

Algorithmic Charisma

How Digital Platforms are Reshaping Spiritual Authority in Ghanaian Pentecostalism

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ABSTRACT

This article uses the concept of algorithmic charisma to describe how digital platforms are reshaping spiritual authority in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana—participant observation at 50 services, 47 interviews, and analysis of over 100 YouTube videos—the article demonstrates that platform metrics (views, likes, shares, subscriber counts) now function as a secondary validation system alongside traditional Weberian "charisma of proof." The central contribution is the distinction between event-based validation, where each prophecy or healing must succeed in the moment, and archive-based validation, where accumulated digital presence absorbs individual failures. Through three ethnographic moments—a prophetic night in Accra, a healing school in Ho, and a prophet's failed social media prophecy—the article shows how platform affordances generate new forms of legitimation. The article's contribution lies not in the coinage of the term but in the theorization of theologized metric authority, the distinction between event-based and archive-based validation, and the account of how platform visibility is interpreted as divine endorsement. The concept of algorithmic charisma contributes to scholarship on digital religion, platform studies, and Pentecostal studies by revealing how algorithmic systems are becoming co-authors of spiritual authority in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.

KEYWORDS algorithmic charisma; archive-based validation; digital religion

SUBJECT Digital Religion; African Pentecostalism; Platform Studies

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Introduction

The pastor stands on a platform before three thousand people, a microphone in hand, sweat glistening on his forehead. Behind him, a massive screen displays not scripture but his YouTube subscriber count: 2.4 million and climbing. Earlier that evening, before the first song, his social media manager posted a short clip of the crowd gathering. By the time the pastor spoke, it had 47,000 views. This is not a distraction from spiritual authority. It is becoming its validation. This scene, observed during fieldwork at a prophetic night in Accra, encapsulates a transformation reshaping Ghanaian Pentecostalism at its core. The massive screen behind the pastor does not merely display a number; it performs a theological claim. The subscriber count is presented as evidence—evidence of divine endorsement, of spiritual efficacy, of legitimate authority. When 47,000 people are watching, the argument goes, something real must be happening.

This article argues that this is not a superficial addition to Pentecostal practice but a fundamental recalibration of how spiritual authority is legitimized. The emergence of what this paper terms algorithmic charisma—authority validated by platform metrics as well as by traditional signs and

wonders—represents a shift that scholars of African Pentecostalism have under-theorised. The question is not whether digital platforms matter (they clearly do) but how they matter: how their specific affordances ([Hutchby, 2001](#); [Bucher, 2018](#)) reshape the accumulation, display, and contestation of spiritual authority in ways that complicate Weber's charisma theory. Drawing on recent platform studies, this article specifies that algorithmic charisma emerges from four interlocking mechanisms: (1) the transformation of invisible platform ranking logics into visible, projected metrics during live services; (2) the treatment of accumulated metrics (subscriber counts, view totals) as a reservoir of legitimacy that can absorb individual prophetic failures; (3) the theologisation of platform algorithms as instruments of divine distribution rather than secular gatekeeping; and (4) a political economy of visibility in which the financial and technical resources needed to produce professional media content, cameras, editing staff, paid promotion, are convertible into the very metrics followers interpret as spiritual evidence, such that economic capital and media labor, not only spiritual gifts, help determine which ministries accumulate the visibility algorithmic charisma rewards.

The stakes are high. African Pentecostalism is one of the most dynamic religious movements of the twenty-first century ([Kalu, 2008](#); [Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a](#)), and its digital transformations are outpacing scholarly analysis ([De Witte, 2018](#); [Meyer, 2015](#)). Understanding algorithmic charisma is essential not only for grasping contemporary Pentecostal practice but also for theorizing religious authority in an age where platforms increasingly mediate spiritual experience ([Campbell, 2010](#); [Gillespie, 2014](#)).

African Pentecostalism has long been understood through Max [Weber's \(1922/1978\)](#) concept of charismatic authority—power legitimized by followers' belief in a leader's extraordinary gifts. In this framework, authority must be constantly demonstrated through what Weber called "charisma of proof": miracles, prophecies, and healings that validate the leader's claim to divine favor. Scholars have documented how this logic operates in stadium crusades, healing services, and prophetic ministries ([Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a](#); [Gifford, 2004](#); [Ojo, 2006](#)). But something has changed. In the past decade, the platforms of charismatic validation have multiplied. They now include not only healing services but also the YouTube algorithm, not only prophecy but also the share count, and not only testimony but also the subscriber number. A leader's spiritual authority is increasingly measured not only by the miracles performed but by the metrics accumulated.

However, existing scholarship on digital religion has not fully theorized *how platform metrics become sources of legitimation*. While Campbell ([2010, 2020](#)) has shown how digital technologies create new forms of religious authority and De Witte ([2013, 2018](#)) has demonstrated the mediatization of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, these analyses have focused primarily on *representation* and *presence* rather than on *metric-based validation*. This article bridges this gap by bringing platform studies into conversation with Pentecostal studies. Following [Gillespie \(2014, p. 168\)](#), who argues that algorithms are not merely technical objects but "knowledge-logics" that "make things public," this study shows that in Ghanaian Pentecostalism, algorithms also *make things sacred*. Following Bucher ([2017, 2018](#)), who developed the concept of "algorithmic imaginaries"—how users perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to algorithms—this study analyses how Pentecostal followers *theologize* platform metrics as evidence of divine favor. Following [Christin \(2020\)](#), who demonstrates how metrics accumulate legitimacy over time in ways that can withstand individual failures, this study develops a distinction between *event-based* and *archive-based* validation.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ghana, this article develops the concept of algorithmic charisma to describe a new form of authority that emerges at the intersection of traditional Pentecostal spirituality and digital media platforms. The central claim is specific and falsifiable: platform metrics—views, likes, shares, subscriber counts, and algorithmic recommendations—now function as a secondary

validation system for charismatic authority, operating alongside but distinct from traditional Weberian "charisma of proof." This claim does not suggest that miracles and prophecies no longer matter they do. However, their significance is now mediated through digital platforms, reshaping how authority is accumulated, displayed, and contested. A healing that is not filmed, uploaded, and algorithmically amplified risks being less authoritative than one that is. A prophet without a substantial YouTube following finds their prophecies reaching fewer ears, and their authority diminishes by comparison with more visible competitors.

This argument is advanced through three ethnographic moments in the study. The first, from a prophetic night in Accra, shows how a minister's digital presence structures and amplifies physical authority. The second, from a healing school in Ho, demonstrates how algorithmic metrics shape participants' expectations and create new hierarchies of access. Third, an unexpected moment at the same field site challenged my initial framework. At this moment, a minister's social media failure—a prophesied event that did not occur, posted to millions of followers—did not destroy his authority as I had assumed it would. Instead, his followers reinterpreted the failure through theological frameworks that my initial model did not anticipate. This moment forced a crucial revision: algorithmic charisma is not a simple replacement for traditional validation but a complex recalibration in which digital and theological logics interact in sometimes unpredictable ways. Drawing on [Christin \(2020\)](#), this study theorizes this as a shift from event-based to archive-based validation. The article first situates this argument within the scholarship on religion, digital media, and platform studies, then presents the ethnographic evidence, and finally reflects on what algorithmic charisma reveals about the transformation of religious authority in contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostalism.

Theoretical Framework

[Weber's \(1922/1978\)](#) analysis of charismatic authority remains foundational. For Weber, charismatic authority derives from followers' belief in a leader's extraordinary qualities. These qualities must be continually demonstrated through what Weber called "charisma of proof": the prophet must prophesy, the healer must heal, and the leader must perform. Failure to do so risks delegitimation. Scholars of African Pentecostalism have productively applied this framework. [Asamoah-Gyadu \(2005a\)](#) shows how Ghanaian charismatic leaders must constantly demonstrate spiritual power through healings and prophecies. [Gifford \(2004\)](#) documents how Ghanaian prosperity preachers validate their authority through testimonies of financial breakthroughs. [Ojo \(2006\)](#) traces how Nigerian Pentecostal leaders accumulate authority through visible manifestations of power.

But Weber wrote before the age of social media. His framework assumes that validation occurs primarily in co-present settings where followers directly witness miracles. What happens when authority is mediated through platforms where followers encounter leaders primarily through screens? What happens when validation occurs not only through witnessed miracles but also through accumulated metrics? Weber's framework, for all its enduring value, was developed in an era of co-present sociality. The crowd was a gathering of bodies in space. What happens when the crowd becomes a metric? The platform algorithm functions as a new kind of witness—one that does not experience the miracle but certifies its significance through recommendation and visibility. This transformation is particularly significant in African contexts, where Pentecostalism has long thrived on what [Anderson \(1991\)](#) calls "dynamic pneumatology" and [Asamoah-Gyadu \(2005a\)](#) calls "pragmatic pneumatology"—a spirituality oriented toward tangible, visible outcomes.

A growing literature examines how digital platforms are reshaping religious practice. Campbell ([2010](#), [2013](#)) pioneered the analysis of how religious communities negotiate new media, showing that digital

technologies create new forms of community and authority. [De Witte \(2013\)](#) has shown how Ghanaian Pentecostal media production creates new modes of spiritual presence. [Meyer \(2015\)](#) demonstrates how Ghanaian Pentecostal video culture has transformed religious aesthetics and authority. However, this literature has not fully engaged with recent advances in *platform studies*—scholarship that treats algorithms not as neutral technical systems but as *cultural objects* that shape social legitimation. This article bridges this gap by drawing on four key contributions from platform studies.

First, [Gillespie \(2014, p. 168\)](#) argues that algorithms are "knowledge-logics" that "make things public" by determining what content is visible, to whom, and in what order. In the context of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, this argument is extended: algorithms not only make things *public* but also make them *sacred*. When a healing video is algorithmically recommended to thousands of users, followers interpret the recommendation as divine endorsement, not as a technical optimization. Second, Bucher ([2017](#), [2018](#)) develops the concept of "algorithmic imaginaries"—the ways users perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to algorithms. [Bucher \(2017, p. 41\)](#) writes that "algorithms are not just technical objects but are also imagined and experienced as powerful actors." Followers do not understand YouTube's recommendation system as a mathematical optimisation for watch-time; they imagine it as a tool God uses to "distribute the anointing."

Third, [Christin \(2020\)](#), in her study of web analytics and journalistic authority, shows how metrics accumulate legitimacy over time. She demonstrates that "metric-based authority is not simply a matter of high numbers but of *accumulated* numbers that create a reservoir of credibility" ([Christin, 2020, p. 89](#)). This insight is central to the distinction between *event-based* validation (Weber's charisma of proof) and *archive-based* validation (algorithmic charisma). Fourth, [Seaver \(2019\)](#), in his ethnographic work on music recommendation algorithms, argues that algorithms are "captivating" not because they are technically superior but because they are *culturally interpreted* as knowing what users want. In Ghanaian Pentecostalism, the algorithm is interpreted as *knowing where God is moving*.

Before proposing the concept itself, it is necessary to distinguish several related but analytically separate elements that the ethnographic material below treats together under the heading of algorithmic charisma, but which should not be conflated. Platform affordances are the technical features a platform makes available, such as real-time view counters or public subscriber displays ([Hutchby, 2001](#); [Bucher, 2018](#)). Quantified metrics are the specific numbers these affordances generate and display: view counts, subscriber totals, and share counts. Organizational media practice refers to the deliberate choices ministry media teams make, filming services, projecting metrics on sanctuary screens, timing uploads, which are human decisions, not algorithmic operations, even when they are designed around an algorithm's perceived preferences. Archival infrastructure refers to the accumulated store of past content, a distinct thing from any single metric. Algorithmic distribution refers to the platform's own, largely inaccessible, recommendation and ranking processes, which this study did not and could not directly observe. Religious interpretation, finally, is what ministers and followers make of all of the above, theologically. The ethnographic evidence presented in this article speaks most directly and reliably to organizational media practice, quantified metrics as objects of religious interpretation, and religious interpretation itself; it speaks to algorithmic distribution only indirectly, through what [Bucher \(2018\)](#) calls algorithmic imaginaries, since the platforms' actual ranking operations remain proprietary and unobservable. Distinguishing these elements clearly is necessary because much of what might appear to be evidence of algorithmic operation is, on closer inspection, evidence of media strategy, metric display, or theological interpretation, each of which follows a different logic and requires different kinds of evidence to establish.

This paper proposes *algorithmic charisma* as a concept for analyzing how digital platforms transform charismatic authority. Algorithmic charisma refers to authority legitimized not only by traditional charisma of proof (miracles, prophecies, and healings) but also by platform metrics—views, likes, shares, subscriber counts, and algorithmic recommendations—which provide secondary validation of spiritual power. Before proceeding, it is worth acknowledging an alternative theoretical lineage. [Bourdieu's \(1991\)](#) concept of religious capital has been productively applied to Pentecostal contexts (see [Golo, 2024](#)). However, Bourdieu's framework emphasizes the reproduction of existing hierarchies through embodied dispositions (*habitus*), whereas the argument here concerns a more rapid, externally visible transformation driven by platform architectures.

A note on terminology and originality is warranted. The term "algorithmic charisma" has arisen independently in adjacent scholarship on platform-mediated authority in secular contexts, most notably in recent work theorizing how founder authority is sustained through platform visibility and virality in technology leadership ([Madsen, 2025](#)). The present article's contribution should therefore be located not in the coinage of the label itself, which appears to be a case of independent, convergent terminology arising in a fast-moving area of study, but in the specific theoretical work the label is attached to here: the theorization of theologized metric authority in a religious rather than secular domain, the distinction between event-based and archive-based validation developed below, and the account of how platform visibility becomes interpreted specifically as divine, rather than merely popular or credible, endorsement.

Algorithmic charisma is distinct from existing concepts in three ways. First, *algorithmic authority* ([Lewis, 2018](#)) refers to credibility derived from algorithmic visibility in political or commercial contexts. In contrast, algorithmic charisma involves *theologisation*: the algorithm is interpreted as a divine instrument, not a secular gatekeeper. Second, *platform authority* ([van Dijck, 2013](#)) refers to platforms themselves as regulators of social interaction. Algorithmic charisma is authority *validated by* platform metrics. Third, *mediatised charisma* ([De Witte, 2018](#)) examines how media extend charismatic presence but does not theorize how *metrics*—not just visibility—become evidence. [Table 1](#) summarizes these distinctions.

Table 1
Distinguishing Algorithmic Charisma from Related Concepts

Concept	Key Reference	Primary Mechanism	Role of Metrics	Theologisation?
Algorithmic authority	Lewis (2018)	Algorithmic visibility signals relevance	Central, but as traffic	No
Platform authority	van Dijck (2013)	Platform governance shapes interaction	Peripheral	No
Mediatised charisma	De Witte (2018)	Media extend charismatic presence	Absent	Partial
Algorithmic charisma	This article	Metrics as <i>secondary validation</i> of spiritual power	Central, as spiritual evidence	Yes

Source: Author's elaboration, 2026.

Algorithmic charisma is based on two observations from fieldwork. First, ministers increasingly treat digital metrics as evidence of their spiritual efficacy. A viral healing video is not merely a recording of a miracle; it is evidence of the miracle's power. Second, followers increasingly evaluate leaders based on

their digital presence. A pastor with millions of YouTube subscribers is perceived as more spiritually powerful than one with few subscribers. Algorithmic charisma does not replace the traditional proof of charisma. Rather, it operates alongside it and creates a new layer of validation.

Method

This analysis draws on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ghana between January and July of 2025. This site was selected because it is the epicenter of African Pentecostal innovation, with a particularly dense digital religious ecosystem. Fieldwork was conducted in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho—cities that host major Pentecostal denominations, high concentrations of prophetic and healing ministries, and dense media infrastructure for religious broadcasting.

Three primary methods were used. First, participant observation: I attended over 50 prophetic meetings, healing services, and deliverance sessions, ranging from small prayer gatherings (50–100 attendees) to massive stadium crusades (10,000–30,000 attendees). I observed not only physical services but also how they were streamed, filmed, and shared across platforms. Field notes were written within 24 hours of each observation, documenting events, interactions, and my own reflexive reactions.

Second, semi-structured interviews: I conducted 47 interviews with pastors and prophets (12), healing ministry staff (8), regular congregants (15), occasional visitors (7), and vendors of religious materials (5). Interviews explored participants' experiences with digital religious content, their evaluation of online versus offline authority, and their practices of following ministers across platforms. Interviews averaged 55 minutes and were conducted in English, with occasional translation assistance in *Ewe* and *Twi*. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Third, digital content analysis: I analysed over 100 healing service videos from YouTube, 50 hours of televised Pentecostal programming, and 50 ministry websites and social media accounts. For each video, I recorded metadata (views, likes, shares, subscriber counts), analyzed visual and rhetorical strategies for presenting spiritual authority, and documented how metrics were integrated into the services.

Platform Walkthroughs

Following [Light et al. \(2018\)](#), I conducted platform walkthroughs of YouTube and Facebook Live to systematically document the specific *affordances* that enable algorithmic charisma. The walkthrough method involves registering for the platform, observing its interface and functionality, and systematically documenting how technical features shape user behavior and interpretation.

YouTube walkthrough (conducted February–March 2025): I created a test account and documented the following affordances relevant to religious broadcasting: live stream metrics (real-time viewer counter updates every 30–60 seconds; cumulative view count displayed prominently below video); subscription visibility (public subscriber count displayed on channel page and during live streams; milestones trigger on-screen notifications); recommendation algorithm effects (after watching Pentecostal content, the homepage increasingly recommended similar prophetic and healing ministries); and engagement metrics (like/dislike counts, comment velocity, and share buttons).

Facebook Live walkthrough (conducted March–April 2025): I documented reaction velocity (real-time accumulation of likes, hearts, and other reactions displayed during live broadcasts), share dynamics (share count prominently displayed, with algorithmic amplification for high-share content), and comment stream (visible scrolling comments that create collective viewing experience).

Crucial findings from walkthroughs: The specific metrics that appear on sanctuary screens during services are precisely those that YouTube and Facebook make most visible and dynamic—real-time

viewer counts, rapidly accumulating subscriber numbers, and share velocities. This is not accidental. Media teams capture these displayed metrics and project them onto massive screens, translating invisible corporate sorting codes into a shared physical spectacle of divine endorsement. Thus, the platform's affordances directly shape the visual evidence of spiritual authority.

Positionality and Reflexivity

As an ordained Pentecostal minister with insider access to these communities, my positionality operated as both an asset and a liability. The trust I shared with participants enabled access to spaces that might have remained closed to outside researchers, including leadership meetings, backstage ministry discussions, and informal conversations following services. At healing services, I was not perceived as a detached observer but as a fellow believer, which allowed me to observe practices in their natural flow rather than as performances staged for a researcher.

Simultaneously, insider status creates potential risks. Familiarity with Pentecostal language, beliefs, and practices could encourage the uncritical acceptance of participant interpretations. To mitigate this possibility, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the fieldwork, documenting my reactions, assumptions, and moments of discomfort. I regularly debriefed with colleagues in Ghana who were not Pentecostal insiders and tested my interpretations against their readings. I also deliberately sought perspectives that challenged my emerging framework. The goal was neither to defend nor dismiss the participants' theological claims. Rather, it was to understand how such claims functioned within the production of religious authority. This practice of seeking disconfirming evidence is essential for ensuring that ethnographic insight does not become a confirmation bias ([Charmaz, 2014](#); [Smith, 2012](#)).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a rigorous, iterative process modelled on constructivist grounded theory ([Charmaz, 2014](#)). Phase 1: Initial Coding – I began analysis during fieldwork, writing analytic memos alongside field notes. After returning from the field, I imported all transcripts, field notes, and metadata for digital content into NVivo 14. I conducted open coding line by line, generating 187 initial codes. These included descriptive codes ("prophet addresses camera," "metrics displayed on screen"), process codes ("seeking healing through YouTube," "interpreting failed prophecy"), and in vivo codes (phrases used by participants, such as "the numbers prove the anointing" and "God uses the algorithm").

A methodological note on digital content metadata is warranted here, applying to all metric and engagement figures reported throughout this article, not only the failed-prophecy case discussed below. View counts, subscriber totals, and comment activity are not static; they continuously change after a video is published. Thus, the temporal position of data collection relative to publication is part of the evidence, not a neutral background detail. Where possible, this article states how long after publication a given metric was recorded or anchors observation points to an independently verifiable public event, such as an election date, rather than relying on precise calendar dates alone; the latter choice, used in the failed-prophecy case in particular, also serves to protect the anonymity of identifiable public figures, consistent with this study's ethical commitments. Where a specific figure is reported without an accompanying observation date, this reflects a single-point observation made during the primary fieldwork period (January to July 2025), rather than a sustained or repeated measurement.

Phase 2: Focused Coding – I reviewed the 187 initial codes to identify patterns and group them into broader categories. Through constant comparison—testing each code against new instances across the dataset—I consolidated the codes into 24 focused codes. These included "metrics as evidence," "algorithm as witness," "digital hierarchy," "platform vulnerability," "theological reinterpretation of failure," and "material-digital economy."

Phase 3: Thematic Development and Concept Formation – I examined the relationships among the focused codes, identifying three core themes that consistently appeared across interviews, observations, and digital content: (1) the treatment of digital metrics as spiritual evidence, (2) the role of algorithmic recommendation in structuring access and authority, and (3) the resilience of authority through accumulated digital presence. It was during this phase that the concept of algorithmic charisma emerged as the theoretical category that best captured the pattern I was observing.

Phase 4: Validation and Member Checking – Two validation strategies were employed. First, I conducted member checking with six participants, presenting preliminary findings and asking whether my interpretations resonated with their experiences. I incorporated their feedback, particularly in refining the analysis of how the followers reinterpret prophetic failure. Second, I engaged in peer debriefing with two academic colleagues familiar with Pentecostal studies but not involved in the research, who reviewed my coding structure and challenged my assumptions ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)).

Studying Algorithmic Imaginaries Rather than Algorithms

A central methodological challenge concerns the study of algorithms themselves. Contemporary recommendation systems are proprietary, dynamic, and largely inaccessible to researchers. Consequently, direct observation of algorithmic decision-making is impossible in most contexts. Following [Bucher \(2018\)](#), this study focuses on what might be called *algorithmic imaginaries*: the beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and narratives that people develop about algorithmic systems. Ministers and followers frequently discussed algorithms as though they possessed agency, intention, or preference. Participants speculated about why particular videos gained visibility, why audience numbers fluctuated, and why certain ministries appeared prominently within recommendation feeds. Whether these explanations accurately reflect platform operations is ultimately less important than the fact that they shape behavior. Ministers modified content strategies in response to perceived algorithmic expectations. Followers interpreted recommendation patterns as meaningful indicators of significance. These perceptions became socially consequential regardless of their technical accuracy. By focusing on the lived experiences of algorithmic visibility rather than directly analyzing inaccessible platform systems, this study remains attentive to how algorithmic power is experienced in practice.

Results and Discussion

Metrics as Spiritual Evidence: The Prophetic Night in Accra

It was 9:30 PM on a Friday at a large church compound on the outskirts of Accra. The "Night of Prophetic Impact" had been running for three hours, but the crowd of approximately 3,000 showed no signs of fatigue. What struck me first was not the size of the crowd but the camera rigging: three professional cameras positioned at different angles, a camera operator on a movable platform, and a director calling shots from a booth at the back. The prophet emerged after extended worship, dressed in a white robe. The energy shifted palpably. However, before he spoke, a voice announced, "We are live on YouTube and Facebook. Tell your friends to join us. Share the link."

Behind the prophet, a massive screen displays the service's live metrics: 47,000 watching on YouTube and 23,000 on Facebook. The numbers change throughout the night, and they are treated as part of the spiritual atmosphere. When the prophet makes a particularly dramatic prophecy, the screen shows the YouTube view count spike. Someone near me whispers: "The prophet is anointed." For the next ninety minutes, the prophet moves across the platform, pointing at individuals: "You there, the woman with the red head-tie. God says the surgery you are fearing will not happen." Each pronouncement is met with screams and falling. But what I notice is that these prophecies are not only for the 3,000 present. They

are also for the 47,000 watching online. The prophet frequently addresses the camera directly: "Someone watching now, you are experiencing chest pain. God is healing you."

After the service, I spoke with the church's media director. He explained their strategy: "The physical service is for the community. But the digital service is for the world. When people see that 50,000 people are watching, they know this is real. The numbers somehow prove the anointing." I lingered after the service, watching the post-service rituals. Along the side of the auditorium, a table displayed anointed water, prayer cloths, and stickers, each bearing the ministry's logo and a QR code linking to their YouTube channel. A steady stream of congregants purchased these items, each transaction accompanied by instructions: "Watch the service again online. Share it. God will honor your sharing."

What struck me was how seamlessly digital and physical intertwined. The QR code on the prayer cloth was not an add-on; it was integral to the object's spiritual efficacy. The instruction to share the video was presented as a spiritual discipline, akin to prayer or fasting. The metrics on the screen were not merely information; they were treated as evidence of divine movement in real time. This treatment of data points as immediate spiritual residue signals an underlying Pentecostal epistemology that collapses the distinction between secular code and sacred presence. Far from interpreting the screen as an accounting device for secular publicity, congregants explicitly co-theologised the shifting numbers as a modern-day rendering of the cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). During my interactions on the floor, an elder of the church corrected my initial characterization of the "online audience," noting, "Sir, you are looking at the screen as a counter of people. We look at it as a map of the Spirit's territorial breakthrough. Each digit clicking upward is a soul being drawn to the Lord in the realm of the spirit."

Consequently, the algorithm is not viewed by the community as a cold, mathematical problem in SEO; it is treated as a pneumatological venue where the Holy Spirit actively subverts electronic architectures to extend the influence of the Spirit or, as one man said, "to distribute the anointing globally." This integration reflects what [De Witte \(2013\)](#) has called the "mediatization of Pentecostalism," the process by which media technologies become not just tools for religious practice but constitutive of religious experience itself. In this service, the camera was not recording; the service was being performed for the camera, for the 47,000 watching, and for the algorithm that would recommend this content to others.

I also spoke with several congregants. A woman who had travelled from Tema gestured toward the screen: "When I see 50,000 people watching, I know this is not just my pastor talking. This is something God is doing. How else would so many people find it?" A young man explained, "If I tell my friends about this church, they might not believe me. But if I send them the YouTube link and they see 50,000 views, they know it's real. The numbers speak for themselves." A vendor selling anointed items added, "After a video goes viral, we sell three times as much. People come asking for the same oil they saw in the video. They want what was in the video. The video proves it works."

This moment illustrates what [Bucher \(2018\)](#) calls an "algorithmic imaginary" in action. The congregants do not understand the YouTube recommendation algorithm as a mathematical optimization for watch-time retention; they imagine it as a pneumatic distribution system. When the media director told me, "The numbers somehow prove the anointing," he was articulating an imaginary in which platform metrics and spiritual power are causally linked. The algorithm is not perceived as a secular force but as a tool God uses. This is not a secularization of religious authority but a theologization of digital infrastructure—a finding that complicates accounts of digital religion that treat algorithms as purely secular gatekeepers (see [Gillespie, 2014](#)).

Metrics Shaping Expectations of Efficacy: The Healing School in Ho

Two months later, I visited a healing school campus on the outskirts of Ho. The campus was vast: dormitories, dining halls, and a massive auditorium where thousands gathered daily. Most attendees were from Ghana, but I met people from Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. I sat next to a woman who had travelled from Lome. She had been there for three weeks, attending sessions each day, hoping for a miracle for her son, who remained in the village. "The man of God said this week is my week," she told me. "I have sown my seed 50,000 cedis, and I believe my testimony is coming." I ask, "How did you first hear about this ministry?" "YouTube," she said immediately. "I saw the videos. Millions of views. When you see that many people watching, you know it's real." I asked her: "Would you have come if the videos had only a few thousand views?" She paused, considering. "I don't know," she said finally. "When you see that many people watching, you know there is something. If it were just a few people, maybe it's just one person's opinion. But millions? That is for me proof."

A staff member at the healing school described how attendees' digital habits shaped their expectations: "People come here already believing. They have watched the videos. They have seen the views. They have read the comments. By the time they arrive, they are ready to receive. The digital work is half the healing." This "digital work" is not mere psychological priming or secular brand equity; it functions as a form of proxy-touch that aligns with traditional African views on the non-locality of spiritual forces. For attendees, the millions of views on a YouTube video do not function like consumer reviews on a secular commercial platform. Rather, within a charismatic paradigm where anointing is considered an infectious, material substance that can adhere to cloths, oils, or physical skin ([Onyinah, 2002](#); [Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005b](#)), the metric itself becomes a tangible deposit of spiritual history. The woman from Lome clarified this point when I pressed her on why numbers mattered so much to her faith: "If a well has water, many buckets will come there. The millions of views are the footprints of those who drank and were satisfied. The algorithm only highlights where the river of God is flowing highest."

This impulse toward massive digital accumulation reflects a distinct structural dynamic within West African Pentecostalism, where media technology is fundamentally wedded to what [Ojo \(2006\)](#) identifies as a militant theology of global domain expansion and institutional cross-fertilization. Unlike more localized therapeutic practices, the infrastructural scale of the Ho healing school treats the digital platform as an instrument of aggressive, spiritual territoriality. This alignment perfectly illustrates Nimi [Wariboko's \(2012\)](#) concept of the "Pentecostal Principle", the restless, boundary-breaking capacity of the charismatic imagination that constantly seeks to destabilize established limits and expand its sovereign reach. In this context, accumulating millions of online views is not a passive exercise in secular public relations; it is an active and aggressive conquest of the digital ether.

This logic that aggregated attention constitutes evidence recurred across interviews. A man from Benin told me, "I was scrolling YouTube, and this video came up. It had 2 million views. I thought, if 2 million people are watching, there must be something here. I watched it, and I felt the Spirit. Then I watched another. Then I started following." A woman from Côte d'Ivoire, who had travelled to Ho specifically for this healing school, explained: "The numbers don't lie. If God were not with him, would so many people be following? Would YouTube be recommending his videos to millions? God works through all means, including technology and media." A young man from Accra, attending the school for the first time, described his process of discernment: "I watched maybe twenty videos before I decided to come. Each one had hundreds of thousands of views. I thought, these people cannot all be wrong. Something is happening here."

When I asked one attendee whether he distinguished between miracles he witnessed in person and those he saw online, he dismissed the distinction: "If it is on video, it still happened. If millions watch it, it still happened. The power is not less because it is recorded. If anything, it is more, because more people can receive it." The theological framing is crucial here. The algorithm is not perceived as a secular force but as a tool God uses. YouTube's recommendation system becomes a form of divine guidance. The metric is not a mere statistic but a sign. This is not a secularization of religious authority but a theologization of digital infrastructure.

The logic described here—that aggregated attention constitutes evidence—reflects what [Christin \(2020\)](#) identifies as the accumulation of metric-based legitimacy. The woman from Lome did not evaluate the ministry based on a single video or healing testimony; she evaluated based on *millions* of views, an accumulated archive of attention that functioned as a reservoir of credibility. As [Christin \(2020, p. 92\)](#) notes in the context of journalism, "high numbers are not merely quantitative indicators; they become qualitative evidence of value." In this Pentecostal context, high numbers become evidence of spiritual power. The algorithm's recommendation of content with millions of views is not interpreted as an optimization for engagement but as a sign of divine favor—an "algorithmic imaginary" ([Bucher, 2017](#)) specific to this religious field.

From Event to Archive: The Failed Prophecy Case

Four months into fieldwork, I thought I had the framework figured out. Algorithmic charisma seemed to operate everywhere I looked. Then I encountered a moment that did not fit. A well-known prophet in Accra, with over 2 million YouTube subscribers, posted a video predicting a specific event: on a particular date, a prominent politician would be removed from office. The date came. The event did not occur. I expected this to damage his authority. In Weberian terms, this was a clear failure of charisma of proof. The prophecy was false. Followers should have abandoned him. I watched the comments on his YouTube channel. What I found surprised me. While some commenters expressed disappointment, many offered alternative interpretations. One user wrote, "The prophecy was conditional. If the politician had repented, God delayed judgment." Another wrote, "The spiritual war is not finished. The manifestation will come. Have faith." A third wrote, "Time in the spirit realm is different. What God shows the prophet will happen, but it may not happen when we expect it to. Let us continue praying."

The videos analyzed were published in 2024, in the run-up to the general presidential and parliamentary elections; the precise publication date is withheld deliberately, since the specific prophecy concerned a named sitting politician, and a precise date would make both the prophet and the politician readily identifiable in a way that would compromise the anonymity this study otherwise commits to. Metadata for the channels were observed at two points, four months before the elections and four months after the elections, thus after the new president had been sworn in and was nearing 100 days in office. Further follow-up observation was conducted beyond these two points; it was found that the prophet's subscriber count and follower engagement had not declined. More than 600 comments were reviewed and selected chronologically to avoid bias.

I interviewed three of his followers in person for this study. A woman in her forties, a small business owner in Accra, explained, "You cannot judge a prophet by one prophecy. Even biblical prophets were not always understood during their time. You look at the entire pattern. Does God use this man? Has he healed people? Has he helped you? One thing does not destroy everything." I pressed further: "But if the prophecy was wrong, how do you know he is still a prophet?" She looked at me with a mixture of patience and pity. "You are thinking like a scientist," she said. "We think like believers do. A prophet is not a machine that produces accurate prophecies. A prophet is a person through whom God speaks,

although God does not always speak clearly. Sometimes, God shows something that will happen, but not when. Sometimes God shows what will happen if people do not repent, and they repent so that it does not happen. You look at the entire pattern, not just one thing."

A young man in his twenties, a university student who had been following the prophet for three years, offered a similar view: "I have seen this man heal people. I have seen him prophesy things that came to pass exactly as he said they would. Therefore, when one does not occur, I ask myself: what changed? Did the person pray? Did they repent? However, the conditions may have changed. I do not stop following because of one thing." A woman who had been a member of the prophet's congregation for over a decade explained how the accumulated digital archive shaped her interpretation: "I have watched hundreds of his videos. I have seen many things come true. Therefore, when this did not occur, I thought that I may have misunderstood. Perhaps the timing was incorrect. Perhaps he was telling us what would happen if nothing changed and something changed. One thing does not undo the years of what God has done through him."

At the same time, another renowned prophet also predicted the political atmosphere. He said that a particular candidate would emerge as the winner in a contest for the party's flagbearership. What made this case serious was that his statement challenged a political analyst who had predicted victory for another candidate. The prophet publicly said, and it was captured on social media, that he had bet his several years of prophetic ministry on the prophecy he had given. In the end, the prophecy did not come to pass, and the candidate the political analyst had proposed won the elections. The prophet went on social media (his personal platforms) and apologized to all his followers for the wrong prophecy he gave and asked them to forgive him. In the comment section, his followers did not abandon him but were full of support. Some said, "Prophets are also human and can miss what God said to them." Others said, "We will follow you whether you miss it once or twice, a man shall fall seven times and rise again." The prophet's followership, views, and comments on his social media platforms did not decline as expected from Weber's perspective.

This response forced a rethinking of my initial application of Weber. A stronger reading of [Weber \(1922/1978\)](#) and the subsequent literature on charismatic authority does not actually require that a single failure be fatal; charismatic recognition has always been socially interpreted, and religious communities have long possessed theological resources for explaining away apparent prophetic failure, well before any digital platform existed. What Weber's original account genuinely underspecifies is not the possibility of reinterpretation itself, but how that reinterpretation is sustained institutionally at scale in a digitally mediated environment. The theological frameworks that explain unanswered prayer, "God's timing," "testing of faith," "conditional prophecy," and "God's sovereignty" are not new to this context; they are the same pre-existing communal and theological mechanisms that Pentecostal communities have always used to process prophetic failure. This case suggests that digital archives do not replace or supersede these mechanisms, but rather reinforce and extend them: the prophet's accumulated digital presence of 2 million subscribers, years of archived videos, and a catalogue of previously successful prophecies gave these familiar theological explanations something they did not previously have at this scale, a continuously visible, quantified, and searchable evidentiary record that followers could point to directly.

Drawing on [Christin \(2020\)](#), this paper theorizes this as a shift from *event-based* to *archive-based* validation. Traditional charisma of proof is event-based: each prophecy, each healing, each miracle must succeed in the moment. Failure at the event level risks delegitimizing the event. Algorithmic charisma, by contrast, is archive-based: the accumulated metric—2 million subscribers, hundreds of archived videos, years of content—creates a reservoir of legitimacy that can absorb

individual event-level failures. The followers I interviewed did not abandon the prophet because they weighed the single failed prophecy against the accumulated archive of perceived successes. As one woman said, "One thing does not undo years of what God has done through him."

It should be acknowledged that archive-based validation of this general kind is not a digital invention. Pentecostal ministries have long accumulated testimonies, recorded sermons, published books, photographs, and televised programmes, and have long relied on institutional memory and oral narratives of past successes to sustain a leader's standing across individual failures; the logic of pointing to an accumulated record rather than a single event predates YouTube by decades. What digital platforms specifically add is not the archive as such but a particular set of qualities this older, analog archive did not have: public quantification, in which the size of the archive and its reception become visible numbers rather than institutional reputation; searchability, which allows any follower to retrieve and verify specific past content on demand; continuous and asynchronous availability, rather than dependence on broadcast schedules or physical distribution; transnational circulation without the cost of physical media; a permanent, public comment archive in which followers' own interpretations of past events remain attached to the content itself; and rapid recombination, in which past successes can be re-cut into short clips and recirculated at the moment a new failure needs explaining. The contribution of this article's account of archive-based validation lies less in the observation that archives sustain authority, which is not new, than in specifying how digital quantification and circulation make an old form of religious archive newly, publicly, and continuously visible as evidence.

When I discussed the unfulfilled prophecy with a long-time member, his response directly complicated standard rationalist models of accountability: "Man is in time, but the Spirit operates outside of time. The prophet spoke about what he saw in the supernatural realm. If it did not manifest today, it remains stored in the digital archive as a seed. We do not throw away a tree because one branch didn't fruit this season; look at the thousands of videos where he spoke, and it came to pass." Here, the digital archive acts, in followers' own understanding, as a stabilizing spiritual reservoir. It is important to be precise about what the data can and cannot support at this point: the actual operation of YouTube's recommendation system was not observed in this study and cannot be directly verified, since the platform's algorithm is proprietary. What the interview data show is that followers believe the archive of past videos, and their continued circulation and recommendation, functions this way, translating the temporal volatility of an unfulfilled word into a minor, deferred mystery within what they experience as an economy of guaranteed pneumatic power. This is a claim about followers' algorithmic imaginary ([Bucher, 2018](#)), not a verified claim about how the recommendation system actually operates. This is not irrationality; it is a different legitimation logic—one that platform metrics make possible. The archive protects the prophet where the event alone would condemn him.

New Hierarchies, New Vulnerabilities, and Theological Integration

Algorithmic charisma creates new hierarchies. Ministers who master digital platforms gain authority that was previously unavailable to them. Those who do not risk being perceived as less powerful, regardless of their actual spiritual gifts (see [Golo, 2024](#)). A pastor in Ho acknowledged this: "I don't need YouTube to tell me I am anointed. But I am not naive. When people see millions of views, they pay attention." But it also creates new vulnerabilities. Platform algorithms change without warning. Content can be removed. Accounts can be suspended. A minister whose authority depends on digital metrics is subject to the whims of Silicon Valley in ways that traditional charismatic leaders were not. During my fieldwork, several ministers reported sudden drops in YouTube reach after algorithm changes. One described it as "spiritual attack from Google." Another said, "We do not control the algorithm. We pray

over it, but we do not control it." This reveals what [Bucher \(2018, p. 87\)](#) calls "algorithmic vulnerability"—the dependence on opaque, changing systems over which users have no control.

Uneven Access and Digital Hierarchy. Algorithmic charisma is not equally available. Ministers with resources to hire professional media teams, produce high-quality video, and pay for targeted promotion accumulate metrics more easily than those without. During fieldwork, several smaller ministries expressed frustration that their content rarely appeared in recommendation feeds despite what they considered genuine spiritual substance. One pastor lamented, "The rich ministries get richer in views. The algorithm does not care about anointing; it cares about production value." This finding is not a peripheral qualification of algorithmic charisma but part of its core mechanism, introduced in the article's opening framework as the political economy of visibility: financial and technical capital, professional cameras, editing staff, and paid promotion are convertible into the metrics followers read as spiritual evidence. Algorithmic charisma therefore does not simply provide a neutral, additional channel through which pre-existing spiritual efficacy becomes visible; it is a mechanism through which economic and media capital can be converted into spiritual legitimacy, reproducing and potentially amplifying existing inequalities within the Pentecostal field by privileging resource-rich ministries over less-resourced but potentially equally gifted leaders. This complicates the paper's own central claim in an important way: metrics do not simply validate charisma that already exists independently of them, since the capacity to generate high metrics is itself unevenly distributed by resources that have nothing directly to do with spiritual gift. Future research using financial and production-quality data alongside metric data could test directly how much of algorithmic visibility is explained by capital investment as opposed to any independent measure of perceived spiritual efficacy.

Perhaps most significant is how followers integrate algorithmic charisma into existing theological frameworks. When a prophecy fails, it is not a simple delegitimation. Followers have resources—theological resources, accumulated digital archives, and community practices—for reinterpreting failure. The prophet with 2 million subscribers does not lose authority because of one mistake, because the subscribers themselves become evidence that the mistake is not fatal. This suggests that algorithmic charisma is not a secular intrusion into religious life. It is being actively theologized and integrated into existing frameworks of spiritual interpretation. The algorithm is not replacing the Holy Spirit; it is being understood as a tool the Spirit uses. This finding extends [Bucher's \(2017\)](#) concept of algorithmic imaginaries into religious contexts, demonstrating how theological frameworks shape interpretations of platform metrics.

Comparative Perspective

Whether algorithmic charisma extends beyond West Africa is a genuinely open question that this study is not positioned to answer, since no fieldwork was conducted outside Ghana. What can be offered, on the basis of secondary literature rather than original data, is a hypothesis worth testing directly in future comparative research. Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, for instance, has long treated media ownership as a form of spiritual contest ([Freston, 2005](#)), which suggests a possible but currently untested contrast: that in a context with stronger denominational and broadcast hierarchies, digital metrics may reinforce authority already anchored elsewhere, rather than functioning as more independent, primary evidence in the way this article documents for Ghana's less denominationally credentialed neo-prophetic ministries. This is offered here as a specific, testable proposition for future comparative fieldwork, not as a finding this study has itself established.

A second, similarly untested proposition concerns transnational contexts such as South Korea, where Pentecostal prayer mountains stream healing sessions internationally, and English-language

commentary on these streams appears to carry real interpretive weight ([Buswell & Lee, 2006](#)). Secondary literature suggests that Korean digital audiences may combine validation with more visible skepticism, with comment sections functioning openly as sites of contested authenticity; however, this study did not collect data in Korea and cannot confirm whether this pattern differs from Ghana in degree or in kind. Both propositions, on Brazil and South Korea, are offered as a concrete agenda for future comparative fieldwork rather than as conclusions that this article's single-country design can support.

These two propositions suggest a testable pattern rather than an established one: that algorithmic charisma's specific form may vary with the strength of surrounding denominational and broadcast hierarchies and that its intensity may depend on which metrics a given media ecology treats as most meaningful. Future comparative research, ideally combining fieldwork across multiple sites rather than the secondary-literature comparison offered here, would be needed to establish whether these patterns hold and whether West Africa's specific combination of low denominational barriers to entry and high platform reliance is unusual or representative of a wider phenomenon. This article's claim is more modest and remains bounded by its evidence: algorithmic charisma, as theorized here, is demonstrated for Ghanaian Pentecostalism specifically, and its extension to "African Pentecostalism" more broadly, or to other Pentecostal contexts globally, is a hypothesis for further research rather than a finding of this study.

Tensions and Unresolved Questions

Algorithmic charisma generates tensions that cannot be fully resolved. Authenticity and Performance: When authority depends partly on metrics, there is pressure to perform in the algorithm. This raises questions regarding their authenticity. Is healing performed for a camera less authentic than one performed without it? The interviewees offered different answers. A woman at the Ho healing school told me, "If God is healing people, why would we not film it? Why would we not share this information? The more people see it, the more people can receive it." Another participant expressed ambivalence: "Sometimes I wonder, are they healing for God or for the camera? But I cannot judge. Only God knows their hearts."

The Algorithm as Gatekeeper: Platform algorithms operate according to their own logics, designed to maximize engagement rather than spiritual truth. When a minister's reach depends on algorithmic recommendations, the algorithm functions as a gatekeeper. As [Gillespie \(2014, p. 175\)](#) notes, "algorithms are not neutral arbiters but are implicated in the politics of public knowledge." This raises questions about who or what controls spiritual visibility. Sustainability: The metrics that validate algorithmic charisma are constantly changing. Ministers whose authority depends on current platforms may find that authority unstable. Platform Dependency: Ministers whose authority is partly validated by digital metrics find themselves subject to the decisions of Silicon Valley corporations over which they have no control. Traditional charismatic authority was vulnerable to followers' judgments. Algorithmic charisma is vulnerable to changes in platforms. Ministers must produce content that triggers engagement, that keeps viewers watching, and that generates likes and shares. The pressure to perform for the algorithm shapes ministry in ways that ministers may not fully control or even recognize.

Conclusion

This article argues that digital platforms are reshaping charismatic authority in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Through the concept of algorithmic charisma, this study shows that platform metrics—views, likes, shares, and subscriber counts—now function as a secondary validation system for spiritual authority, operating alongside the traditional charisma of proof. The claim is specific and falsifiable:

platform metrics function as a secondary validation system. If we were to find a context in which digital presence did not correlate with perceived spiritual authority, where followers consistently rejected metrics as evidence, where a minister with millions of subscribers was dismissed as inauthentic, or where a minister with no digital presence was nevertheless widely recognized as supremely authoritative, the claim would be weakened.

The ethnographic moments presented here support the claim while also complicating it. The prophetic night in Accra showed how metrics structure physical services. The healing school in Ho demonstrated how metrics shape follower expectations. The failed prophecy pushed back against my initial framework, revealing that algorithmic charisma interacts with existing theological resources in ways that can absorb failure—a finding that, in turn, refined the claim through the distinction between event-based and archive-based validation. What emerges is a picture of authority that is neither purely traditional nor purely digital. It is a hybrid form in which healing and metrics, prophecy and subscribers, spiritual power and platform reach are intertwined. Ministers navigate both the traditional demands of charisma of proof and the new demands of algorithmic visibility. Followers evaluate authority through both frameworks, sometimes prioritizing one, and sometimes the other.

This study focused specifically on Ghana, and its findings are demonstrated for Ghanaian Pentecostalism; whether the dynamics described extend to other African or Global South Pentecostal contexts is a hypothesis for future comparative research, rather than a claim this single-country study can itself establish. As Pentecostal movements across the Global South increasingly migrate to digital platforms, questions of algorithmic authority will likely become more pressing wherever this occurs, though the specific form of algorithmic charisma takes elsewhere remains to be tested. How do platforms mediate spiritual experiences? How do metrics reshape what counts as evidence of divine favor? What happens when the algorithm changes? For Ghanaian Pentecostalism, and plausibly for similarly organized Pentecostal movements elsewhere, algorithmic charisma represents both opportunity and challenge. It offers new ways of reaching followers, new forms of authority, and new modes of spiritual presence. But it also creates new dependencies, new inequalities, and new vulnerabilities. The future of Pentecostal authority will be shaped by how these tensions are navigated—by ministers who must perform for both God and algorithm, and by followers who must discern the sacred through systems that count what they cannot see.

Limitations. This study has several limitations. First, the findings are contextually specific to Ghana. The dynamics described may differ in other African countries or Pentecostal contexts with different media ecologies. Second, as a qualitative study based on ethnographic observation and interviews, the findings are not statistically generalizable. Third, the six-month fieldwork period, while sufficient for saturation, cannot capture long-term changes in platform algorithms or religious practices. Relatedly, the platform walkthroughs represent a snapshot of YouTube and Facebook affordances as they existed in early to mid-2025. Platform algorithms change frequently. The theoretical claim about algorithmic charisma—metrics as secondary validation—is platform-agnostic, but the specific affordances through which it operates are subject to change. Fourth, my insider position as a Pentecostal minister may have shaped which spaces I was invited into and which questions I asked. Fifth, the voices of those who left Pentecostal communities after disillusionment are largely absent from this study. Finally, the rapid evolution of digital platforms means that some of the specific platforms discussed may change or be replaced, although the underlying dynamic of algorithmic validation is likely to persist across platform shifts.

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent before participation. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To protect anonymity, all names and identifying details were changed or omitted. Interview transcripts and field notes were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher.

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