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Research Paper



A Christian Mission: Urban Model for Ideological Propagation & Market-Driven Evangelism

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Abstract:

The intersection of religion and commerce has become an increasingly common phenomenon in the modern world, and Christianity is no exception. Christianity's global influence extends beyond traditional religious practices, into the realm of consumerism and into the global power of the market. This shift constitutes a significant shift in the way Christianity operates in today's world, where faith is not only a spiritual belief system, but also a product to be traded, sold, and consumed. The relationship between Christianity and global market power is multifaceted and includes aspects of religious branding, commercialized evangelism, and the integration of Christian messages into the broader economic system. This article examines the complex interplay between Christianity and the global marketplace and examines how Christian organizations, institutions, and media use economic systems, marketing strategies, and cultural capital to disseminate religious ideologies.

The power of the global marketplace is driven by consumer demand, globalization, and the growing influence of digital technology, which provide opportunities for the commercialization of religious practices. Historically associated with spiritual and moral teachings, Christianity is increasingly aligned with the structures of modern capitalist society. By adopting marketing techniques, branding strategies, and media, Christian institutions have harnessed the economic potential of their faith-based products and services. From megachurches and televangelism to Christian media and entertainment, religious practices have now become embedded in a global marketplace, where consumer goods, experiences, and services are inextricably linked to Christian beliefs and values. One key transformation in this context is the emergence of megachurches as global brands. These large, influential religious institutions often adopt the same business strategies as successful corporations, using hightech services, lifestyle brands, and a customer-centric approach to attract parishioners and increase revenue. For example, megachurch leaders such as Joel Osteen and Rick Warren have successfully transformed their churches into multibillion-dollar businesses, with services such as online platforms, books, music, and motivational seminars. These churches sell Christianity not only as a religious system, but also as a lifestyle brand, offering spiritual experiences that are marketed as consumer goods. The size and influence of these megachurches show how Christianity is embedded in consumer culture, where religion itself becomes a consumer product. The present research paper is aim to explore how urban environments facilitate the propagation of Christian beliefs through market driven evangelism. This paper covers how Christian missions, traditionally spread through religious teachings, are now often propagated using marketing strategies in modern cities. The paper will address how urban centres act as cultural and ideological hubs for spread of Christianity and growing trends of blending evangelism with commercial and media-based approaches.

Keywords: Christian Mission, Evangelism, global market force, commercialisation of Christianity, megachurches, digital technology, market driven Evangelism, wokeism, new ideology,

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I. Introduction:

Urban environments serve as critical arenas for ideological propagation due to their density, diversity, and access to global communication networks. Evangelical movements, in particular, have embraced marketdriven strategies to sustain and expand their influence(Campbell, H., 2009). This paper investigates how economic globalization, technological advancements, and neoliberal ideologies shape contemporary evangelical movements in urban settings. The integration of Christianity into the digital age also plays a key role in its relationship with global markets. With the rise of social media platforms, online streaming services, and digital content, Christianity has entered the global market on a scale never seen before. Christian leaders, churches, and organizations now utilize digital marketing techniques, including search engine optimization (SEO), targeted ads, and social media influencers, to spread their message.

Online platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts have enabled Christian leaders to reach new audiences worldwide, extending their influence far beyond their local congregations (Golan, O., 2023). Digital platforms also create new economic opportunities for Christian ministries, with online donations, virtual church services, and faith-based merchandise contributing to a new form of digital evangelism that is both market-driven and globally accessible.

In India, Pastor Bajinder Singh, a self-styled Christian preacher from Punjab, has been known for his healing sessions and prophecies. His events have attracted attention from Bollywood celebrities, leading to both praise and controversy. In May 2022, Bollywood personalities like Johnny Lever, Rakhi Sawant, and Sonia Singh publicly endorsed Pastor Singh's meetings, highlighting the perceived miracles and healings associated with his gatherings¹. In September 2024, actors Chunky Panday, Aditya Pancholi, and comedian Sunil Pal attended one of Pastor Singh's events, where they participated in Christian practices and received blessings². This led to online trolling, with some questioning their motivations and suggesting financial incentives. Pastor Singh's events have faced scrutiny due to allegations of forced conversions and financial misconduct. But due to these all controversies, Bajinder was high on SEO and others are attracted to Christianity, In 2022, he was accused of extorting money from a family by promising to bring their deceased daughter back to life.

Another significant aspect of the Christianity-market force relationship is the **global spread of Christian products**. From books and films to music, apparel, and even themed vacations (e.g., Christian cruises or pilgrimages), Christianity is increasingly commodified. Christian literature, such as the *Left Behind* series or devotional books, has a sizable market, with Christian publishers catering to a global audience. Christian-themed entertainment, including films like *The Passion of the Christ* or *God's Not Dead*, has found large audiences and commercial success, both in the West and globally. Similarly, Christian music artists, from Hillsong United to Christ Tomlin, have cultivated a global fanbase, with their songs being marketed as part of a contemporary Christian lifestyle.

Despite the growing integration of Christianity into the global market, this convergence raises several **ethical and theological concerns**. Critics argue that the commercialization of Christianity undermines its spiritual and moral values, reducing it to a consumer product. Some contend that market-driven evangelism exploits the vulnerable, offering spiritual experiences in exchange for financial contributions, while others argue that it distracts from the core message of faith and salvation, focusing more on material success and consumer-oriented lifestyles. The ethical implications of commodifying religious beliefs raise questions about the authenticity of faith in a consumer-driven society.Furthermore, the global spread of Christianity through market forces has implications for religious **diversity and cultural imperialism**. As Christianity becomes more commodified and globalized, it may marginalize indigenous religions and cultural practices. The imposition of Western-style Christianity through media and consumer culture can lead to the homogenization of religious practices, where the rich diversity of Christian traditions is overshadowed by a globalized, market-driven version of the faith. This raises concerns about the impact of market forces on local religious practices and traditions, particularly in non-Western countries where Christianity is being marketed as part of a broader cultural and economic agenda.

Market-Driven Evangelism and Its Impact:

In today's interconnected world, the fusion of marketing strategies and ideological propagation is increasingly evident, particularly within the realm of religion and belief systems⁷. Market-driven evangelism, a strategy where religious or ideological messages are spread through media, branding, and consumer-based approaches, has emerged as a powerful method for the dissemination of ideas. The use of commercial tools to promote religious ideologies and spiritual messages, particularly through mass media, branding, and global outreach, has transformed the ways in which these messages are spread. This phenomenon isn't limited to Western contexts but is equally prevalent in non-Western settings, such as India, where Bollywood and other popular media have played a significant role in propagating spiritual and ideological beliefs (Table-1).

The connection between market-driven evangelism and BollywoodIndia's film industry is particularly fascinating. Bollywood's vast reach and influence have made it a fertile ground for the propagation of ideologies, including religious, cultural, and political ideas, using market-oriented strategies that align with the

commercial interests of the entertainment industry. Bollywood's ability to weave spirituality and religious teachings into its narratives has led to an expanded influence of religion, often capitalizing on commercial appeal.

| Table-1 Key Factors for market univen evangensm | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Key Factors | Description | | |
| Consumer Culture & | Religious experiences are increasingly commodified through megachurches, televangelism, and a | | |
| Spirituality | thriving worship music industry. | | |
| Digital Evangelism | Online sermons, religious influencers, and AI-driven engagement redefine the outreach of evangelical | | |
| | groups. | | |
| Corporate Structures in | Evangelical organizations function like multinational corporations, employing branding, franchising, | | |
| Religion | and aggressive fundraising. | | |

| Table-1 | Kev | Factors | for | market | driven | evangelism |
|----------|------|---------|-----|---------|--------|------------|
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Televangelism and Media Evangelism in Market-Driven Ideology

In Western contexts, televangelism is a well-established method of market-driven evangelism. Televangelists such as Billy Graham and Joel Osteen have successfully blended the reach of television with religious outreach, using high production values, branding, and media to create global followings⁶. The same principles that drive televangelism have also been adopted by religious movements across the globe, where ideology is marketed through films, television shows, and media events, all designed to generate both faith-based audiences and commercial profit.Bollywood, India's film industry, operates within a similar framework. Though Bollywood isn't traditionally associated with overtly religious content, it has increasingly become a space where spiritual messages and ideologies are disseminated. The key to Bollywood's influence is its ability to blend emotional appeal with mass entertainment, making it an effective platform for spreading ideologies. Religion and spirituality often find their way into Bollywood films, where themes of moral righteousness, devotion, and the search for inner peace resonate deeply with audiences.

Bollywood and the Branding of new Spirituality

Bollywood's intersection with religion and spirituality has evolved significantly over the decades. The film industry, along with popular celebrities, has embraced market-driven evangelism by packaging spirituality in ways that appeal to the aspirations and desires of its mass audience. Celebrities in India, much like those in the West, have become icons whose personal beliefs and spiritual practices shape and influence the public discourse. Stars such as Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, and Priyanka Chopra, among others, have become symbols not only of entertainment but also of lifestyle choices and new personal ideologies that wokeism. These figures are often vocal about their spiritual journeys, which in turn shape the collective ideological landscape of wokeism (Table-2).

| Bollywood involved in Wokeism Type Evangelism | Description |
|--|---|
| Secular & Traditionalist Opposition | Urban intellectuals, untraditional religions, and progressive movements resist native cultural dominance. |
| Hybrid Spiritualities | The emergence of new-age and syncretic faiths as alternatives to structured evangelicalism. |
| State Regulation & Repression | Governmental restrictions on foreign-funded religious activities in some regions. |

Table-2: Market Driven Packaging Evangelical Spirituality of Bollywood

For instance, Shah Rukh Khan's association with Sufism has influenced many fans to explore Sufi mysticism, making it a commercially viable aspect of his persona. His movies, particularly those that explore themes of love, faith, and destiny for Islam(such as *My Name is Khan* or *Kabhi AlvidaNaaKehna*), subtly incorporate spiritual themes that align with Islam's teachings of tolerance, love, and inclusivity that useful tool for spreading Islam. These films are not only vehicles for entertainment but are also subtly marketed as pathways to exploring deeper spiritual truths, making religion a commodity within the consumer culture of Bollywood for spreading peaceful religion-Islam.Another significant example is the rise of films that feature spiritual journeys and themes for soft-spreading of Islam, such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Chakde! India*. These films are marketed not just as entertainment but also as emotionally uplifting experiences that provide both ideological content and aspirational goals. The blend of consumerism and spirituality has made it possible for Bollywood to become a critical arena for the commercialization of ideologies for different religion.

The Role of Consumerism in Bollywood's Spiritual Influence

As Bollywood films become more commercialized, the ideologies promoted through them are often shaped by the market itself. Spirituality, in this case, is presented as a commodity, much like a product that can be consumed by audiences in exchange for entertainment. The commercialization of spirituality through Bollywood has led to the rise of an entirely new market for spiritual products (Table-3). For instance, devotional music, spiritual books, and even movie-inspired merchandise are sold as a way to prolong the connection to the spiritual messages embedded in films.

| Adaptation Strategy of Bollywood | Description |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Customization of Belief Systems | Messages are tailored to address urban concerns, including mental health, prosperity theology, |
| | and work ethics. |
| Localization & Cultural Appropriation | Evangelical movements integrate elements of local traditions to increase acceptance. |
| Youth-Oriented Engagement | The rise of faith-based music festivals, social media campaigns, and self-help-styled preaching |
| | attract younger generations. |

Table-3 Ideological Adaptation in Urban Contexts

The commodification of spirituality in Bollywood has not been without criticism. Critics argue that it undermines the sincerity of spiritual practices by reducing them to consumer products. However, for many, the market-driven evangelism embedded in Bollywood films offers a new way to engage with spirituality—one that is comfortable, accessible, and often packaged with the glamour and luxury associated with Bollywood.In India, spirituality and religion have long been tied to social identity while Bollywood capitalizes on this connection by ensuring that spiritual themes resonate with the broadest possible demographic. Bollywood films and media personalities often reflect or shape public discourse on religious believes, sometimes through overt messages, but often more subtly through narrative and emotional appeal. This approach mirrors that of market-driven evangelism in Western media and belief systems are marketed as part of a lifestyle, linked not just to religious faith but to social status, personal success, and belonging.

The Rise of Yoga and Meditation as Marketable Ideologies

One of the most prominent instances of market-driven evangelism in Bollywood is the rise of yoga and meditation as commercially marketed ideologies. Yoga, in particular, has become a global phenomenon, and Bollywood actors like Shilpa Shetty, Kareena Kapoor, and Deepika Padukone have not only adopted yoga in their personal lives but also incorporated it into their public personas that marketing of new adapted Church religion wokeism. Through interviews, social media, and film roles, these celebrities promote yoga and meditation as tools for both physical and mental well-being, tapping into a large market of health-conscious consumers and talking about own spiritual evangelism. Yoga retreats, wellness programs, and spiritual tourism are a direct result of Bollywood's role in promoting a "spiritual lifestyle" that is both aspirational and accessible of marketable form of evangelical religion. These ideologies, while rooted in ancient traditions, have been commercialized to suit modern sensibilities of wokeism. The market-driven nature of this spiritual branding has use yoga as shadow, and similar practices, part of the mainstream consumer culture, where evangelical thoughts a product to be bought and consumed by young generation.

The Global Impact of Bollywood as a Spiritual Evangelist

Bollywood's reach extends beyond India's borders, where it has gained a massive following in countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Western world. In these regions, Bollywood films act as vehicles for not only entertainment but also ideological and cultural exchange particularly wokeism and Christian thoughts. For instance, films that explore Hindu spirituality or teachings from the Bhagavad Gita often find audiences in countries with large Indian diaspora populations or among non-Indians interested in Eastern philosophies.Moreover, Bollywood has played a critical role in shaping how spirituality and Indian thoughts are viewed globally, most commonly damage to Indian Hindu believes by sarcasm. However, as more international audiences are introduced to Bollywood, the blend of spirituality with consumerism becomes more ingrained in global culture. Bollywood films, music, and actors help to market spiritual ideologies worldwide, framing them in a way that is attractive and aspirational. Spirituality becomes part of a globalized consumer culture where personal belief systems are marketed in tandem with other lifestyle products.

In parallel, the rise of **televangelism** and **Christian media** plays a central role in shaping the relationship between Christianity and global market forces. Television preachers and faith-based media outlets such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and the Daystar Television Network have created a massive global audience for Christian content. Televangelists, much like corporate leaders, have crafted global brands, using television and later digital platforms to reach millions worldwide (Chan, H., 2019). The production values of these broadcasts are sophisticated, and the presentation of Christian content is packaged in a way that appeals to a global, commercialized audience (Elias Brasil De Souza, 2015). The success of figures like Billy Graham and, more recently, figures such as Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen, reflects how Christianity has been integrated into the global market economy, with religion being marketed through the lens of media, entertainment, and consumerism⁴.

Megachurches as Global Brands and Tourism for Spreading the Gospel Message

The phenomenon of **megachurches** as global brands represents a significant shift in the way Christianity is practiced and propagated in the contemporary world. Traditionally, Christianity was spread through grassroots efforts, personal interaction, and community involvement. However, in the 21st century, megachurches—large, influential Christian congregations—have embraced corporate branding, media outreach, and tourism as tools to extend their reach and impact. Through these strategies, megachurches have become global brands that not only influence the religious landscape but also contribute to the global tourism industry, turning Christian pilgrimage sites into tourism destinations and utilizing mass media to spread the gospel message to a global audience.

| Key features of | Description |
|-------------------------|--|
| Megachurches | |
| Neoliberal Religious | The alignment of free-market capitalism with religious doctrines, reinforcing financial success as divine favor. |
| Movements | |
| Religious Soft Power | The global export of evangelical ideologies through media, NGOs, and international diplomacy. |
| Intersection with | Many evangelical movements align with nationalist ideologies, influencing policies on education, immigration, |
| Nationalism | and social ethics. |
| Global brands for life- | Most brands influence the global life-style with evangelical believes, new ideologies and wokeism such as |
| style | Gucci, Louisvuitton, Maybelline, Nike, Adidas, Marlboro, Johnnie Walker, Jackdaniel. |

The Rise of Megachurches as Global Brands

The term "megachurch" typically refers to a Christian congregation with a large membership, often in the thousands or tens of thousands, that operates in a highly organized and professional manner⁴. These churches stand out not just for their size but also for their ability to create a brand identity that is recognizable and appealing to a wide audience. The branding of megachurches, like any global corporation, involves the creation of a recognizable image, a consistent message, and a strong sense of community that is marketed as part of a lifestyle (Williams, E. 2020).

Prominent examples of megachurches that have achieved global brand status include **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas, led by Joel Osteen, and **Hillsong Church**, originally based in Sydney, Australia. These churches have become global symbols of prosperity theology, contemporary worship, and community-driven spirituality.

1. Lakewood Church: Under the leadership of Joel Osteen, Lakewood Church has transformed from a small church to one of the largest congregations in the United States. With a membership of over 50,000 and a weekly televised broadcast that reaches millions of viewers worldwide, the church has embraced a corporate-like approach to evangelism. Its branding is characterized by Osteen's positive and motivational preaching style, which is packaged to appeal to a wide, diverse audience. The church's message of prosperity and success aligns with the desires of the modern consumer, blending religious teachings with self-help principles that are easy to market.Lakewood Church attracts many international visitors, particularly due to its connection with Joel Osteen, a globally recognized figure in the Christian world. Lakewood's **annual events** and the church's **Sunday services** have become important points on the tourist map of Houston, Texas. Visitors often plan their trips to the city around the opportunity to attend services at Lakewood, further establishing the church as a key player in the tourism economy. Moreover, the church's influence extends beyond the religious sphere; the **Osteen brand** (books, television broadcasts, events) further integrates the church into the broader global market and tourism sector.

2. **Hillsong Church**: Hillsong has achieved global fame, not only for its church services but also for its music ministry, which has had a significant influence on Christian worship worldwide. Hillsong music, which is used in thousands of churches across the globe, has become synonymous with contemporary Christian worship. The church's branding emphasizes a relaxed, contemporary style of worship that appeals to younger generations. Hillsong's expansion into major cities around the worldLondon, New York, Paris, and moredemonstrates how megachurches leverage their brand to create global outreach and community. They often incorporate these visits into broader tourism itineraries. The church's international conferences, such as the annual **Hillsong Conference**, attract thousands of attendees, many of whom travel internationally to attend. These events combine worship with personal development, fostering a sense of community and belonging among participants. Through these events, Hillsong spreads its message of Christian faith and worship while also contributing to the local tourism economy.

The success of these megachurches as global brands can be attributed to their use of marketing strategies borrowed from the corporate world. These include the use of **social media**, **high-quality production values in services**, and **personal branding of leaders** to create a message that resonates with a wide audience⁵. In many ways, megachurches have transformed Christianity from a religious practice into a product that can be marketed and consumed in ways similar to any other consumer good³.

Tourism and Pilgrimages for Spreading the Gospel

The commercialization and branding of megachurches have had a significant impact on **Christian tourism**. As megachurches grow in prominence, they attract not only local congregants but also visitors from around the world. Many megachurches have turned into **pilgrimage destinations** where people travel to experience the church's services, community events, and the lifestyle associated with the church's brand. Christian conferences, particularly those organized by megachurches, have become a major form of global evangelism. These events often feature renowned speakers, musicians, and worship leaders, and they draw thousands of attendees from all over the world. For example, **Hillsong Conference** or **Passion Conference** attract thousands of young adults who are eager to deepen their faith and experience the energy of contemporary worship. These conferences are not only religious gatherings but also large-scale marketing events that help spread Christian messages in ways that appeal to the globalized, media-savvy audience of today. Many megachurches offer **spiritual retreats** or **pilgrimages**, which function much like religious tourism. These retreats may take place at the church's headquarters or in other locations tied to the church's brand, often in exotic or appealing destinations. Participants engage in worship, fellowship, and personal reflection while exploring the church's message. These events help foster a sense of community among believers, while also promoting the megachurch's global presence and its branding as a spiritual lifestyle (Golan, O., 2018)

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

While the global brand of megachurches and their involvement in tourism present numerous opportunities for spreading the gospel, they also raise important ethical and theological concerns.

1. **Commodification of Faith**: One major criticism of megachurches as global brands is the **commodification of faith**. As megachurches adopt business models and marketing strategies, there is concern that Christianity is being reduced to a consumer product. Critics argue that the spiritual and transformative message of the gospel may be diluted in favour of financial gain and mass appeal. The challenge lies in balancing the need for outreach with maintaining the authenticity of the Christian message.

2. **Exploitation of Pilgrimage Tourism**: As megachurches become tourist destinations, there is a concern about **exploitation**. Religious tourism can sometimes overshadow the true spiritual mission of the church, turning sacred events and spaces into commercial ventures that prioritize profit over faith(Golan, O., 2018). The line between evangelism and profit generation can become blurred, leading to questions about the integrity of such endeavours.

II. Conclusion

The expansion of evangelical movements in urban settings reflects a dynamic interplay between faith, market forces, and socio-political trends. By leveraging technological innovations and market-driven strategies, evangelical groups continue to adapt to the evolving urban landscape (D. R. Watts, 1981). The urban model of ideological propagation demonstrates how religious movements incorporate modern marketing techniques, digital engagement, and political alliances to sustain and expand their reach. While evangelical expansion benefits from globalization and neoliberal economic structures, it also faces resistance from secular institutions, traditionalist religious groups, and regulatory frameworks⁶. The emergence of hybrid spiritual movements and alternative ideological narratives challenges the dominance of evangelical ideologies in urban spaces. Moving forward, the future of evangelical movements in cities will likely depend on their ability to balance economic adaptability with theological authenticity. The continued fusion of faith and market-driven evangelism raises critical ethical and societal questions about the commercialization of spirituality and the role of religion in an increasingly interconnected global economy. Understanding these interactions is essential for policymakers, religious leaders, and scholars seeking to navigate the evolving relationship between ideology, economics, and urban life.

Megachurches have successfully leveraged branding, media, and tourism to spread the gospel message across the globe. By adopting corporate strategies and embracing their status as global brands, megachurches have transformed Christianity into a marketable product that appeals to a wide audience. This shift has also given rise to a new form of **religious tourism**, where people travel to experience the unique worship style, community events, and brand identity of these megachurches. While this approach has resulted in unprecedented global outreach, it also raises important ethical and theological questions about the commodification of faith. As the megachurch phenomenon continues to evolve, it will be crucial to assess its impact on both the global market and the spiritual integrity of Christianity. Social media, particularly YouTube and Facebook, have played a pivotal role in this expansion. Digital platforms enable rapid dissemination of sermons, theological messages, and testimonials, reaching millions beyond traditional church settings. Prominent figures such as Bajinder Singh exemplify the influence of social media in modern evangelical movements, utilizing live-streamed healing services and religious gatherings to attract followers in India. These

digital tools not only enhance accessibility but also facilitate interactions between religious leaders and urban audiences, further embedding evangelical ideologies into contemporary life⁸.

In conclusion, the relationship between Christianity and the global market force is a complex and evolving dynamic, with Christianity increasingly participating in the consumer-driven, globalized economy. The rise of megachurches, televangelism, Christian media, and digital evangelism illustrates how Christianity is adapting to the demands of the modern world, using market strategies to spread its message. While this alignment with market forces has allowed Christianity to reach new audiences and become a global brand, it also raises important ethical, theological, and cultural questions. As Christianity continues to navigate the intersection of faith and commerce, it will be crucial to reflect on the implications of this convergence for both the authenticity of the faith and the broader global religious landscape.

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