Joy FM, one of Ghana’s renowned private radio stations, was the first legal private radio
station to be activated on the Ghanaian airwaves in April 1995. Hitherto, as a result of the
resentment of other stations’ failure to obtain a frequency despite all effort, Joy FM
succeeded in acquiring a frequency owned by GBC, 99.7 FM. However, the possibility of
obtaining frequencies became very much opened and the late nineties and early 2000s
witnessed a rapidly increasing number of other private FM stations. Currently there are
more than 150 FM stations in Ghana. In Ghana, the opening up of the airwaves for public
discussions on numerous civic issues and phone-in shows has almost turned radio into a
“truly participatory practice, where being on air is as important as what is actually said.”99

Though a lot of people are rejoicing in this freedom of speech and expression, others have
severely criticized the way and manner in which some citizens continue to abuse this new
freedom by making unsavoury comments and indulging in character assassination
especially during phone-in programs. De Witte argues that this phenomenon of phone-in
programming obviously encroaches upon previous GBC “conventions of ‘civilized’ radio
speech. Several incidents raised questions among media practitioners about what can and

98 De Witte, Spirit Media, 51; Benyah, “The Use of Mass Media by Charismatic Churches in Ghana”, 57.
cannot be said in the name of freedom of expression and what modes of speech are and are not appropriate for broadcasting.”

To understand the very concept of radio broadcasting in Ghana, one needs to look at it from a more social and cultural perspective than just what is broadcasted on the airwaves. A lot of superstars or celebrities have emerged from the FM and radio stations. These include pastors as well. A lot of Ghanaian pastors and journalists are known because of the radio programme they host. Some of them have become very prominent and enjoy a social status in various functions organized in the country. Radio has almost acquired a common place in Ghana and is constantly shaping people's identity.

2.3.1 The Emergence of Private Television (TV) Stations

Francis Benyah has argued that not only has there been an emergence of the private radio stations but also private TV stations as well. However, the capital involved in setting up a television station may have contributed to the delay in the setting up of such a venture by an individual even after the liberalization of the media. This notwithstanding, recent proliferation of television stations in Ghana point to the fact that there has been remarkable shift in the development and economies of Ghana. Individuals and churches that have the financial resources are now opening up and establishing their own television station and ministries.

In October 1, 1997, ‘TV3 Network Limited (TV3 Ghana)’ became the first free-on-air private television station to start commercial broadcasting. The establishment or the creation of the TV channel was as a result of a joint venture agreement by the Government

100 De Witte, “Spirit Media, 53.
101 De Witte, Spirit Media, 54.

In September 2011, TV3 was taken over by a Ghanaian company *Media General Ghana Limited.* The initial transmission of the TV station was limited only to the greater Accra Region. Currently, the TV station covers seven (7) out of the ten (10) regions in Ghana which is approximately 80% of national coverage.  

However, with an emerging market economy like that of Ghana, one cannot escape the threat that comes with its business market; that is, competition. Just three months after the launching of TV3, another TV station emerged on the scene, Metropolitan TV. Metro TV was established by GBC under a cooperative venture agreement between GBC and two Lebanese-Ghanaian brothers who are the owners of the *International Media Enterprisez-Media1.* The station is well known for its broadcast in sports because that aspect is very popular in Ghana.  

TV3 obviously encountered a major competition with the arrival of Metro TV which has succeeded not only in broadcasting its network to all the regions in the country but it also went into a deal with South Africa’s media company *Multichoice,* thereby opening the airwaves for them to broadcast throughout Africa.  

Currently, they are also on the satellite TV known as DSTV Channel 1. There were two other TV stations that were also based in Kumasi. Crystal TV and Fontomfrom TV. These were not free-to-air, but operated through cable networks. Crystal TV is currently operating in Accra and Fontomfrom is lost from the airwaves.  

Ghana’s fifth private TV station, TV Africa, was inaugurated in May 2003 and owned by the celebrated Ghanaian film-maker Kwaw Ansah. The aim of the T.V station is to broadcast and promote Ghanaian and African culture, and also to champion Pan-Africanism.

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105 Benyah, “The Use of Mass Media by Charismatic Churches in Ghana”, 60.
106 Benyah, “The Use of Mass Media by Charismatic Churches in Ghana”, 60.
107 Benyah, “The Use of Mass Media by Charismatic Churches in Ghana”, 60.
in both Ghana and beyond. Another TV station that came onto the scene not too long ago is Viasat One (1). It is a Ghanaian television channel that is owned by a Swedish media group, *Modern Times Group (MTG)*. The channel was granted a license by the National Communications Authority of the Republic of Ghana to begin operations in December 2007 but actual broadcasting started on December 12, 2008. After 2008, a great number of radio and TV stations have emerged in the Ghanaian media landscape.

2.3.2 The Liberalization of the Media and Commercialization of Religion

The liberalization of the airwaves came also came with the commercialization of the airwaves. With the changing face of media broadcasting from state control into private venture, one significant characteristic that comes with the new radio and TV stations was apparently their commercial nature. Airtime in Ghana and elsewhere is sold at very high profit margins. According to de Witte, “the forces of state interest losing power to those of global capitalism implied an increase in advertising, the advent of programme sponsoring, and the sale of airtime for privately produced programmes.”

Significantly, Ghana’s ethos of numerous religious traditions operating in the religious field is increasingly changing the *modus operandi* of the individual religious traditions and their agents. Some religious groups have become more like business organizations appropriating marketing strategies in a quest to attract clientele or “consumers” to the goods and services they offer, while at the same time making sure their organizations are visible and viable.

According to Genevieve Nrenzah, Peter Berger, in an effort to explain the relationship between religious groups in a thoroughly secularizing and quickly changing religiously pluralistic American society in the 1960s, suggested the religious economy theory. He

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108 Benyah, “The Use of Mass Media by Charismatic Churches in Ghana”, 60.
posed that in a culture or society where the state and its agents have restricted power to sanction religious adherence, new religions and worshipping cultures would emerge constantly, each presenting its most attractive image in a bid to win the loyalties of worshippers.\footnote{Genevieve Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines: Current Developments on Ghana’s Religious Landscape” PhD Dissertation, University of Bayreuth, 2015, 55.} According to Nrenzah, “Berger argued that the development described above engenders a free market situation in which religious groups and their agents compete for adherents and public patronage.”\footnote{Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 55.}

Nrenzah posits that Berger’s theory sparked further scholarly inquiries with Laurence Iannaccone adding a new twist by stating that “if individual denominations function as religious firms, then they collectively constitute a religious market.”\footnote{Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 56.} According to Nrenzah, Muller describes the “distinguishing characteristics of religious organizations motivating a view of religious organizations as competitors…\textit{considering} the sustainability of competitive advantages among religious organizations.”\footnote{Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 56.} She postulates that Stark and Finke in their earlier submissions viewed the religious economy as a commercial venture. They have recently, however, revised their earlier position, describing a religious economy as a subsystem within religious activity, consisting “of all the religious activity going on in a society: a ‘market’ of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents and the religious culture offered by the organization(s).”\footnote{Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 57.} By this definition Stark and Finke imply that religious organizations are run just like firms where producers (religious organizations) exhibit their products for sale and religious followers are like consumers on a market shopping for religious commodities: they bargain and pay a price for what religious groups offer.\footnote{Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 57.}
vein the strategies of religious leaders, or suppliers of various forms of religious capital, is analogous to that of producers and entrepreneurs whose actions are calculated responses to the constrictions and opportunities offered them in the religious market place.\textsuperscript{116}

Central to this theory is the conceptualization of “religion as a commodity, an object of choice.”\textsuperscript{117} Rodney Stark and Roger Finke define a religious economy as entailing of “all religious activities going on in any society: a ‘market’ of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organization seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization.”\textsuperscript{118} In an earlier attempt to unpack the concept of religious market, Finke and Stark maintained that “religious economies are like commercial economies. They consist of a market and a set of firms seeking to serve that market. Like all market economies, a major consideration is their degree of regulation. Some religions are virtually unregulated, while others are restricted to state-imposed monopolies.”\textsuperscript{119}

In this situation, religious adherents or devotees are seen as consumers who shop for religious commodities for which they are ready and willing to bargain and pay a price. In a similar way, religious leaders are seen as producers and entrepreneurs whose actions represent “rational responses to the constraints and opportunities found in the religious marketplace.”\textsuperscript{120} The relative freedom of choice exercised by religious consumers urges religious agents to create different religio-cultural commodities and services, especially in countries with more “numerous competing churches than [in] countries dominated by a

\textsuperscript{116} Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 57.


single established church.”121 These producers will supply attractive commodities and services to their clients, advertise and market their products, fight with other competitors to maintain a portion of the market and keep a constant flow of demand for their supplies.122 In Ghana, religious groups including the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and the indigenous or the traditional religion are now employing the media to advertise their services to woo pubic patronage. The priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion are employing the media both print and electronic such as social media, internet, and television to carve a niche for themselves in religious pluralistic context of Ghana.

Unlike the years of military governments in the 70s and 80s when religious activities were constricted, today citizens in Ghana’s democracy are constitutionally guaranteed the freedom of religion. There is a high level of religious pluralism because of the new situation, occasioned by diversified and divided loyalties or affiliations, engendering a free religious market in Ghana. In such a free – or even volatile – religious market situation as we find in contemporary Ghana, there is the tendency for power struggle among the various parties involved. In Ghana, prime time for television broadcasting is between the hours of 7 to 10 pm. Airtime is mostly sold for half an hour. The media houses are no doubt making money from the religious bodies.123

2.4 African Traditional Religion and the Use of Old Media

Before the recent growth and improvements in modern media technologies, African indigenous religions had their own forms of media for communication. The various types of the media served as a form of identification for the indigenous religion. However, the

121 Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 57.
growth and development in technology has hitherto had a kind of impact on the ways and types of media used by the practitioners of the indigenous religion. In this section, attempt is made to discuss the old forms of media used by the indigenous religions as well as the new types they are using as a result of improvement and development in media technologies.

The uniqueness of the African means of communication is embedded in their originality, creativity, tradition and culture. These essentially make them highly effective and enduring in the dissemination of information personally, inter-personally and through group communications. Studies and research into traditional media systems are relatively recent. Traditional forms of media for the indigenous religion include drums, music (or more popularly, folk music), dance, signs, and language, symbols and rituals.

2.4.1 Drums

Drums hold a special place in the history of traditional religions in Africa. It is usually used to invite or call-up the spirit especially in ritual dancing. Developed and used by cultures living in forested areas, drums served as an early form of long-distance communication, and were used during ceremonial and religious functions.\(^\text{124}\) The traditional drumming found in Africa is actually of three different types. Firstly, a rhythm can represent an idea (or signal). Secondly it can repeat the accentual profile of a spoken utterance or thirdly it can simply be subject to musical laws. Drum communication methods are not languages in their own right; they are based on natural languages.\(^\text{125}\) The sounds produced are conventionalized or idiomatic signals based on speech patterns. The messages are normally very stereotyped and context-dependent. They lack the ability to form new combinations


\(^{125}\) Mike “The Talking Drum”, 94.
and expressions. The Talking Drum for instance, is a cultural instrument which have endured and survived the test of time up to the present generation.\textsuperscript{126}

The history of the Talking Drum is as old as creation itself. In many parts of Africa, the Talking Drum is used as means of notification, alertness and entertainment of people in palaces or during ceremonies.\textsuperscript{127} As the name suggests, the talking drums are thought to mimic languages by closely imitating the rhythms and intonations of the spoken words. The pitches of the Talking Drum can be regulated depending upon how the players strike the head of the drums and change their tension. These pitches can mirror people’s voices, and thus, the drum is called “Talking Drum”. The Talking Drum has historically been used for many purposes, which includes: to communicate messages across distances and villages, bring people together, help settle disputes among members of a village and to serve as memory device to help people remember important events that took place in African society.\textsuperscript{128}

In African traditional societies, “the Talking Drum is use to praise or curse other people and to welcome guests, praise the gods and people in the society, invoke the spirits of ancestors and deities, correct the errors of the societies, generates conversational proverbs in order to allow people to communicate with their elders and is still part of royal ceremonies or recitals of ancestry.”\textsuperscript{129} In Nigeria, for instance, the specific pattern of drumming and rhythms is closely linked with spiritual beings or Ogun associated with the traditional Yoruba belief system. Originally celebrated in Nigeria and some areas of Ghana as elucidated by Nketia.\textsuperscript{130} It recognizes the existence of traditional structures and channels

\textsuperscript{126} Mike “The Talking Drum”, 94.
\textsuperscript{127} Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.
\textsuperscript{128} Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.
\textsuperscript{129} Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.
\textsuperscript{130} Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.
of communication used as verbal and symbolic aspect of interpersonal and group communication such as town crier, drum, gong and so forth. Traditional communication was an important activity which touches every sphere of human life, bringing people, cultures, communities and races closer for meaningful development and peaceful co-existence.\footnote{Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.} It is the process of social interaction that helps people to understand themselves and live harmoniously as organized people of a given state, country or nation.\footnote{Mike “The Talking Drum”, 95.}

In African indigenous religions, the priests and priestesses employ the use of the drums for ritual dancing, inviting and also communication.

\subsection{Music and Dance}

Music, according to the \textit{Africa Encyclopedia}, is “sound that is organised in a particular pattern.” Every sound has a pitch, ranging between the highest and the lowest. When the pitch is clear and easy to distinguish, the sound can be described as a musical note. Music has been increasingly used as a major channel of communication. The role of music as a medium of social and political communication is most pronounced under circumstances where the people lack access to formal communication channels. Two factors that partly favour the adoption of popular music as a forum for socio-political, commentary include the dominance of oral culture in Africa and the intolerance of the ruling class toward open criticism. Music has been a convenient way for oral cultures to communicate their experiences and ideas in ways that can be easily committed to memory and easily recalled. Traditional African folk and have served the dual purpose of entertaining and narrating/commenting on events. Among the indigenous religion priests and priestesses used music as medium of communication with the spirit world and invoking their presence.
Again, another medium through which traditional priests and priestesses communicate with the gods is through dance which is usually accompanied by music and spirit possession. Among the Akan spirit possession with its associated practice is referred to as *akom*. Akom also refers to the prophecy, dance and music of the gods. The expressions *akom asi ne so* (literally meaning *akom* has come upon him or her) and *akom afa no* (akom has taken him or her) are used to describe the individual possessed by a spirit. While the expression *akom asi ne so* is used to describe the possessed priest in the dancing ring (i.e. the dancing priest, okomfo), *akom afa no* only refers to the early stages of spiritual possession, and does not imply that the possessed individual can perform the dance. It is only among the initiated priests that *akom*, the possession dance, is identified. This identification shows the importance of the *akom* dance, for it is considered the means whereby the gods manifest themselves and come to commune with men. And it places the priest at the center of this theatrical form.\(^{133}\)

### 2.4.3 Language and Symbols

Language is a set of arbitrary symbols, matched with meaning and used by a group of people for communication. So, spoken language is commonly referred to as word-of-mouth and used for everyday conversation. It is easy to relate to most common and most used of all traditional modes of communication. According to Ibagere, “spoken language is easy to understand and is the first, after body language, to be learnt by a stranger.”\(^{134}\) It is usually employed alone but it could also be combined with any other mode, depending on the circumstance [and need]. For example, one could accompany one’s speech with music to make the speech more effective, depending on the occasion. However, such combination

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\(^{133}\) Patience Alexandra Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study” MA Thesis University of Ghana, Legon, 1974, 5.

should be significantly functional in enhancing the creation of the right impact on those who receive the information being passed on by the communicator. In various cultures, language as a vehicle of conceptions and symbolic expressions has been instrumental in translation and understanding of religious beliefs and ideas. Language and different forms of symbol were also employed by the adherent of the indigenous religion as means of mediums through which communication was done.

2.5 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the mass media has greatly influenced the practice of religion. It is evident that the media has greatly and consistently assist in providing the medium for transmitting religious messages and knowledge to the masses. It is constantly redefining the practice of religion by making it go more public. This chapter, has particularly highlighted the ubiquitous nature of religion in recent times due to the massive deployment of the media by religious institutions. The chapter also highlighted the linkage between religion and media and how the media evinces the very conception of religion. The researcher can conclude that the appropriation of the mass media by priests and priestesses of the traditional religion will make the indigenous religion one of the most advertised religious forms of expression in the coming decades on both electronic and print media. This issue will be discussed more in the next chapter which focuses on the selected priests and their use of the media.

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CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONAL PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES AND MODERN MASS MEDIA

3.1 Introduction

This study particularly, looks at the use of the mass media by some traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana. Until recently, it was a known fact that traditional priests and priestesses mostly resided in outskirts of a town, especially forests and some isolated places. From there, they received clients and helped the clients according to their needs. It was somewhat unusual and uncommon for one to see a traditional priest or priestess in the public domain, or to see and hear them on any radio or television station. Generally, if they would come to the public domain, then it was as a result of the fact that there was an issue that demands their assistance; for instance, when there is the need to perform certain rituals to cleanse their town or community in the open space to avert any impending calamity. Here, it must be noted that the traditional priests or priestesses come to the public domain to execute their duties upon consultation with and permission from the chief and council of elders in the society.

Traditional priests or priestesses do not only come to the public domain because they have to perform certain rites to usher in the celebration of an upcoming event (e.g. festival). Presently, it appears to be out-dated for majority of the traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana to reside in isolated and remote places to receive clients. In recent times, they have mounted billboards, signposts and made conscious efforts to advertise or publicize their services on the radio and the television. Looking at these trends, this chapter focuses on the traditional priests and their appropriation of modern mass media. So far, attempts have been made to examine the concept of the media and how religion in general, fits well into the concept of the media. In this chapter, the discussion is focused on the selected traditional
priests and their use of the media. The chapter presents the background leading to the calling of these traditional priests. It discusses the kind of training they received and also, looks at the level of their usage of the mass media. This is important because one needs to understand the background of traditional priesthood, their calling and training, so as to appreciate to some extent, the new role of adding modern media technologies to their work. Again, there is also a brief background of the African Traditional Religion.

3.2 African Traditional Religion

Religion, is a central feature of African life. Kofi Asare Opoku has emphasized that a “close observation of Africa and its societies will reveal that religion is at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African life.”\textsuperscript{136} Therefore, according to him, it is no exaggeration “to say that in traditional Africa, religion is life and life, religion.”\textsuperscript{137} African Traditional Religion is a phrase coined by scholars to describe the indigenous religion of Africa. The concept; African traditional Religion, refers to the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the fore bearers of present Africans, and which is being practiced today in various forms and shades, and intensities by a very large number of Africans. However, “Africa is so vast and has such a large number if societies which differ from each other considerably that one runs the risk of generalization when one speaks of traditional religion; though, there is a common thread or decimal features in indigenous values, views and experiences which shows a large measure of uniformity.”\textsuperscript{138} The word “traditional” suggests the undergirded fundamental indigenous value system and not in reference to something of the past. According to T. N. Quarcooopome, there are five basic component
elements that go into the making of African Traditional Religion. These are belief in God; belief in the divinities; belief in spirit beings, belief in ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine.\textsuperscript{139}

3.2.1 Belief in God

In African traditional religion, God is supreme and above all. He is wholly other and not of the status of the divinities. Opoku argues, “He is essentially a spirit for there are no images or visible representation of Him”.\textsuperscript{140} According to Quarpoome, God is known to be the creator and controller of the universe.\textsuperscript{141} He is the sovereign ruler of the universe, the king, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, compassionate, judge, holy and immortal. Though, originally God was known to be near man, man’s fault made him move himself high up.\textsuperscript{142} However, that does not mean he is not active in creation or in the affairs of men. He still maintains contact with the universe either directly through his personal intervention or indirectly through his personal intermediaries, the divinities and the ancestors.\textsuperscript{143} To the Ashanti for example, there is a Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, who created all things, and who manifests his power through a pantheon of gods. According to K. A Busua, the Ashanti conception of the Supreme Being may be gathered from the titles ascribed to him. He is, “the Ashanti say older than all the things that live on the wide, wide earth (Asase terɛ, na Onyame ne Panin). It is noteworthy that the Ashanti never had special priest for the Supreme Being, though every god (abosom) has a priest.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{139} T.N.O Quarcooepome, \textit{West African Traditional Religion} (Ibadan: African Universities Press 1987), 40
\textsuperscript{140} Opoku, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 9.
\textsuperscript{141} Quarcooepome, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 40.
\textsuperscript{142} Quarcooepome, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 40.
\textsuperscript{143} Quarcooepome, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 40.
The Ashanti conceives their world as the creation of the Supreme Being, *Onyankpon*. The Akan conceives this invisible power as also the source of human life and all that sustains it. Yet the Asanti does not show nearly as much fear and concern for *Nyame* as he or she shows for the *abosom*, the lesser gods with which his world abounds. The Ashanti does not represent *Nyame* in any visual or physical form. As indicated, there is no priestly office devoted to his service. *Onyame* has no organized cult; and no collective ritual activities are performed for him. *Onyame* has no taboos.

### 3.2.2 Belief in deities (gods)/divinities

The deities and/or the gods are believed to be children of God. They were not created but brought into being “with regard to the divine ordering of the universe.” They are ministers of God with derived powers. Each of them is assigned to a portfolio. Their main function is to act as intermediaries between God and man. They are largely natural spirits though some are manifestations of divine attributes. They have as their temporary dwelling, objects in nature like rivers, lakes, lagoons, streams, trees, forests, groves, mountains, hill etc.

According to Ashanti belief, the gods (abosom) derive their power from the Supreme Being. They come from him and are part of him. A god is but the mouthpiece of the Supreme Being (*Onyankpon Kyeame*), a servant acting as intermediary between Creator and creature. According to Busia, “there is a whole pantheon of these gods, for their number is being added to all the time. Some acquire a country-wide fame for a season and then pass into oblivion; while others, like the Ntoa of Nkoranza, Wenchi, and Techiman, or the Tano,

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145 Onyankopon (Nyame or Onyame) is the God of the Akans.
have become tribal gods having elaborate annual festivals held in their honour.”

In spite of the fact that the Ashanti recognizes his dependence on the Supreme Being, he or she considers the lesser gods as the proper bodies with whom to communicate for all concerns of life. Ashanti religion, therefore, tends to focus on the abosom. And it is in understanding the relationship between Onyankopon, the abosom and man that one can glean the meaning of the sacred drama of worship.

3.2.3 Belief in Spirit Beings

There are also, spirit being who may be good or bad. One particular type is believed to be “abstract power, shape or vapour”. According to Quarcoopome, “it is an immaterial being and its make-up is such that it is able to assume various dimensions whenever it wishes to be seen. It may appear abnormally tall, short, fat or thin.” It is believed that when they appear beside the natural object which is their residence they may appear in the form or shape of that object. They are generally good spirits. There are ghost spirits of those who die accursed death or bad death, either by hanging, drowning, of bad disease or infectious and incurable diseases like leprosy; or during pregnancy. There is also the belief in born-to-die spirits. The traditional belief is that these spirits form a company and agree to undertake in turns to leave the group and to die at certain named dates and times. There are also dwarfs and witchcraft spirits that form part of the spiritual beings. Again, there is also the forest monster called Sasabonsam by the Akans. The forest monster are believed to be tall and hairy with wild looking eyes. They are said to sit among the branches of big

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151 Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 11.
152 Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 11.
153 Quarcoopome, West African Traditional Religion, 41.
154 Quarcoopome, West African Traditional Religion, 43.
trees and use their feet to hook-up unwary travellers and hunters. They are mainly malevolent beings.

3.2.4 Belief in Ancestors

According to Kofi Asare Opoku, next to God are the ancestral spirits who play a very prominent role in African traditional religion. The ancestors like God are always treated with reverence and awe. The ancestors are the heroes and heroines of the various tribes. They are believed to have acquired extra-human powers in the afterlife and with these powers they are able to intervene in the lives of the living members of the society. They act as intermediaries between God/divinities and men. They are the unseen presidents at family and or tribal meetings and perform the duties of guardians and policemen of public morality. They may punish those who disobey the norms of the society with diseases, crop failure etc. The ancestors are venerated periodically and at annual festivals when supplications are made to them to ensure procreation, peace and prosperity.

3.2.5 Belief in the practice of Magic and Medicine

According to Quarcoopome, magic is the attempt to influence people and events by supernatural means. Magical objects like charms, talismans and amulets are used as protection against evil forces like witchcraft and sorcery and to achieve success in life. Some use magic to harm others, either to liquidate them as enemies or to gain advantage over them. Medicine has been defined to be the art of restoring and preserving health. In African belief medicine is closely associated with religion, because it is the possession of the Divine Healer (i.e. God) who dispenses it through the agency of the divinities and other

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155 Opoku, West African Traditional Religion, 9.
156 Quarcoopome, West African Traditional Religion, 43.
157 Quarcoopome, West African Traditional Religion, 44.
spirit beings who in turn make the knowledge available to priests, medicine men etc.\footnote{158} According to Busua, among the Ashanti’s, below the gods (abosom) are minor deities (asuman) that derive their power from the abosom, or from the souls of plants and trees. The asuman may be in the form of beads, or medicine balls carried on strings or in a sheep’s horn or a gourd. The Ashanti themselves, believe that ultimately, all asuman derive their power from some other supernatural beings.\footnote{159}

### 3.3 The Calling and Training of Traditional Priests

Priesthood within the context of the Akan traditional religion is an intense vocation and centers largely on the prerogatives and/or the choice of the abosom (traditional gods) regarding who is to become or chosen as their priest or priestess. Thus, the choice of who is to become a priest or priestess in the Akan traditional religion does not lie within the ambit of the okomfo (traditional priest). In Akan traditional belief, for one to be chosen as a traditional priest, there are criteria for measuring a genuine call into priesthood. According to Ekem, there must, principally, be evidence of possession by a particular deity who desires to enlist the possessed individual in its service.\footnote{160} The person cannot just become a priest simply by expressing the desire to enter into the profession and finding a tutor to direct his or her training. There must be evidence of the call; the principal among them is the deity that possesses the person. A senior priest who is very experienced and familiar with the characteristics of the deity will determine this evidence.

Ekem intimates that it is the duty of the various communities to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to determine the source of the possessed individual’s experience.\footnote{161} This

\footnote{158} Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 44.
\footnote{159} Busua, “The Ashanti”, 195. See also, R.S. Rattray, Religion and Art in Ashanti, chapter. iii.
presupposes that in the Akan traditional context, the community as a whole has a role in authenticating the validity of one’s call into the office of traditional priesthood. There are two main ways for choosing a priest or priestess. The first is by divine calling, and the second by choice of the traditional owners or elders of a cult. On the other hand, one also may inherit it from a family but even that also needs to get approval from the family deity. In African traditional belief, for one to be chosen as a traditional priest or priestess, it means he or she is responding to a highest calling a person could respond to in “the structured world of tribal life”. The call into the priesthood means that the priests or priestesses are entering into a world in which honour awaits them.

There are certain manifestations which are associated with the calling. Sometimes, the calling is associated with sickness. A revelation, an incurable illness, constant subjection to fits and trances and even apparent madness may be considered symptoms of spiritual possession and suggest a “calling” to the priestly office. The “call” may be sudden and spontaneous. It may be manifested in sudden change of personality and behaviour with the subject often being carried into the bush by the spirit. Or it may be gradual and long-drawn out, accompanied by persistent illness generally not considered “normal” in Ashanti society. Steps will usually be taken by the patient’s family to find the cause of the illness and if possible, a cure for it. The procedure for discovering whether some persistent illness or apparent madness is an indication of the priestly vocation may be long and expensive. Generally people resort to well-known methods of curing illness, and it is only when these fail after a long process of trial and error that they begin to suspect a link

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162 Ekem, Priesthood in Context, 48.
164 Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 34.
165 Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 34.
between the illness and the supernatural. Attempts are then made to find out the spiritual origin of the affliction. In the past all such cases found their way to a shrine – to a priest, the most reliable physician.\textsuperscript{166}

Regarding the training of an individual into the traditional priesthood, whether the subject readily accepts the offer or is persuaded to accept it, he or she does not automatically become a priest. Priesthood, like all other well-known life-time professions, requires experience. The subject must undergo a period of apprenticeship during which he or she is initiated into the secrets of priesthood. He or she must be trained by a chosen priest to serve his god.\textsuperscript{167} The length of the period of apprenticeship depends largely on the traditions of the god the novice is going to serve. Often one’s experience through association with a priest before a god first takes possession of him becomes an important factor which determines the length of his or her training.\textsuperscript{168}

According to R.S. Rattray, the period of apprenticeship lasts for three years.\textsuperscript{169} This period of training is divided into three phases. In the first year the novice is asked to “bath with medicine” prepared from barks and leaves of certain trees. These baths are aimed at strengthening the ankles for dancing, causing the god to stay with the novice and bringing about the nkomoa.\textsuperscript{170} The novice receives instruction in the akom dance and music. He or she also learns some taboos associated with the god he or she will serve. In the second year the medicine baths, lessons in dance and those on taboos continue. In addition, he or she is given asuman (charms) to wear and he or she learns their associated taboos. Whatever the taboos may be, the trainee has to take an oath to keep them. The last year of apprenticeship

\textsuperscript{166} Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 34.
\textsuperscript{167} Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 39.
\textsuperscript{168} Kwakwa, “Dance and Drama of the gods: A Case Study”, 39.
\textsuperscript{170} From \textit{akom} (spiritual possession) and \textit{mmoa} (animals, spirits). Thus nkomoa means the spirits of \textit{akom}. 
is devoted to instruction in water gazing and divining; preparation of *asuman*; how to comport oneself generally as a priest; and how to say prayers, perform libation, invocations, sacrifice and other related rituals. The novice receives further instruction in *akom* dancing and singing.

Since this study focuses on some selected priests of the indigenous religion and their usage of the mass media, the subsequent discussions will be focused on these selected priests, their calling and usage of the media for their activities. The discussion centres on priesthood within the Akan context since all three case studies fall within the Akan geographical context.

### 3.3.1 Nana Kwaku Bonsam: His Background

Nana Kwaku Bonsam was born as Stephen Osei Mensah. He hails from Akomadan-Afrancho, a town in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Akomadan-Afrancho also serves as his present location for the activities of shrines. Kwaku Bonsam could not have a good formal education due to his parents’ inability to sponsor him financially, resulting in frequent interruptions until he eventually dropped out of school with frustration.171 Nrenzah in an interview with Bonsam has postulated that apart from financial difficulty resulting in the truncation of his education, another ordeal that made young Bonsam drop from school “was his totally disfigured face, caused by a childhood accident that resulted in 70% of his body being badly burnt. His mother, Aunty May, is reported to have counted on the incidence of his son:

> It happened when he was only four years old. He was filling a kerosene stove with gas oil from his father’s motor bike, and then all we heard was “boom!” fire. It covered all his body, he cried out *agyeiia! Agyeiiia*; before we put the fire off, he was burned. For two years, he was in the hospital. The accident, however, traumatized his childhood. His friends shunned his

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company not wanting to associate with someone who was disfigured. Other people made fun of him.\textsuperscript{172}

However, concerning his background story, Nrenzah has noted the ambiguity in his life story. According to Nrenzah, though Bonsam’s mother recounts the incidence to have taken place during his early childhood days, Bonsam’s version of the story of his burns “has strands that it differs considerably from his mother’s account.”\textsuperscript{173} According to Nrenzah, Bonsam links his disfigurement to an occupational hazard at his job site. He associate his burns with a fire that broke out at a gas station he was working. Nrenzah explains that the inconsistence in his story are not actually surprising as most often, stories about religious personalities are laced with mythic repository that are meant in a way to “bolster the legitimacy of the leader” or his personality. She argues, “Sometimes the figures themselves re-interpret earlier happenings in their lives in the light of their vocations as religious leaders. Bonsam slants the story of the accident to suit his adult working life, by stating how he did not perish from the burns because the gods had a mission for him. This would make the story of his rise as a priest more dramatic and easily believable.”\textsuperscript{174}

Though Bonsam communicate well in the Twi language, he is only able to speak broken English. His frequent travels and sometimes quite prolonged stays in New York (e.g from August 2012 to August 2013) has helped him to enhance his fluency in English. Nonetheless, one can easily notice how he struggles with English words and the grammatical errors in his effort to speak English correctly.\textsuperscript{175} Kwaku Bonsam stayed with his mother Auntie May until he was twenty when he migrated to Kumasi to learn a trade in gas cylinder repairs. After his apprenticeship, he was employed by an LP gas station in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{172} Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 126.  
\textsuperscript{173} Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 126.  
\textsuperscript{174} Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 126.  
\textsuperscript{175} Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 126.  
\end{flushright}
Pankrono, a suburb of Kumasi. His responsibilities included repairing damaged cylinders, helping clients to fill them, and supplying the filled cylinders to clients in their homes in the catchment area of Pankrono. As it will be discussed in the next section, it was in the course of his work as a gas station attendant that he claimed to have encountered a stranger, who later gave him spiritual powers that subsequently turned him into a priest.

**Calling into Priesthood**

Unlike the culturally accepted signs that has been highlighted by Ekem as indicative of a person being called into the vocation of traditional priesthood, Nana Kwaku Bonsam’s calling into traditional priesthood seems to defy such normative or conventional approach. Thus, Kwaku Bonsam’s call to his vocation of traditional priesthood is not in congruence with the usual modalities expected of most traditional priests. According to Kwaku Bonsam, before he was called into the traditional priesthood, he was operating his own Liquidified Petroleum Gas station at Pankrono-Adabraka, Kumasi in the Ashanti region. In an interview, Kwaku Bonsam narrated that his call to the traditional priesthood began in the year 1998, when he offered a kind gesture to a gentleman he didn’t know from anywhere. According to Kwaku Bonsam, he had closed from work one afternoon when he realized the gentleman was lying down sick and had soiled himself with his own vomitus. Kwaku Bonsam narrated that what surprised him most at the scene was that the gentleman was lying down at a junction of a church. He saw church members who had closed from church but did not bother to come to the rescue of the young man.\(^{176}\)

According to him, the situation was troubled him. So, he took the young man to his house and gave him water to wash down, and afterwards, found something for him to eat. He later took the young man to the hospital. However, upon reaching the hospital, the nurses could

\(^{176}\) A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam on 2nd June, 2018 at Akomadan-Afrancho, Kumasi.
not inject young man because the needle was unable to penetrate through his body. Kwaku Bonsam claimed that every attempt to inject the gentleman failed. The gentleman was wearing a ring on one of his toes. The young man removed the ring from his toes and upon removing the ring from his toes, the nurses were able to inject him. After the treatment, the gentleman went back to Tamale, where he comes from. Kwaku Bonsam indicated that he later had a contract to go to Tamale to repair a gas cylinder belonging to a Vocational School. While he was on the job, he decided to visit a crocodile pond. Coincidentally, on reaching the crocodile pond, he met the gentleman he had helped awhile back in Kumasi. However, Kwaku Bonsam claimed that during his conversation with the gentleman, he could not comprehend the language the gentleman was speaking because he wasn’t speaking Twi. Kwaku Bonsam claimed that when the gentleman noticed he didn’t understand his language he plucked a leaf and asked him to chew it. After chewing the leaf, he could understand him perfectly.

Kwaku Bonsam, claimed that while on the conversation, the gentleman informed him (Kwaku Bonsam) that he would like to go and show him his hometown to meet his father. After telling him this, Kwaku Bonsam claimed the gentleman asked to him to hold his hand. After holding him, he “pulled something” and before he realized, he was in the middle of a forest with the man. Kwaku Bonsam disclosed in the interview that, while in the forest, he saw a man lying down in a ditch. He claimed the man was doing nothing except eating kola-nut. The supposed father of the gentleman he helped asked his son to inform him that “he was going to make him a famous person on this earth before he dies as a result of the help he offered to his son.” Kwaku Bonsam claimed this was a surprise to him because, as an

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177 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
178 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
179 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
180 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
individual, he was only dealing in his gas business and he did not know the means or the way by which he was going to be very popular and famous. He claimed he was confused.\textsuperscript{181} While conversing with the gentleman’s father, Kweku Bonsam felt very hungry. He was asked the kind of food he preferred. He replied and said he wanted to eat banku and okro stew. To his amazement, the father of the gentleman magically provided him his meal served in the same bowl he uses at home.\textsuperscript{182}

After eating the food, he claimed he was offered some effigy. Afterwards, the gentleman decided to accompany him back to where he came from. He claimed they went and stood in a bush and the man magically pulled a leaf. On pulling the leaf, the only thing he could realize again was that he was lying down at Suame roundabout in Kumasi. He stated that this particular incident happened in 1999.\textsuperscript{183} Kwaku Bonsam indicated that he nearly suffered a mob lynching at the time because people around the roundabout mistook him for a wizard who had gone to his usual night operation and unfortunately brought down by some powers. Kwaku Bonsam indicated during the interview that a trotro driver, who knew him as a gas seller in Pankrono, came to his rescue.\textsuperscript{184}

Kwaku Bonsam disclosed during the interview that, upon his return to Kumasi, he kept the effigy given to him by the supposed father of his friend inside his wardrobe. However, on his return from work one Friday, he realized the wardrobe had fallen down with all the glass in front of the wardrobe broken into pieces.\textsuperscript{185} According to him, when this incidence happened, he decided that he was no longer interested in the effigy so he informed his friend who is a traditional priest (okomfo) about it. According to him, his friend (traditional priest)

\textsuperscript{181} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{182} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{183} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{184} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{185} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
asked him to throw the effigy away since he is equally not interested in them. Upon his friends’ advice, he went and threw the effigy in a septic tank to finally get rid of it. Kwaku Bonsam claimed that the septic tank exploded and even through that, someone lost his life. Strangely, Kwaku Bonsam claimed the effigy mysteriously made its way back into his room. In another attempt to do away with the effigy, he went and threw it in the offin river. This time again, upon his return from the river, he realized the effigy was lying at the back of his car seat. According to Kwaku Bonsam, he was getting frustrated with the way things were going so after some time. So he went to inform the Pankrono chief that something was laying in his room and he didn’t know exactly what it was. As a result, the chief sent his linguist to go and have a look at it and they discovered and told him it was is a god. Kwaku Bonsam said he told them he didn’t like it so he went to dig a hole and buried the effigy in it.

However, the effigy returned to his room. So, he decided to stop worrying himself about it. Following this, one Friday, he decided to go to his gas filling station. On his way to the gas station, he suddenly became possessed and started dancing. In that state of trance he lost himself completely but as he was told later, he performed magical feats like conjuring up money, standing on eggs, plantain branches, clothes and food. According to him, this is where it all began and this happened in the year 2000. He claimed, “the gods asked me to give away my car and gas filling station to someone for free. The gods started training me in the art of the priestly job. They revealed herbs for healing diseases and granted me the “eye” for seeing and talking to spirits.”

186 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
187 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
According to Kwaku Bonsam, he left everything and went back to his hometown Akomadan Afrancho. However, “on my return to my hometown, most of the people didn’t accept me because they claimed I was going insane. My grandfather sacked me from his house. I was later accepted by my grandmother so I went and stayed with my grandmother. I later relocated on the instruction of the gods and I came to settle at my current location in Akomadan Afrancho. When Nana Kwaku Bonsam was asked about the mode and form that his training took and whether he was trained by a senior priest, this was what he had to say: “I wasn’t trained by anyone and I don’t have any master anywhere. It is the gods themselves that trained me.”

![Picture 3.1: Nana Kwaku Bonsam’s shrine.](http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh)

Source: Picture taken by the researcher during fieldwork in 2018.

### 3.3.1.1 Nana Kwaku Bonsam and the Use of Media

As indicated earlier in this study, the usage of the media especially radio, television and social media has become part and parcel of the activities of some traditional priests in

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188 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
Ghana. As a known avid user of the social media, the researcher sought to find out from Kwaku Bonsam how he has appropriated modern media technologies in his work as a traditional priest. During an interview with Kwaku Bonsam, he emphasised that one of the reasons that has influenced his use of the media is that the world has become a global village due to the advancement and improvement in communication technologies and so, he also need to abreast himself with the changing trends to be more relevant. He argues:

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\text{we are now in an international world and everything has changed. In earlier times, traditional priests did not go on television. Currently, some are even against the mounting of sign boards. There is nothing wrong with the mounting of the sign boards because, the reason for the mounting of the sign boards is to give directions to people on where one can be located. Some also argue that the okomfo must not go on television and that any okomfo who go on television is not a good or true okomfo. This is not the truth. Why, because, even the bible…now pastors are everywhere on the television. If pastors had stop going on television, may be Christianity would have declined by now. Today, look at Multi TV, we probably have over thousand (1000) pastors on Multi TV. Because they promote Jesus Christ. So, if God has also helped us and we also have mouth to talk, why can’t we also go on the television?}
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He continued to argue that at the moment, on twitter alone, he has over thirty-one thousand followers. To him, if he has such number of followers on twitter alone, then one could imagine the kind of community he has created for himself. So, for him there is no need for anyone to convince him not to employ the use of the media such as television and radio. In trying to affirm how the use of modern media has influenced his activities as well as his relationship with people, Kwaku Bonsam disclosed the number of yahoo messages he receives on his phone. His words might be instructive for our discussion:

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\text{Right now, look at my yahoo message, I have forty-four thousand, five hundred and ninety three messages. So this makes me no less a small person for you to tell me that I should not be on the media. Now, I have not even talked about my Gmail account, now look at it, I have four thousand four hundred and sixty one messages. I am also on Tango. So, all these help. The social media help people to know the powers that the gods have. If there are people in America…right now, if I should go on my phone with you, I even have some pastors who are coming here this}
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\[^{189}\text{A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.}\]
week. If someone is in America and the person wants to see me now, some of them want to do a Facebook live. If you do a Facebook live, the person is connected to you. But how can you go on GTV and think someone in America will be connected to you. They’re not going to see you. Even Ghana people don’t watch television much. But if someone is in Jamaica, Botswana, and I begin to do a Facebook Live right now, I can get connected to at least 500 people at a go.190

According to Kwaku Bonsam, the social media help to promote the worship of the gods. He claimed to be the first traditional priest in Ghana to create a website for his services. The creation of the website made him internationally recognized and also, gave him the opportunity to travel to the United States. He recounted during the interview:

I am the first person to have created a website in Ghana. No okomfo in Ghana had a website. It is the Akonedi Shrine that transported the traditional worship to America but when they went, they hid themselves in Brooklyn because they were afraid. I went to America and I proved to them that the akom is authentic and many people came to believe in it. Following this development, I went to the Whitehouse and the pentagon. Even when Ebola came, I went there to pray, and asked the Ebola to go back to the sender. The Ebola was brought to Africa by the whites. I prayed and it was publicized on channel 12, a New York City television station. So the social media helps.191

Talking about the relevance of the use of the media by traditional priests, Kwaku Bonsam argued:

Any okomfo who says if an okomfo mounts a sign board it means that okomfo is not powerful is not true. Can you say that if the pastors goes on television or mount a sign board that pastor is not powerful? They are promoting Jesus Christ and that is exactly what we are also doing for our gods. If someone is passing by and the person sees my sign board, the person will know that Nana Kwaku Bonsam is from Akomadan-Afrancho and if that person needs helps, he or she will come here. But if you have not mounted a signboard and you are at some village somewhere and at the back of some river, how will the person locate you.192

According to the Kwaku Bonsam, the use of the mass media has helped him in so many ways. He argued that due to his presence in the media especially the social media, he is now

190 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
191 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
192 A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
in Wikipedia and as a result, he is internationally recognized. According to him, the use of the media has helped him to promote the worship of the traditional religion. Again, it has also helped people to know the truth inherent in the worship of the traditional religion.\textsuperscript{193}

He argues:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The media also help people to know the kind of person you are. If you are here and you don’t go on social media, how will people from distant places know you are at Akomadan-Afrancho. But through social media, you will get to know that Nana Kwaku Bonsam is at Afrancho. Through social media especially on Facebook, you can google my name. You can search where Nana Kwaku Bonsam is. Then you can know Nana Kwaku Bonsam is at Akomadan-Afrancho.}\textsuperscript{194}
\end{quote}

However, there have been some challenges that he has encountered as a result of his quest in using the media to promote the worship of the traditional religion. According to Kwaku, his first attempt to go on radio was not without challenges. He narrated that on his first attempt on radio at the Asempa FM in Accra, he was confronted by some assailants who did not understand why he should be on radio to promote the traditional religion. He recounted, “these people wanted to kill me. They stabbed me with a knife at the Asempa FM. They didn’t understand why I should be on the radio to promote the traditional religion. My only rescue was the security man on guard at the Asempa FM that very day.”\textsuperscript{195} He continued, “I was also confronted again after a programme at Peace FM on the road at John Teye in Accra. They broke my car windscreen. I was beaten small.” Kwaku Bonsam, in the interview, however believed that these attacks on his life were orchestrated by some pastors who don’t support the idea of the kind of work he was doing by promoting the indigenous religion on air. “The pastors are a challenge”, he argued. They have been insulting me. You are a fool. You are dirty and so on and so forth. We will kill you. The challenges are more

\textsuperscript{193} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{194} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{195} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
but I have resolved to withstand it with the help of God. We are promoting the traditional religion.”\(^{196}\)

Finally, Kwaku Bonsam bemoaned that the only people who are destroying the work of traditional religion are his “own brothers” who are engaging in fraud. He intimated that “some of them [so-called traditional priests] have been talking about ritual money. There is no double money in this world. Any traditional priest who engages in ritual money is not a traditional priest. He is a thief. He is an armed robber. Because there is no double money in this world. There is no pocket drive. I have produced money religio-magically but I haven’t asked anyone to come for such monies before.”\(^{197}\)

### 3.3.2 Nana Ankomah Adjei (Nana Bright) of Bredi: His Background

Nana Bright of Bredi, was born Nana Ankomah Adjei. His father, Nana Kwadwo Adjei was a traditional priest. His mother was Abena Akyea. Both parents hail from Bredi in the Nkoranza municipality. Nana Bright as he is popularly called, took over from his father as a traditional priest after the father’s demise. Nana Bright is the first born of six children from his mother. Nana Bright as part of his education was sent to Koforidua in the Eastern Region to stay with his uncle to enable him have his basic education. He later returned to Nkoranza to continue his secondary school education. After secondary school, he migrated to the United States of America for greener pastures. He returned home to take over from his father as a traditional priest when his father was advanced in age before his demise. Currently, Nana Bright has 3 wives with whom he has 9 children.

\(^{196}\) A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\(^{197}\) A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
Calling into Priesthood

Nana Bright is a traditional priest and currently, the head or the president of the Brong-Ahafo association of traditional priests and priestesses. Nana Bright also had his call into the traditional priesthood later years in his life though, he knew from the beginning of early childhood days that he had a task to fulfil as traditional priest due to some mysteries that surrounded his birth. Nana Bright was called into the traditional priesthood while in his mother’s womb.\textsuperscript{198} According to him, his father made him to understand that his calling was from birth when he was in his mother’s womb. In an interview, he recounted:

> When his mother was expecting him “the gods touched me in my mother’s womb which caused my mother to shake. So when I was in my mother’s womb, sometimes the gods manifested through my mother. So mine [priesthood] was actually a gift given to me. The gods manifested through me even when I was schooling. The gods allowed me to complete my education without interruptions. When my father was about to die he called me to come home since I was outside the country (United States) because it was time for me to do the work of the gods and that he was done with his work. It was actually a calling on my life. I didn’t just give myself to the gods to use me or something.\textsuperscript{199}

Regarding his training as a traditional priest, Nana Bright bemoaned the fact that it is not all priests that undergo the normal or usual kind of training. This is what he says;

> It’s not all priests that undergo some form of training. The ones that have sincerely been called by a god do not necessarily undergo any special form of training. For example, my father didn’t undergo any form of training. With regards to my father, I was told that when my father had his first call, he was taken to place by a god to be given some directions. Since you are called by the gods, they show you everything you need to know. Everything you need to do the work is in you the individual, he will teach and show you his ways but there can also be a situation where someone who loves you and is also good with herbs can teach or show how to use a particular herb to treat some ailments; so that you can add to what you already know. I didn’t undergo any form of training, all I remember doing was being with my father till about age six when finally he took me to Koforidua in the Eastern region to school till I was about going to the Senior Secondary School when he brought me back to Nkoranza to continue my schooling and also to be close to him. After school, I traveled outside the country (United States) and all that time the

\textsuperscript{198} A Personal Interview with Nana Bright, on 26\textsuperscript{th} May, 2018, at Bredi, Brong Ahafo.

\textsuperscript{199} A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
gods were still manifesting through me. I was able to prophesy to many people and it all came to pass when my father was alive.  

### 3.3.2.1 Nana Bright and the Use of the Media

Unlike some traditional priests, Nana Bright claimed he does not use any form of modern media to advertise his services or himself as a traditional priest. He intimated:

> I don’t do any form of advert to attract followers. I have not advertised my services on any radio or television. It is my name that sells me out. If truly, it is the gods who have called you, they will direct people to you. Sometimes, someone may be going through some troubles. Before they realize, they will be directed to come here for help. So here, I don’t do advert. All the people that come here hear of my name in some places through individuals who have visited my shrine before. They hear about what people are talking about. The kind of job I do and the way am able to help people.

However, according to Nana Bright, though he does not engage in the use of the media for advertisement, he, nonetheless, grants audience to television and radio stations that want to interview him on the kind of work he does or about the worship of the traditional religion.

This is what he says:

> I have been on television and radio on a number of occasions purposely for interviews and sometimes to explain issues or speak on certain pertinent issues regarding society. My festival has also gone very far. Sometimes, during the celebrations, we are able to kill about fifteen cattle for the celebration. I remember in a particular year, we killed about 20 cattle. It is something big! So, sometimes, the media houses come here to cover it. Last year for instance, U TV, Adom TV and Royal TV came here to take coverage of it. When they come and they want to interview me, I allow them do it. I do so because, all the work we are doing is to help mankind. So, when someone comes and he or she does not understand certain issues and they want clarifications, you must open up to them and explain things well for them to understand.

Commenting on the use of the media to advertise the services of the traditional worship by some traditional priests and priestesses, Nana Bright argued that “not all that glitters are
Our elders have some proverb that says empty barrels make noise. Containers with loads move smoothly without any noise. If you fill a container with water and you push it, you will realise that it moves smoothly without any noise.²⁰³

According to Nana Bright, what he is much worried about is the way and manner people go on radio and make noise about the kind of power they claim to have. He states:

Sincerely, I think some of them do not even have any power in them. Most of them don’t have any spirit in them. Some of them go there and say they are producing money for people. Then people don’t reason about it and then they begin to follow them. The gods or no god will just take money and go and put it in someone’s room and say this is money, take it. The gods would like to know you are a human being and that they want to help you. Just like you have a farm and you have applied fertilizer on it. You will see that your crops will yield much and better results. So the gods only helps you when you work hard. A god will not just take money and give to you. I can’t just imagine how people reason. Do you think the money that the okomfo conjured and gave you, if that money is good to that okomfo, he would charge you the person for his or her services? Why doesn’t the okomfo take that money? So that when you get there anytime you don’t have money, he or she can give you some.²⁰⁴

Regarding the use of the media by other priests and priestesses, Nana Bright asserted the fact that it is the understanding and how each and everyone wants to go about his or her work. According to him, maybe for some priests and priestesses, their gods allow them to go on Facebook to do their work or advertise their services. He stated that:

In some part I understand them. Because, perhaps, someone will be trying to locate them and the person might know how or where to find them. Maybe so many people will not hear about them as they might have heard about me. Because for my own, since the time of my father...my father was one hundred and forty-five (145) years before he died. He was very old. So maybe, their own haven’t gone that far. And today, we have the technology. So if they decide to use the media technologies to advertise their services, I understand them.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
²⁰⁴ A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
²⁰⁵ A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
According to Nana Bright, he wouldn’t say there is an opportunity to use it so everyone must use the media. He argued that:

There is no prominent god or traditional priest that you will ever hear standing somewhere to preach or something. But right now, there has been a lot of changes in the world. If they have the chance and the permission they want to do it [advertisement in media] I don’t have a problem with it. However, what I expect from the person doing the advert, is for him or her to do the right thing. Because you will judged on account of whatever you do. Hope you understand me? So, if that person is doing something good, and he or she indeed have what he or she is claiming to have, then it is good. But if it is vice versa, then it is up to him or her. For me, that is my advice.\footnote{A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.}

According to Nana Bright, though the recent advancement in media and communication technology is good and that, it helps a lot, He is not against its usage because he himself uses a mobile phone. According to him, all that other traditional priests and priestesses are doing in the media is to attract people to their shrines. But he is of the opinion that wherever the other traditional priests and priestesses use the media to do must be free from fraudulent activities. “They must not use the media to dupe people”, he argued. “Because if they do, the same media will tarnish their image and services publicly as it also promoted them\footnote{A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.}

He further argued:

In using the media as part of the worship services of the traditional religion, all I wish for is the good side of it. Using the media in a good manner that will promote the traditional religion. If you use the media to advertise your services and people get to know it is good, they will know. If your services are also fraudulent, other people will also use the same medium to tell the outside world the kind of person you are; that you are liar and a fraudulent person. So, you might have the name through your presence in the media, your name can go far in the media, but you can also get bad advertised image if people get to know you are fraudulent.\footnote{A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.}

In the view of Nana Bright, the good services a traditional priest renders to his or her clients can also serve as a best medium for advertisement and only the use of the traditional forms

\footnote{A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.}
of media to advertise your services. He recounted, “if you do good for one or two people, they even start advertising you to others. I have seen this person somewhere. His services are good. Within some few days, you will see people coming to you.”

According to Nana Bright, though he has a Whataspp on his phone, he does not even use it to communicate with his clients. He claims it is his children who installed the whatsapp and that he hardly uses it. However, if he wants to communicate with his clients, he normally does that through normal phone calls by directing them to his shrine. He is not against the mounting of billboards or signposts. However, he does not personally use such media platforms in advertising his shrine or the kind of services he renders to people. Though he gets visitors from around and outside the country, including Westerners he doesn’t use any electronic media to advertise himself.

3.3.3 Okomfo Mary: Her Background

As a young girl, okomfo Mary was born Yaa Amea. She grew up in Anyinasu in the Ejura-Sekyeredumase District in the Ashanti Region. Due to the religious background of her parents, she was baptized into the Catholic faith. After her baptism as a Catholic, she was renamed Mary Yaa Amea. The name Mary has since been maintained even when she became a traditional priestess. Okomfo Mary got married to Kwasi Owusu Ansah and they had their wedding at a Catholic church in Anyinasu. Okomfo Mary has four children comprising of two males and two females. Her two male children are all traditional priests. One of her female children follows her while the other one is a Christian. She had her education up to form four level in the old educational system in Ghana.

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209 A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
210 A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
211 A Personal Interview with Nana Bright.
Calling into Priesthood

For okomfo Mary, her training began through possession by a deity. According to her, when she got possessed by the deity, she was given a lot of instructions to follow. Some of the instructions, she recounts, made her to walk for a number of miles to places.\textsuperscript{212} After the possession by the deity, she underwent some form of training under several traditional priestesses. According to okomfo Mary, after she was possessed by the deity, she could not speak for some time until some rituals were performed. After the rituals were performed, one of the senior traditional priestesses at the time said she was going to prophesy and that if her prophecy doesn’t come to pass, she will be punished. She recounted during the interview:

I gave three prophecies when I had the call at Anyinasu. One of them, they said I prophesied that, there was going to be massive development from where the Nigerian house is to where the river is located. Am told I also prophesied that there was going to be a lot of money and development in the area and it also came to pass. I also prophesied that people were going to build a lot of houses in this area and right now, look at the development this area has received.\textsuperscript{213}

According to okomfo Mary, she went through numerous forms of training under several traditional priestesses before she finally assumed the full role as a traditional priestess. He stated “I went through a lot of training. Sometimes I wasn’t even allowed to eat. I was educated on some special taboos and other stuff. The observance of these taboos were part of the work you will do for the gods. I was separated from normal secular life. Because I was told any breach of moral purity could lead to my expulsion from the shrine or the suman.”\textsuperscript{214} According to okomfo Mary, this other training she received equipped her to finally graduate into a full priestess. She narrates that after her assumption into the

\textsuperscript{212} A personal interview with Okomfo Mary, on 7\textsuperscript{th} May, 2018, Nkoranza, Brong Ahafo.  
\textsuperscript{213} A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.  
\textsuperscript{214} A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
priesthood after three years of training, she has been able to help a lot of people including Christians through the help of her god, Asuo Asantesei Kwabena.215

She explained that she loves her work as a traditional priestess and the she is opened to other religious faith such that one of her daughters is a Christian. She said she is happy about that.

![Okomfo Mary in her priestly regalia.](Image)

Picture 3.2: Okomfo Mary in her priestly regalia.
Source: Picture taken by researcher during field work in 2018. This picture was posted on a wall at the shrine.

3.3.3.1 Okomfo Mary and the Use of the Media

For *okomfo* Mary, during the yam festival celebration, she uses the community radio and other radio stations to advertise the programme to them. According to her, the signpost helps people to locate you easily. During the interview, she disclosed that the use of the TV, twitter and other media outlets helps to communicate ones’ presence though she does not often use them.216 According to *okomfo* Mary, signposts are a vital means of

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215 A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
216 A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
communication especially when you want people to hear and know about your services and the kinds of things you do. She argued that the advantages of using signposts are many and among them is potential placement of the advertisement close to your potential clients. In the view of okomfo Mary, the mounting of a signpost ensures high frequency of exposure to regular commuters who ply the route where your signpost is located. To her, the aspect of 24-hour presence of the signpost underpins their utility as a high reach tool for advertising.\(^{217}\)

She argued therefore that in Ghana, major streets, highways and cities are littered with billboards, posters and signposts from the camp of traditional priest and priestesses. These billboards and signpost are mainly to communicate the presence of the traditional religion to the public. It is an attempt to drag the traditional religion from the confines of the private into the public by making its presence felt.\(^{218}\) According to okomfo Mary, her only concern is the way some people are using the media to dupe others in the name of the traditional religion. She argued that these kind of individuals who pose themselves as traditional priests and priestesses are only charlatans who are parading themselves as a result of the free media to just dupe vulnerable people.\(^{219}\) Her concern is for people to be vigilant and not succumb to people who pose themselves as traditional priests and destroy the good works some of them are doing.

Okomfo Mary, when asked about her use of the radio had this to say: “Before I started going on radio, I sought permission from my gods and they allowed me to do so. I often make use of Akyea FM at Nkoranza. Sometimes I go there in person to explain certain

\(^{217}\) A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
\(^{218}\) A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
\(^{219}\) A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.
issues and some kinds of help that I can offer to people in need. Sometimes, I do an audio recording and send to the station.\footnote{\textsuperscript{220} A personal interview with Okomfo Mary.}

According to Okomfo Mary, her use of the radio has offered her the opportunity to help a lot more people who otherwise might not have heard about her. She maintains that there are so many people out there who need to hear about the kind of help that she can provide, and her use of the radio has brought many to her for healing and spiritual life interventions such as protection from the collapse of one’s business and work. For her, her aim is to help take problems from people and, so she is very happy that the use of the radio is contributing greatly to her aim. She indicated that she also uses Akasanoma Radio on line. This she claimed is being operated for her by another person. As a result of that people even come from outside Ghana to visit her shrine. She declared her intention on going to the TV if she gets the opportunity and the needed support. Her major challenge according to her was the cost of airtime. Commenting on how she has been funding her programmes on the radio, she said she depends on the little monies that she receives from people who come to her for her help. She maintained that it has not been easy at all.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the background to the training of the selected indigenous priests and priestess. Not only that, it has also highlighted the use of the mass media by the selected priests and priestess in Ghana. These include Nana Kwaku Bonsam of Akomadan-Afrancho in the Ashanti region; Nana Bright of Bredi in the Brong Ahafo region and Okomfo Mary at Anyinasu in the Ahanti region. The appropriation of the media, has consequently, increased the public visibility of the traditional religion in the Ghanaian airwaves and also,
promoted the activities and services rendered by traditional priests and priestesses. The next chapter focuses more on the implications of the use of the mass media by the traditional priests and priestesses as well as the changes it has brought on the lifestyle of the traditional priest and the implication it has on the indigenous religion in general.
CHAPTER FOUR

A DISCUSSION OF THE USE OF MEDIA BY INDIGENOUS PRIESTS AND PRIETESSES IN GHANA

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the use of the mass media by three selected traditional priests and priestess. The chapter also looked at the calling and training of the traditional priests and priestesses and examined the various forms of training and experiences they encountered leading to their call into the traditional priesthood. In this chapter, the researcher examines how the use of the mass media by these traditional priests and priestesses has shaped the contemporary face of the African Traditional Religion and the forms of attraction it is gaining in the Ghanaian public sphere. Some of the issues that this researcher discusses include: mediating power and the search for security through the media, the media as medium for religious marketing, advertising and branding African traditional religion. The media and transnational networks, and the impact and/or the influence of the use of the mass media on the traditional religion.

4.2 The Use of the Modern Media by Traditional Priest and Priestesses

The use of the mass media by the traditional priest and priestesses in recent times has gained a lot of popularity and considerable public attention. Evidently, the use of the media among traditional priests and priestesses extend beyond the motive of publicizing the activities of the traditional religion to the arena of marketing and advertising. As it has been indicated, some traditional priests and priestesses have tended to publicize their services in the media especially the radio and the television. Some also mount signposts and billboards to direct people to their shrines. As indicated, Nana Kwaku Bonsam seems to be one of the most publicized traditional priests in Ghana. He has gained a lot of popularity for the use of social
media network such as twitter and Instagram. From his discussion, the aim to be on these media platforms is to help gain maximum space, time and resource to help advertise and display to the public, the core nature and aspects of the indigenous religion.

Picture 4. 1: A signpost showing directions to Nana Kwaku Bonsam’s shrine and the numerous activities he performs for people. 
Source: Picture taken by the researcher during fieldwork 2018.

In recent times, apart from the radio and television, some traditional priests and priestesses have also resorted to the use of other internet based media. There are some traditional priests and priestesses who are now on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In today’s media saturated environment, being seen and heard is what matters in the religious scene today, the traditional priests and priestesses of the traditional religion have also adapted the use of the new forms of modern media technologies to conform or adapt to the existing and modern current trends. The adoption or the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses have made their presence felt in the Ghanaian public space.
As indicated earlier, they are employing the use of mobile phones, internet, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram and other forms of new media to make their religion more visible and attract a lot of people into their stead. Broadly categorized as social media, these new media are employed largely by celebrities and organizations as one of the most reliable platforms for marketing, advertising and attracting potential customers and consumers. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are only three kinds of the numerous forms of social media that is currently being used by many people globally. The two most popular ones used by people are Facebook and Instagram. Facebook is available to anyone with a valid email address. Facebook members can join networks based on school affiliation, employers, and geographic regions. Facebook can be used for keeping track of friends both old and new. The application and use of Facebook has given impetus for most business marketing and operation. It also help people to connect to their friends and loved ones anywhere on the globe. With the improvement and advancement in modern media and communication technologies, not only has individuals, but companies and businesses are now relying on internet based approaches to market their services.

This has given a great boost and increase in customer attraction and the generation of revenue for businesses. It has also helped them to extend their constituencies and create global niche for themselves. In today’s world, how fast a business is growing is dependent on how that business or a company is able to employ innovative ways through the use of social, mobile and local marketing strategies in the running of the business. In today’s media saturated environment, one of the major channels for advertisement and promotion of products is the internet. The internet, since its inception, has given impetus to most companies and business organizations to market and sell their products at ease. The modern media has become the most preferred method or approach for marketing and advertising in recent times. It has drastically changed and brought about a kind of dynamism in online
marketing. Owing from the improvement and advancement in modern media, traditional priests and priestesses have moved from their confined zones (hidden places) and are playing a frontal role in the marketing process of the indigenous religion as partners in multiple online conversations engaging their customers, prospective customers as well as those who offer criticisms on the kind of services they offer. For example, the indigenous religion has witnessed a lot of branding and marketing strategies from traditional priests and priestesses through their use of the media.

Significantly, in an attempt to be more in tune with modernity and attract individuals who stand in constant need of their services, traditional priests and priestess are also engaging the use of these new forms of media technologies to communicate their presence. It has undoubtedly become a new platform through which the indigenous religion is advertised and marketed. In Ghana, some traditional priests and priestesses such as Nana Kwaku Bonsam are now having official twitter handle, Instagram and Facebook account through which they communicate with individuals who want their services and also, make public their views on matters of public interests. Generally speaking, advertising is a means of communication of a message to the desired target audience comprising of individuals, customers, or to a society at large, and the message maybe of any kind; about products, brands, corporate or about social messages and notices to the general public. One can argue that the style and approach in which the priests and priestesses employ the usage of the media is mainly for advertisement and promotion of traditional religion. They are using the new media platforms to make their presence felt and thereby creating a lot of attention for their religious activities.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the traditional priests and priestesses only employed old forms of media such as drums, arts, symbols, music etc. for communication.
However, with the emergence of new media they have resorted to these new forms of media to make themselves more relevant and appealing to the eyes of the public. The question is, why this new shift? It is evident that individuals have interest in taking part in the branding or marketing process and conversation that these new media presents. In the next section, the researcher focuses the discussion on the four components of the social media namely: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as used by some traditional priest and priestesses in Ghana. Attention will also be placed on the use of television and radio, and print media such as signposts.

4.3 The Use of Radio and Television
One of the traditional forms of media in Ghana is radio and television. Before the assumption of a democratic rule, the radio and television space in Ghana was highly controlled by the state. However, the free media space as a result of the liberalization of the media hitherto ushered in a kind of competition in the Ghanaian media. Apart from Christianity, one form of a religious strand that has gained dominance in Ghanaian media is the African traditional religion. More visibly, some priests and priestesses of the traditional religion have become some sort of competitors to their Christian counterparts. In Ghana, most radio and television stations are flooded with advertisements from the priests and priestesses of the traditional religion. They purposefully use their airtime hours to promote the traditional religion and also, market the kind of services they offer at their shrines. Another twist to this whole event is the display of supernatural powers and religio-magico powers on the side of some acclaimed traditional priests. Some traditional priests and priestesses try to convince their television audience on the kind of power they wield by engaging in the practice of producing monies magically in the full glare of people on the television. Very largely, the use of the radio and television are purposely to promote and
also, give audience the exposure to the kind of services offered by the priests and priestesses in their shrine.

4.4 Traditional Priests and the Mediating of Power and the Search for Security

Over the last two decades, there has been enough evidence to suggest that various strands of religious organizations and/or institutions in Ghana have increased their participation in the media for religious services or activities. This study, particularly, has focused on the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses. The study has pointed out that the current attempts by traditional priests and priestesses to move from their private and secluded places into the public domain are influenced by the advancement and improvement in communication and media technologies. However, very importantly, one phenomenon that remains conspicuous in the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses is the attempt to promote the African traditional religion and thereby, mediate and make known to the general public the “power” inherent in traditional religion. As mentioned earlier, unlike previous times when traditional priests will sit in their shrines in isolated places and allow people to visit or consult them, some of them are now openly operating and advertising their services in the media and calling attention for their activities on television and radio.

Despite the different religious traditions that people belong to, the indigenous or traditional religion especially, has become an abode for the search of security and members of different religious traditions in Ghana, be it Christians or Muslims; solicit for their services because usually, the shrine has often times become a place for solving mundane issues.221 In Ghana,

the challenges that confront people as a result of difficult socio-economic issues and leadership failures culminates in the search for security from various religious functionaries who are known to be powerful and can proffer solution to people’s problem. In Ghana, though successive governments have tried their best in improving the lives of the people through the introduction of numerous economic policies, there is still an indication that these economic policies have not yielded much results due to incessant corruption and bad leadership. Unemployment coupled with other issues has brought untold hardship and frustration among the populace. The attempts to also move or usher the country into a globalizing African economy has not been met without challenges. Thus, “while globalization and modernity have come with many advantages in Ghana, their malcontents seem to outweigh these gains. These malcontents include relative poverty, the increasing chasm between the rich and the poor, the pressure on the local population to aspire towards Western lifestyles, and growing unemployment as free trade undermines the basis of local industries, to name just a few.”

Genevieve Nrenzah, has argued that individuals who suffer the full brunt of these globalizing induced dislocation include “women and the teeming upwardly mobile youth. Against the backdrop of this gloomy picture a prevailing Christian narrative on material prosperity has rejuvenated the pre-occupation with wealth and health among worshippers.” She argues further that the discourse also links the acquisition or maintenance of wealth and health with religious practice. This had led to an upsurge in Ghanaian Christian religious rituals believed to be capable of securing the prosperity of worshippers. Encouraged by this development, purveyors of magico-religious power in Ghana’s indigenous religious landscape, such as priests and priestesses, have supported a counter

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222 Nrenzah, “Gender Dimensions of Wealth and Health in Ghanaian Indigenous Religious Thinking”, 175.
claim in two directions: “in opposition to the demonizing Christian discourse they maintain that indigenous or traditional spiritual power is not only “good”, but more so, they hold that their power has superior potency compared with power from Christian sources, and is more capable of producing the access to wealth and health that worshippers seek.” These purveyors have also increased their public visibility in Ghana, making their services more accessible to the public. Thus, some traditional priests and priestesses now recognize the need to advertise their services in the media for people to know the kind of services and help they are able to offer to people to enable them deal with their problems and at same promote the traditional religion.

Among the Akan of Ghana, the traditional priests and priestesses popularly known in the local parlance as *komfo* (singular) and *Akomfo* (plural) is believed to be the mouthpiece of the gods and they carry supernatural powers that they can use to help people deal with their problems in life. As highlighted by K.A. Busua “the spirit of the god speaks through his or [her] priest, sometimes by displacing the personality of the priest, so that he becomes a mere medium behaving and speaking as compelled by the spirit that possesses him [or her].” In such instances, Busua argues that usually, “a trained spokesman interprets the utterances and gestures of the priest. At other times the priest may interpret the will of the god through drawing leather thongs, or throwing cowrie shells or sticks, or casting a bone or stone die, or watching the fluttering of a slain chicken and the position in which it comes to rest.” Among other things, the “gods are besought to grant health, or children, or prosperity in business, or protection from misfortune and from witches.” Traditional priests and priestesses as mouthpieces of the gods are believed to carry supernatural abilities

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223 Nrenzah, “Gender Dimensions of Wealth and Health in Ghanaian Indigenous Religious Thinking”. 175.
that enable them to communicate with the gods or the unseen world and thereby invoke their blessings on people. They are able to also diagnosis and give directions or solutions to problems. It is believed that the *okomfo* through the medium of music and dance enters into trance and communicates with spirit beings.

John Ekem, for instance, has given two meanings to the word *okomfo*. According to him, in secular language, the word *kom* refers to “hunger”, but in religious discourse it refers to the act of cultic or spirit-inspired dance. When any music and dance forms are set aside as something sacred to the gods or divinities, they assume ritual value.²²⁷ They are cultivated not only to provide the atmosphere and emotional conditioning required to sustaining a ritual occasion, but also as a medium for reaching the unseen. In other words they are invocatory. Thus, as Ephirim-Donkor notes, in public the “*akom* is conjuration in a state of trance, which includes unique dances in response to unique musical dictates of deities.”²²⁸ *Akom*, in the senses of both “hunger” and “cultic dancing” to ritual music is applicable to traditional priesthood for it is through the spiritual disciplines of “fasting” and deliberate abstinence from “pleasure” that the religious functionary achieves the “spiritual alertness” and “heightened sensitivity” to supernatural communication that enables religious mediation to occur in the context of power.²²⁹ Ritual music through drums and singing creates the appropriate atmosphere for the gods to descend and possess the priest or priestess and then deliver the required messages through them as mediums. Thus, *akom* refers to the acts of “prophesying” under the influence of a possessing deity, and it mostly (though not always) occurs during a period of trance. When the religious functionary keeps spiritually alert to physical, spiritual and ritual purity, it makes it easier for the spirit of the


²²⁸ Emphirim Donkor, 22.

²²⁹ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 100.
deity to descend or alight upon him or her and bring word to the confused and troubled world of humans:

The akomfo possess a repertoire of secret herbal knowledge, which they draw upon to aid the treatment of all kinds of illnesses. Before applying their medical skills, however, they divine the diagnosis thus ensuring that holistic healing was psychosomatic. In this way, the spiritual causation of an otherwise physical affliction is first mitigated... On matters of state, the akomfo are consulted regularly, especially during exigencies in order for them to make known the will of the ancestors and deities to their earthly representatives, the rulers. Thus the akomfo are prophetic voices who promulgate future events to society through traditional rulers.230

Thus akom “is wholly and ritually meaningful, as it entails acquiring a repertoire of spiritual and medical knowledge needed to address magico-medical, psychosomatic and spiritual welfare of society.”231 Despite the presence of Islam and Christianity, traditional religions in Ghana have retained their influence because of their intimate relation to family loyalties and local mores (social rules prescribing behaviour of individuals in a society, which, if violated, result in strong disapproval or punishment).232 The traditional cosmology expresses belief in a supreme being (referred to by the Akan as Nyame, or by the Ewe as Mawu). There are also the divinities that take “residency” in streams, rivers, trees, and mountains.233

These divinities are generally perceived as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and society. Ancestors and numerous other spirits are also recognized as part of the cosmological order. For all Ghanaian ethnic groups, the spirit world is considered to be as real as the world of the living. The dual worlds of the mundane and the sacred are linked by a network of mutual relationships and responsibilities.234 The action of the living, for

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230 Emphirim Donkor, 23.
231 Emphirim Donkor, 25.
example is believed to affect the gods or spirits of the departed, while the support of family or ethnic ancestors ensure prosperity of the lineage or state. Neglect, it is believed, might spell doom. To ensure that a natural balance is maintained between the world of the sacred and that of the profane, the roles of the chief within the state, family elders in relation to the lineage, and the priest within society, are crucial.\textsuperscript{235} Priests undergo vigorous training in the art of medicine, divination, and other related disciplines and are, therefore, consulted on a more regular basis by the public. Because many diseases are believed to have spiritual causes, traditional priests sometimes act as doctors or herbalists. Shrine visitation is perceived to be strongest among the uneducated and in rural communities. This fact, however, does not necessarily suggest that the educated Ghanaian has totally abandoned tradition; some educated and mission-trained individuals do consult traditional oracles in times of crisis.\textsuperscript{236}

Evidently, the messages of healing, miracles and prosperity easily find sympathetic echoes among a populace down on the economic ladder. With the vulnerable at their mercy, the emphasis is on good life, an antidote to the despair that thrives in society outside the walls of their shrines. Through the use of the mass media such as television and the radio, the traditional priests and priestesses are now displaying their “power” and inviting the general public to their stead to solicit such powers for their personal gains and success in life. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, a traditional priest and others have gained prominence and popularity on national TV channels for the kind of help they are able to offer to people. In the case of Kwaku Bonsam, for example, some of the help he has offered to people has seen him travelling outside the country and going to places

such as the United States of America. Similarly, Nana Bright of Bredi also indicated that he has on some occasions, received visitors from abroad to his shrine.

In Ghana and particularly Africa, the belief in supernatural evil forces and their ability to effect pain and suffering in the lives of people makes individuals run to the shrines and other religious places in search of security. The plurality of the religious space in Ghana can be attributed to the traditional concept or notion of invisible world which is believed to be inhibited by malevolent spirits, serving as obstacles for the realisation and enjoyments of human life in the material world. As a result, a number of Ghanaians are therefore inclined to any religion that claims to have power to help people overcome any form of evil or hardship in their lives. According to a Ghanaian scholar of the indigenous and/or traditional religion, Elizabeth Amoah, “the African [Akan] concept of well-being comprises everything that makes life worth-living... good health, peace and harmony with the spirits, and the entire society, to the material or physical resources that seem to give comfort.” Amoah further intimates that “well-being in this sense has both internal (psychological and spiritual) and external (material) dimensions.”

It is this worldview of the life in the traditional concept that partly evokes the need of religious functionaries like the traditional priests. The Akan, especially, believe that people are vulnerable to spiritual forces, both evil and good. As a result, there is the need for a more potent power to overcome the evil ones. Therefore, the services of religious functionaries such as traditional priests are solicited for security and protection. Knowing people’s vulnerability in the precarious mundane world, the traditional priests and

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238 Amoah, “African Traditional Religion and the Concept of Poverty”, 111.
priestesses have now taken advantages of the media and are mediating their power and asking people to come to their shrines to secure help and protection. The powers that are displayed on television screens and radio by traditional priests and priestesses send signals of the mediating role they can play for people. Their ability to discern the future and predict events makes their mediating role very important in traditional societies as well as the modern sphere. This suggests that the mediating role of traditional priests and priestesses will be indispensable looking at the deep-seated desire about the attempts for people to know the future and also, seek for diagnosis or solution to issues that confront them in life especially those that border on health, social wellbeing and progress in life.

4.5 The Media as Medium for Religious Marketing/Advertising and Branding

One of the most important element that comes with the use of the mass media advertising, marketing and branding. Branding has been largely associated with the styles and medium through which the media is used by organizations including those from religious institutions. One of the aims of appropriating mass media is to make one go public and offer to his or her audience the various services rendered by their outfit. Thus, the fundamental aim of every organization is to position itself well in order to appeal to its customers and also attempt to satisfy their basic needs. The subject of branding as a major concept in marketing has become one important feature in the usage of the mass media by traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana. Explicitly, there is no gainsaying in the fact that looking at the advancement in modern media technologies today, one way through which the traditional priests and priestesses can showcase themselves and their services is through the media.
Marketing can be defined as “the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from the producer to the consumer, to satisfy the needs and desires of the consumer and the goals and objectives of the producer.”

Marketing should be understood in a broad way not just as advertising and publicizing, but as including any means that furthers a mutually satisfying exchange between the organization and the customer. This includes the design of the product or service, the choice of the target market, the screening of the main competitors, the organization of the means of distribution, as well as the publicizing and branding of the product. Branding on the other hand can be defined as the idea or image of a specific product or service that consumers connect with by identifying the name, logo, slogan, or design of the company that owns the idea or image. The branding process occurs when that idea or image is marketed so that it is recognizable by more and more people, and identified with a certain service or product.

With inference from the above, one can argue that the attempt by some traditional priests and priestesses to be in the media can only be explained in the context of marking and/or marketing in order for them to gain public audience and create a niche for themselves. Thus, it is to market and gain a popular brand image for themselves and market their services to people who stand in constant need of their services. In recent times, different styles of branding have given the traditional priests and priestesses an identifiable image, and a solid ground to communicate a key aspect of who they are and what they are doing in simple, clear, and striking ways. The idea of branding allows the traditional priests and priestesses to give an impression of their services and also to directly influence what the faith

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community or the entire populace think about the traditional or indigenous religion. Marleen de Witte has suggested that in marketing theory, the idea of ‘branding’ seems to involve three things. Firstly, she argues that the concept portrays a distinctiveness of a particular product, line, service, or firm from similar products, lines, services, or firms. The second is the promotion of consumer awareness of this particular distinctive identity or quality and the third is the effort to create loyalty on the part of consumers, to make them continue buying the same brand of goods despite the availability of competing brands.

In Ghana today, as indicated in the previous chapter, the traditional priests and priestesses are not advertising their trade only on billboards. They are deploying all forms of media technologies including radio and social media to market and brand themselves. Nana Kwaku Bonsam for instance, has over thirty-one thousand people following him on Instagram. He has also created a website\textsuperscript{242} for his shrine and has a lot Facebook activities including Facebook Live to connect to his clients. In the interview with Kwaku Bonsam, he indicated that the use of the mass media has become very necessary due to the changes that have erupted in the society owing to the improvement and advancement of modern media technologies. This is what he says: “as society changes you also have to change. As we speak, the Internet is changing the face of communication in the world. We cannot continue to rely on the past and expect it to make any difference.”\textsuperscript{243} In the interview, he further intimated that “in the past, all these did not exist so our forbearers limited themselves to small corners. We need to expand our frontiers and bring the African traditional religion to our young people who are losing their heritage to foreign cultures because of the myths surrounding the religion. There is no better way to do it than through the media.”\textsuperscript{244} For

\textsuperscript{242} www.kwakubonsam.com (accessed on May, 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2018).
\textsuperscript{243} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
\textsuperscript{244} A personal interview with Nana Kwaku Bonsam.
Kwaku Bonsam and okomfo Mary, the media has come at the right time to help promote the worship of the traditional religion. According to them, the media helps to promote the traditional religion to outsiders.

Marketing and Branding through the media has also been associated with religious cult and consumeristic ethos and the economies of religion. A well-known scholar in the area of marketing, Douglas Atkin, has postulated that brand construction amount to creating religious cults. In his seminal work *The Culting Brands*, Atkin lists Apple and Harley Davidson as examples of companies that have been successful at this, with ensuing economic success. “Brand are symbols”, Atkin argues, and today’s economy is not formal economy in which products are made to compete in rational terms – it is a “spiritual” and “symbolic economy” in which what is sold is “community”, meaning, and shared experiences. Rather than reducing religious phenomena to economic terminology, Atkin exemplifies the very opposite trend which animates marketing today: thinking of economics in religious terms. Far from casting consumers as rational actors seeking to maximize utility, let alone applying this rationale to religious “consumers”, looking at the evolution of marketing in instructive as to how consumerism actually works.

There is an indication that the traditional priests and priestesses are aware of the utility value of religion among the Ghanaian populace and hence, are also devising ways and means to market and make their services available to the people. The traditional priests and priestesses understand their mediation role between the traditional communities and the unseen world. They are aware of the fact that when a Ghanaian is sick or troubled, he or

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she tries to seek answers or solutions to the problem that confronts him or her in life. In doing so, their shrines become the point of call. Thus, the religious functionary in the African context is above all else, perceived to play a mediatory role or, considered to be a person of sacred power, with supernatural ability to “see” into and “discern” developments within the realms of the supernatural. People go to these functionaries for all kinds of medicine for protection against enemies and invulnerability within the physically and spiritually precarious world in which life has to be lived.  

So, through the activities of the traditional priests and priestesses in the media, some sort of commodity value is placed on the religion and audience are asked to seek the benefits thereof for their gains in life.

A commodity value is placed on the religious activity because the advertisement of their services in the media such as television and the radio is honed in the marketplace of religion. The traditional religion is advertised to people as a form of commodity that people can seek or buy to satisfy their hunger in any area of life depravity. However, in such cases, religion is only limited to markets sentiments and value or benefits in it. It is therefore prudent that the traditional priests and priestesses look at the ways and means through which these advertisements and branding are done to enable them cut down exaggeration. As bemoaned by Nana Kwaku Bonsam and Nana Bright, some self-acclaimed traditional priests have through these media duped gullible and vulnerable people with the aim of taking their monies to double it for them or to help them become rich over-night. According to Kwaku Bonsam and Nana Bright, any traditional priest who engages him or herself in such acts is not a good or proper priest of the traditional religion. They also cautioned that the gods of the traditional religion encourage hard work and do not tolerate laziness. Hence, people should try to work hard rather than seek help from the gods in their various life endeavors.

and also seek short ways of becoming rich. This, according to them, does not speak well of the traditional religion. It is therefore imperative that traditional priests and priestesses who have resorted to the use of the media be cautious about the way and manner they advertise the traditional religion.

4.6 The Economic Aspects of Use of Brand Name and the Media by Traditional Priests and Priestesses

As part of this study, one of the observation the researcher has made is economic aspects emanating from the use of the media through what can be described in media marketing terms as brand names. On most signposts, a number of traditional priests and priestesses have names to describe themselves. Though the researcher is not preview to the background information leading to the choice of these names, it is no doubt an indication of a brand strategy to disclose the somewhat powerful nature of their gods. Thus, the names are dedicated to those effects which emanate from the labelling strategies of spiritual suppliers, the aim of which is to bring off a positive reaction from the customer with respect to what is on the offer.

The manner in which potential customers perceive a brand name and keep it in mind is decisive for their attitude to a certain product or supplier.249 As argued by Keller, “the semantic meaning of a suggestive brand name may enable consumers or customers to infer certain attributes and benefits” and “facilitates marketing activity designed to link certain associations to the brand.”250 Thus, if the Ghanaian populace, for instance, get to know that the name Nana Kwaku Bonsam is powerful and that being associated with it brings certain

supernatural enablement, they will continue to trade with him or visit him regularly in an attempt to get answers to their incessant problems.

For instance, Nana Kwaku Bonsam was born as Stephen Osei Mensah. As Nrenzah explains, “Two meanings are associated with his religious name Nana Kwaku Bonsam.”\(^{251}\) According to Nrenzah, “generally, the term *Nana* is a title of reverence that prefixes the name of a god, a chief, a priest, an elder or an important personality in Akan society. The prefix *Nana* is therefore used in reference to the deities whose agents’ priests serve. Bonsam is addressed as *Nana* because he is a priest who serves a deity.”\(^{252}\) She explains further that “in Akan culture Kwaku is a name given to a male born on a Wednesday. In Akan religion it is said that a person’s soul, \(\text{\^kra}\), was created on the day he was born. Thus Bonsam’s soul or \(\text{\^kra}\) was born on a Wednesday according to the Akan reasoning.”\(^{253}\) However, according to Nrenzah, there are some controversies regarding the use of Bonsam as part of his name. This controversy, she argues, emanates from the inconsistencies in the explanations usually given by Bonsam himself regarding his name. On one hand, he links his name Kwaku to the day he was born, that is, Wednesday. On the other hand, he claimed to have “performed wonders in the court of the Techiman paramount chief” and as result “earned the nickname Kwaku Bonsam, from the chief on account of his spectacular display of supernatural abilities.”\(^{254}\)

According to Nrenzah, “it is still not clear which of these explanations back his use of the name Kwaku Bonsam. Likewise, for his name ‘Bonsam,’ which the Akan Christian term for Satan.” Nrenzah reports that in 2008, the name created a stir when Kwaku Bonsam

\(^{251}\) Nrenzah, “Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines”, 124.
emerged on the national religious scene with the proclamation that he would champion a return to the practice of the indigenous religions in Ghana, having been given the mandate by some deities to engage the powers of the gods in the redemption of Ghana and the world at large from socio-political, economic and religious problems. He is quoted to have said:

Ghana is plagued with both spiritual and physical problems because we have left the worship of our forefathers. For Ghana to develop like China and Japan we need to go back to our indigenous worship; this is because these two countries are developed without the help of the West because they dwell on the religion of their fathers… Kofi oo Kofi promised that he will help to heal the world. So my aim is to spread the indigenous religion to the world.255

According to Nrenzah, “convinced that he must really have the backing of some powerful gods to be able to make such a claim; other individual agents from the indigenous religious landscape felt encouraged to publicize their credentials and activities from this time on.”256

Of particular importance is the nuanced semantics in the use of the name. A brand name in religious cycles is to make the fundamental requirement for a particular service to be able to form the subject of communication amongst potential consumer (irrespective of whether it is a benevolent or derogatory assessment) is that the service concerned be identifiable. The continuity of the supplier’s name and the service offered ensures recognition value, allowing it to be linked to past experiences and future expectations. Brand names, nowadays, form part of the current manifestations of the spiritual services market. Through these names, the therapeutic ideas offered acquire a physical identifiable medium to which certain features can be ascribed, either to the person of the therapy provider (his name, his title) or to a symbol referring to the institution that is providing healing or to the healing service itself.257

However, the economics of the brand name are not just restricted to opening up potential for sanctions. A spiritual supplier wishing to acquire a distinct identity so as to stand out from the mass of competing suppliers needs a name which will attract consumers’ attention. Since the effect of these naming strategies on the visibility of the therapy supplier is hard to overestimate, the chosen names and symbols have to be “catchy” and meaningfully express the “special nature” of the respective therapy company. This also includes the fact that the name must have a high recall value and be easy to commit to memory.258

Brand names “serve as powerful repositories of meaning… employed in the substantiation, creation und (re)production of self”. Names and titles in the spiritual scene must therefore adapt to the alternative self-definition of its public, which is expressed in typical attributes such as “holistic”, “spiritual”, “harmonious”, or “creative”. To gain approval from public brings out an additional feature of the designations as well: Religious entrepreneurs largely resort to concepts which hint at their proximity to the social institutions that are recognized as legitimate. It is primarily the established educational institutions which serve as a point of reference, and above all state scientific and school education institutions (“academy”, “school”, “university”, “center”).259 As well as suggesting professionalism, naming in the form described is also associated with another not unwelcome effect. A supplier’s credibility or integrity is reinforced to the extent that he is able to keep the “economic truth” of his company concealed. The connotations associated with “science”, “research”, and “teaching” essentially do not suggest any interest in private financial gain.260

On the economics of the branding of names and the use of the media, one can argue that, the media environment is also an economic platform where agents show their “wares” for clients or audience who have gathered to shop for religious goods, so that they can pick and choose which potential agents to go to when they need help (healing, revenge, and protection among others). There is a growing level of the commodification of religion in the Ghanaian media and the activities of the traditional priests and priestesses are no means an exemption. In Ghana’s media landscape, there are numerous religious functionaries in the media that are advertising on daily basis to the viewers and the general public the kind of services they render at their respective shrines or churches. This has hitherto resulted in a kind or some sort of religious competition even among the pastors and traditional priests. This situation has changed with the growing commodification of spiritual power in Ghana. Nowadays, the indigenous religious agents make a point of showing through gestures and proclamations, how the “powers” of competitors do not march up to theirs and how, they, rather than their competitors, should be consulted. As part of this study, the researcher observed that the more dramatic a miracle performance is, the greater the number of clientele who troop to that performer’s shrine in the days following the act. These priests with dramatic, impressive acts attract more clients after such performances. These new clients consult the priests outside of the public domain and in the secrecy of their shrine and pay for services rendered.

4.7 ATR, the Media and Transnational Networks

There has been a remarkable exchange in religious ideas, services and connections as part of globalization. These media of exchange have been made possible as a result of the improvements in media technologies. These have necessitated a global frame of networks that has created and built relationship among diverse groups of people. As part of this study,
the researcher has come to the knowledge that some of the traditional priests and priestesses have had international networks as a result of their usage of the media. Some of the priests interviewed disclosed that through their use of the media, people from various parts of the globe contact them for help and through that they have been able to establish networks outside the borders of Ghana. For instance, Nana Kwaku Bonsam in an interview disclosed that he has an international reputation to his shrine by stating that he receives people from different part of the globe. He travelled to the United States and visited the Whitehouse. He also claimed to have featured on New York City television station when he prayed for Ebola victims in the United Sates. According to Nana Bright, he also receives visitors especially foreigners at his shrine.

As an increasing number of scholars emphasize, religion always needs techniques and technologies of mediation that establish links between what is conceived as the physical and the metaphysical worlds and that enable people to experience the presence of divine power. Modern technologies of audio-visual reproduction and transmission are not external to religion, but facilitate religion’s core business of connecting people and spirits. As such they are not essentially different from older, more established technologies of storage and communication, such as painting, writing, or print, or religious techniques, such as prayer, dance, or divination. There is an indication that through the usage of the media, the traditional priests and priestesses are able to attract more followers; the more followers or clients a priest has, the bigger his influence in the society or the community. So, the media platform has become a place for them to connect to people and build relationships that are outside their place of abode.
4.8 The Usage of the Media as a Response to Modernity

It is somewhat evident that traditional religion has adapted to the pressures of modernity. It is well accounted that traditional religions “suffer institutional decline and diminishing appeal in the face of modernization.” However, due to its fluid nature, the African traditional religion has found new forms of expression and new avenues of survival in the modern world. These processes of adapting to these new forms of social change has been described by some as “revitalization”. Thus, revitalization of the African Traditional Religion. These new forms of “revitalization” has made the traditional religion to remain as a cultural, political, economic, and religious force especially through their use of the media. Through the media, there has been attempt to give African traditional religion a wider appeal and outreach.

In an interview with a traditional priest in the Techiman municipality, he indicated that the need to get online or the radio and the television has become very necessary due to the rapid changes that is taking place in the society. According to him, one will be “unwise not to employ the use of the media to propagate his or her services because that has become the order of the day. If you don’t use it, then you are losing out big time.”

Most of the radio stations for instance go beyond Ghana. You can listen to some of them online. I am telling you today if you don’t know. So, when I get on it and I am talking and inviting people to come to my shrine and explore the services or activities we do there, do you know how many I am reaching? I can say on authority that some people have even come from outside Ghana to consult me.

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263 Interview with some traditional priests in Techiman on 14th May, 2018.
264 Interview with some traditional priests in Techiman on 14th May, 2018.
and when I asked about how they got to know to me, they said they heard me speaking on one radio station.265

Thus, the media, to a very large extent, have been used by the traditional priests and priestesses to respond to the pressures of modernity and globalization. In the interview with Kwaku Bonsam and *okomfo* Mary, they both indicated the need to remain technologically relevant due to the changes that have taken place in the society. For Nana Bright, though he personally did not like the idea of using the media in response to modern demands, he is of the view that those using it are only trying to remain relevant and respond to the changes in the society. He also argued that they are using it to attract more customers to their shrines. The views of these traditional priests and priestesses resonate with a recent interview that was conducted by the Ghana News Agency with a senior lecturer of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, Mr. Frimpong Manso. In the interview, Frimpong Manso disclosed that the traditional priests “have taken over billboards across the country because of social change, fueled by the increasing influence of the traditional and new media.”266 According to him, though people in the society see this phenomenon as being strange, there is nothing wrong or strange about the situation as these priests and priestesses are “operating within a social context.”267

In a similar debate on the response to modernization, De Witte has reported on the Afrikania mission, especially its adoption of media as a crucial tool in the competition for exposure after the 1992 media liberation that accompanied Ghana’s return to democratic rule. De Witte further intimate the use of the media was one of the attempts by the movement’s to reform and modernize traditional religion to make it relevant and attractive as an alternative

265 A personal Interview with Nana Adinkra, on 17th May, 2018 at his Shine, Techiman, Brong Ahafo.
to Christianity.\textsuperscript{268} She notes how in structure and practice Osofo Okomfo Damuah, a
resigned Catholic priest and founder of Afrikania, patterned the movement in accordance
with Christianity and incorporated many Christian elements, starting with his title, Osofo
before adding Komfo, a title for traditional priests/priestesses.\textsuperscript{269}

However, on the contrary, a traditional priestess interviewed also bemoaned the use of the
mass media by traditional priests and priestesses. According to some of them, there is no
need and/or essence for traditional priests and priestesses to use the media. For instance,
according to \textit{okomfo} Anto in the Brong Ahafo region, the use of the media by traditional
priests and priestesses is somewhat out of place as far as she is concerned. This is because,
according to her, if a traditional priest is “powerful” he or she does not necessarily have to
be in the media to be known by the populace. Her view is similar to that of Nana Bright of
Bredi. Though Nana Bright has a soft stance on the use of the media by traditional priests
and priestesses, he somewhat dislike its usage looking at the views he expressed in an
interview with him. He wished that most traditional priests and priestesses do no use the
media for publicity and advertisement of their activities. According to him, the good works
of a particular priest will definitely bring people to their shrine. According to Nana Bright,
even though he owns the Akyea FM in the Nkoranza municipality, he does not see the need
to do even utilize it for his gains or popularity in the work that he does.\textsuperscript{270} Similarly, the
view of Nana Bright is also shared by the traditional priestess \textit{okomfo} Anto. According to
\textit{okomfo} Anto, most of the traditional priests that use the media for advertising and
marketing cannot be said to be good traditional priests because most the good and genuine
traditional priests will not go on air to advertise their services.\textsuperscript{271}

\textsuperscript{268} De Witte, “Spirit Media”, 207.
\textsuperscript{269} De Witte, “Spirit Media”, 207.
\textsuperscript{270} A personal interview with Nana Bredi, on 23\textsuperscript{rd} May, 2018, at Anto, Brong Ahafo.
\textsuperscript{271} A personal interview with Okomfo Anto, on 23\textsuperscript{rd} May, 2018, at Techiman, Brong Ahafo.
These revelations are very interesting because of the opposite views shared by various traditional priests and priestesses. In some scholarly works, some have categorized the traditional priests that resort to the use of the media as neo or new priests of the traditional religion. In these studies, attempts have been made to refer to these new ways of adapting to the use of the media as a response to modernization or the revitalization of the indigenous or traditional religion. However, whatever the case maybe, on one hand, one can argue that the traditional priests who have resorted to the use of the media are only adapting to the modern trends to make themselves more relevant in the midst of the pressures that comes with modernity. On the other hand, one can also argue that the traditional priests who are refusing to adapt to the new changes and resort to the use of the media are only being conservative.

4.9 Impact/Influence of the Media on Traditional Religion

The media, in one way or the other, has had some sort of influence in the way religion is practiced. Thus, new forms of media technologies that extends the definition of media culture are transforming the way many people experience religion. The African Traditional Religion (ATR), before the advancement of modern media technology, was practised in the private. However, since the advancement in media technologies, there have been enormous changes with regards to the ways and means adherents of the traditional religions practice their faith. Nonetheless, this new form of practice as a result of the media has its own influence on the traditional religion. This is because, the media has its own language and environment and as result, influences or changes anything that comes into contact with it. The following sub-sections presents some of these influences.

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4.9.1 Contributions

A major contribution that the media has had on the activities of traditional priests and priestesses and/or the traditional religion is publicity. In recent times, one cannot travel within a space of 10 or 15 kilometres on major roads connecting cities without encountering a billboard or poster banners mounted on road sides by traditional priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion. The traditional priests and priestesses have taken advantage of the proliferation of media and advertised both their services and the traditional religion. During the interviews, the traditional priests and priestesses interviewed were in unison that the use of the media such as television, the radio and the social media has helped greatly to promote the traditional religion in Ghana. There are some radio and television stations that have given the impetus to traditional priests and priestesses who have the resources to purchase airtime to publicize their activities as well as the traditional religion. This publicity, one can argue, has given the traditional religion a new outlook and visibility among the Ghanaian populace and beyond.

The use of the Media has also given traditional religion a new shape. A lot new development have come about as a result of the media. One can sharply recognise the difference in practices, way of doing things, the environment that the various adherents operate considering those who make use of the social media from those who are not.

4.9.2 Challenges

As argued earlier, the media has its own language and influences anything that comes into contact with it. Part of the media culture is business, entertainment and advertisement. As individuals, when one is appearing on a television programme, one’s choice and style of dressing is even affected. In the case of the usage of the media by traditional priests and
priestesses, one thing the researcher found, as a result of their media usage, is the marketing and business associated with their services. It is evident that most of the traditional priests and priestesses that employ the use of the media spend much time talking and advertising these services they offer at their respective shrines. Some also use the platform to entertain others. Entertainment has become crucial because in the media environment, one must try to keep the active presence of his or her audience by trying to inculcate some entertainment elements to keep them glued to their television and radio. This reduces the religious time to any ordinary television show which in a way reduces its essence and value.

In one of the interviews, a priest bemoaned the economic intentions of the priests who employed the use of the media. The priest explained that though in most cases, they are not supposed to charge for the services they render, but to collect gifts in the form of money as token to “contact” the gods, some of the new priests that are in the media do charge clients because they are commoditizing their spiritual power and operating as business people. One can argue that such traditional priests and priestesses are simply using the tradition of gift-giving to the gods to conceal the economic nature of their transactions with clients. While Innaccone uses the term “market” as a metaphor to describe how religious institutions and agents position themselves in a pluralistic religious society to maximize their gains, one can apply his understanding to the actions of the indigenous religious agents in this regard. I could not agree more with Iannaccone that individual priest and priestess who employ the use of the media function as firms and therefore collectively constitute a religious market for selling religious goods and services. Monetary gains may not be the primary motivation of these agents but there is no doubt that they also see the platform as an important money-making avenue, in addition to its other advantages. They advertise spiritual power and attract seekers who come to buy this crucial religious capital from their shrines. These
activities, however, reduces religion to a market value and hence, the good values are lost or not paid attention to.

4.9.3 Setbacks

It is also evident that the media has presented some forms of setbacks to the African traditional religion. Thus, African Traditional Religion is a religion that has suffered from journalistic polemics, often “demonized” in public discourse, and (mis) represented in mainstream media as a source of evil medicines with diabolical rituals perpetuated by dubious religious functionaries. According to Birgit Meyer, traditional religion came to be regarded as “uncivilized,” and Christianity as a religion of progress, modernity and civilization, that had “opened people’s eyes.”

For Meyer, the dismissal and primitivization of traditional religion pushed it into the sphere of secrecy, to the “underneath of things” that many hold to be more powerful than the more public performance of Christianity.

The recent Ghanaian internet fraud scheme called “sakawa”, which involves the performance of money-making rituals using human body parts, is only one example of what is generally believed to be associated with ATR and its representatives. Asamoah-Gyadu cites a story in his article that; On Saturday September 11, 2010, The Mirror, Ghana’s most popular weekend paper published the story of a 32-year old Nigerian who was murdered over “sakawa” Chibuzor Iwabu and his colleagues had, using “sakawa” been able to reap some three thousand and two hundred Euros (3,200) through the Internet. When a disagreement broke among them over the sharing of the money, he was murdered. It is believed that the charms and medicines for engaging in “sakawa” are obtained from some

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273 Birgit Meyer Religious and Secular, “Spiritual” and Physical” in Ghana, 110
acclaimed priests and spiritualists who usually associate themselves with the traditional
religion. As a result of these stories in the media, the average traditional priest or priestess
is sometimes seen as the one who provides the source of blood-money and evil-wealth and
underserved political and managerial positions in contemporary society.275

Media representations of traditional religions as the sources of dubious wealth and
prosperity are reinforced not just by Christian conversion testimonies but also by general
public belief in these things. While some spiritualists have received applause for their
efforts in exposing people in search of quick money, their stock in trade is faith-based
healing there are some who sometimes, use magic which preys upon the gullibility of their
wealthier followers and the desperation of the poor. This, almost all the traditional priests
interviewed, bemoaned as one of the setback currently facing the traditional religion as a
result of the use of the media. From the views of those interviewed, individuals who engage
themselves in such acts cannot claim to be proper traditional priest and priestess of the
indigenous religion. According to all the respondents, no proper and well trained traditional
priest will engage in acts of such as “sakawa” and other dubious activities as reported by
the media. These activities as publicized by the media as being part of the activities engaged
by some spiritualist who parade themselves as priest of the indigenous religion are only
tarnishing the image of the indigenous religion.

4.10 Conclusion

Generally, this chapter has examined the influence of the use of the mass media by
traditional priests and priestesses. The chapter has looked at the changes that has engulfed
the performance or practice of the indigenous religion as a result of the media. In analysing

275 Asamoah-Gyadu, Media Representation of African Traditional Religions, 8.
the issues, the chapter also took into consideration the mediatory role played by traditional priests and priestesses through their use of the media. Not only that, the chapter has also taken into consideration the ways and manner the appropriation of the media has also influenced the business dimension of the traditional religion.

On the whole, one can argue that with religion possessing such a pervasive influence in African life and existence, it will remain an important subject for media representation and coverage. Religion in the media is usually practiced out of sensational or commercial considerations, but media religion takes place as a public relations exercise or for proselytizing purposes through its promotion in the media.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The aim of this study has been to examine the usage of the media by traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana. Again, the study also examined the influence that the appropriation of modern media technologies has brought on the current face of the indigenous religion in Ghana. Globally, there has been a remarkable rise in the use of the mass media by all forms of religious groups and this study has focused on traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana and their appropriation and/or usage of modern media technologies. The most popular among the media used by the traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana are the television, the radio, the internet and social media. This study, has particularly highlighted how the traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana have employed the use of the media to advertise and promote the African traditional religion in Ghana. In discussing the issues at stake, the study employed the phenomenological and qualitative approach in the analysis of the issues that emerged from the study. The study also relied on interviews that basically focused on the three selected traditional priests for the study. The interviews were helpful because it broadened the researcher’s understanding on some of the reasons why the traditional priests have adapted to the use of modern media and how they are using the media. The theory of mediatization was also employed as a framework to guide the analysis of the study.

The theory of mediatization denotes the ways and manner through which an activity is centered and/or anchored on media. For example, if a religious organization employs the use of the media for most of its activities, then one can argue their activities have become mediatized. Mediatization takes the media not only as a technological element, but as a social issue that goes beyond technology itself to reach the sphere of culture, economy and
personal relationship. This study, relying on the theory of mediatization has highlighted how the activities of some traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana have become media centered that is, mediatized. Through their use of the media, they have built relationship and created community for themselves. The study has also discussed how their use of the media has resulted in an economic good in terms of the business and economics that surround their use of the media.

Particularly, some of the issues discussed in the study centered on religion and media, the liberalization of the Ghanaian media space, as well the intersection between religion and the media. The study discussed how religion intersects with media and the general implication it has for the practice of religion especially, the traditional African religion. The study found that the rise in the use of the mass media by traditional priests and priestesses is intensified by the liberalization of the Ghanaian airwaves. This has undoubtedly, given the traditional priests and priestesses a great opportunity to buy airtime, showcase and promote their services on the television and radio.

In highlighting the development and the effect of the use of the media on religion in general, the study again discussed the impact new media technologies have had on African indigenous religious practitioners. Some of the impacts and/or influences discussed centered on advertisement, the role of mediation, economics of brand names as well as the transnational networks emanating from the use of the media. The study argued that the enduring nature of the African traditional religion has actually made them to subsist and be relevant in the contemporary world despite the pressures of modernity.
Again, the study also looked at the use of the mass media by some selected traditional priests and priestesses. It was made known in the study that traditional priests and priestesses mostly resided in outskirts of a town, and in isolated places. From there, they received clients and helped them according to their needs. It was somewhat unusual for one to see a traditional priest or priestess in the public domain, or to see and hear them on any radio or television. However, these have changed in recent times due to the recent improvement in technology especially communication technologies. As a result, traditional priests or priestesses have now come to the public domain to execute their agenda and also promote the indigenous religion.

The study went further to discuss the kind of training they received and also, looked at the level of their usage of the mass media. This was important because one needs to understand the background of traditional priesthood, their calling, training, so as to appreciate to some extent, the new role of adding modern media technologies to their work.

5.2 Conclusion

The study has emphasized that undoubtedly, the mass media has greatly influenced the practice of the indigenous religion and promoted the activities of traditional priests and priestesses. The study has argued that the ubiquitous nature of the media has made the indigenous religion ever present in the Ghanaian public sphere. It can be concluded that the appropriation of the mass media by priests and priestesses of the traditional religion, will make the indigenous religion one of the most advertised religious forms of expression in the coming decades on both electronic and print media. The appropriation of the media, has consequently, increased the public visibility of the traditional religion in the Ghanaian airwaves and also, promoted the activities and services rendered by traditional priests and

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priestesses. In looking at the changes that have engulfed the performance or practice of the indigenous religion as a result of the media and the mediatory role played by traditional priests and priestesses through their use of the media, the traditional priests and priestesses will continue to wield much influence in the Ghanaian public sphere.

The various interviews and observation done in no small way revealed the various forms of the media that are being appropriated by the priests and priestesses. It has been made clear that apart from the Television, Radio (FM), print media being used modern form of social media like facebook, Whatsupp, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram etc., are being appropriated some of the priests/priestesses.

It is common knowledge that change is constant and that people always respond to changes that happen around them. Therefore priests and priestesses cannot remain in their corner, but to respond to the modern trend of the use of media as it seem to be the order of the day.

**Major Findings**

As part of the study, the researcher has made the following findings:

First, the researcher has found out that not all traditional priests and priestesses undergo some form of formal period of training when called into the priesthood as espoused by some scholars. Through interviews with traditional priests and priestesses selected for this study, the researcher came into the knowledge that some traditional priests and priestesses do not undergo any form of training but are trained by some gods through spirit possession and other mundane activities. This was new to the researcher because, prior to this study, the researcher thought every traditional priest undergoes some form of training under a senior priest or priestess after he or she is selected or chosen by the gods to be commissioned into the traditional priesthood.
Second, the researcher also found out that, not all the people displaying themselves in the media can be properly designated or categorized as traditional priests looking at the kind of services or activities they are engaged in, such as money rituals popularly known as “Sakawa”. During the interviews, the researcher was made to understand that a true and authentic traditional priest or priestess does not engage himself or herself in the act of doubling monies. Hence, anyone who poses himself as traditional priest and engages him or herself in the act of doubling money cannot be said to be proper and well trained priest. It was affirmed that such people are spiritualists and not traditional priests so to say.

Third, the researcher also found out that the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses is to make themselves relevant by responding to modernity and at the same time, promoting the African traditional religion. They do not want to remain archaic but respond to the pressures of modernity while maintaining the status quo of the indigenous religion. Fourth, the researcher also found out that the use of the mass media has made the traditional priests and priestesses enjoy transnational networks that have made their presence transcend beyond the borders of Ghana.

Fifth, the researcher also found out that not all traditional priests and priestesses are in support of the use of the media by traditional priests and priestesses in Ghana. Some are against its usage and call for others to exercise restraint and circumspection in the use of the media to propagate and/or advertise the traditional African religion.

Sixth, the media is also used as a medium for marketing and branding strategies to promote themselves and the indigenous religion.
Seventh, the researcher also found out that in the attempt to modernize their activities, some traditional priests have now developed the style of keeping their gods in newly built houses and mansions. This is somewhat new because in earlier times, the gods were kept in isolated places and sometimes under trees. At the shrine of Okomfo Mary, for instance, the researcher found out that each god has its own room. These rooms were newly built apartments; the same was the case of Nana Kwaku Bonsam. Nana Bright has a nice storey building from where he operates.

![Picture 5.1: A storey building from where Nana Bright operates his activities. Source: Taken by the researcher during field work, 2018.](image)

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion and findings, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations:

Firstly, the researcher recommends the need to introduce courses in religion and media especially within the study of African Traditional Religion at the Universities to see how the indigenous traditional religion is responding to modernity through the appropriation of modern media technologies.
Secondly, it is also recommended that further research work be done on the use of modern media and religion, especially modern social media and traditional religion within the Ghanaian context.

Thirdly, traditional priests and priestesses should be encouraged more to intensify their engagement with modern media in order to expose their practices to the world since the importance of the use of modern media in religion today cannot be overemphasised.
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**Interviews**

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEW

1. Nana, please how did you receive your call?

2. Nana, what was the nature of the training you received as a priest/priestess?

3. What is the medium of communication between you and your clients or prospective clients?

4. What type of medium/media do you use to communicate with your clients?

5. Were you using any medium/media before this new one?

6. How often do you communicate with your clients on this medium?

7. On which media platform do you advertise your services and activities?

8. Why have you resorted to this new forms of media for advertisement?

9. How do you employ the use of these media to advertise your services?

10. Has the use of these new media brought any impact on your services?

11. If yes, can you explain more about the kind of impact or influence you have experienced or seen since you started using this type of media?

12. Would you say that it has brought any impact on the shape and form of the Traditional Religion today?

13. Can you mention some of the old forms of medium/media you used to communicate with people?

14. Can you differentiate between the impact of the old forms you used in communicating and the new ones?

15. How do you fund or sponsor your programmes on TV, Radio, etc.?