To Build a Generation of Stars: Megachurch identity, religion and modernity in Indonesia

Jeaney Yip
Chang Yau HOON
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Jeaney Yip
University of Sydney Business School, University of Sydney, Australia

Chang-Yau Hoon
Institute of Asian Studies, University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei

Abstract
Against the backdrop of dominant Muslim presence, an aspiring middle class and the modernisation of Indonesia as an emerging market, we explore how a contemporary megachurch in Indonesia constructs a corporate identity and examine how ‘Western’ ideals and modernity influence organisational practices and communication in a religious setting. We deploy discourse analysis as our approach, which includes a critical reading and semiotic analysis of corporate artefacts to understand their underlying structures and discourse in enacting the corporate identity. We examine how discourses of self-empowerment, Westernisation and modernisation, business and nationalism coalesce to construct a marketable corporate identity for the megachurch. From this perspective, we argue that corporate identity is fluid and is shaped by meaningful choices taken to discursively construct a particular image for its intended audience(s).

Keywords
Discourse, Indonesia, megachurches, modernity, religion, Westernisation

Introduction
Religion and its counterparts are under-studied in the area of discourse and communication, apart from a few notable studies (Ariff, 2012; Chiluwa, 2008). However, religion is increasingly not viewed as a ‘separate’ sphere and should be studied as operating under a ‘plurality of discourses’ (Turner, 2011). We focus on Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, in this study of corporate communication. Specifically, we explore how a contemporary Christian church
constructs a corporate identity against the backdrop of a dominant Muslim presence and the modernisation of Indonesia as an ‘emerging’ market (Economist, 2014) with an aspiring middle class. We view religious organisations, in constructing their corporate identity, as contexts that both resist and strategically embrace multiple discourses as a discursive strategy to thrive. In light of the macro context of Indonesia, this organisational context is interesting to demonstrate how ‘Western’ ideals and modernity influence organisational practices and communication in a religious setting. With this perspective, we argue that corporate identity is fluid and is shaped by meaningful choices taken to discursively portray a particular image to its intended audience(s). These choices are not fixed but instead are drawn from various discourses that are interdiscursively combined, and constituted into a church identity that is both Christian and reflexively resonant to the aspiring, increasingly affluent modern yearning for individualism. How this identity is constructed can be studied from a reading of organisational texts, artefacts and practices.

Religious organisations such as churches are not normally associated with corporate discourses but are traditionally affiliated to denominations and their associated rituals, images and theology. This raises the question of why a church needs to concern itself with a corporate identity, as this is not conventional practice for religious organisations, usually categorised as ‘non-profit’. However, as social and cultural contexts change and religious participation in highly developed countries dwindles, churches have realised the importance of strategic corporate communications in order to survive and grow (Yip and Ainsworth, 2013). On the contrary, religious participation in developing countries such as Indonesia is growing and has not dwindled (Parker and Hoon, 2013). In the past few decades, Christianity has experienced rapid growth in Indonesia. The religious landscape of Indonesia being a dominant Muslim country, however, poses a different political, socio-cultural environment for churches to thrive. How this difference shapes and influences corporate communication in a megachurch operating under these conditions warrants a closer look to understand the ways in which corporate identity is constructed in a ‘non-corporate’ setting.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how a contemporary megachurch, Jakarta Praise Community Church (JPCC hereafter), constructs a corporate identity in a developing country that has a diverse religious landscape, with a focus on the use of its artefacts and practices. This process of corporate identity formation is examined in light of how socio-cultural tendencies such as marketisation and modernisation influence religious practice by transforming the way churches employ the beliefs, symbols, values and practices of their religious traditions. The church – its artefacts and practices – therefore provides the milieu for investigating corporate identity construction. We argue that this article is a novel contribution to the literature not only because churches and identity construction are under-studied but because the ways in which they negotiate their space and thrive in a Muslim society are insightful. A religious organisation such as a megachurch does not simply inherit its identity nominally as a church by inference or by inheritance of an established traditional denomination. In order to be attractive in the marketplace, the megachurch draws upon multiple and even disparate discourses in producing artefacts and engaging in practices that render its corporate identity marketable and thus create its own brand of church.

The current article is divided into four sections. First, we present a brief discussion of the role of artefacts in identity research and provide the theoretical framework that underpins the research, with main reference to a discursive perspective of studying artefacts and identity. Next, we explain our methodology, followed by the main section on the discourses that form the findings of the research. The four discourses which JPCC draws upon in constructing its corporate identity are: self-empowerment; Westernisation and modernisation; business; and nationalism. These
discourses demonstrate the church’s strategic ability to make meaningful choices as part of its corporate identity construction process as well as to ensure that it thrives in a multi-religious, Muslim-dominant and modernising nation. Finally, the discussion section synthesises the main findings in relation to JPCC’s constructed corporate identity and concludes with the contribution that this research adds to the area of church corporate identity and contextual research.

Artefacts, corporate identity and discourse

Identity is not simply an expression of culture and internal values. It involves the practice of choosing symbolic materials that can be used to impress others (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). Contrary to their merely symbolic properties as part of the corporate visual identity (He and Balmer, 2007), this research makes the case for analysing artefacts as identity enactors and constructors. Artefacts are ‘products of an organisation’ (Rafaeli and Pratt, 2006: 1) which, by design or default, have image-projecting and identity-influencing properties (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). As material products, artefacts possess a degree of solidity/tangibility, which makes them highly visible in any organisation. Their high visibility has been purported to intentionally communicate a corporate identity.

The church is essentially an organisation that exists through the spoken and written word (Halliday, 1978). The whole function and purpose of a church is communicated through language, primarily in the form of prayers, songs and sermons. The church serves its audiences in linguistic and semiotic ways, and how this organisational use of language and other semiotic modalities combines with discourse and artefacts to construct corporate identity is the primary research objective of this research. Religious artefacts are not simply neutral ‘objects’: they articulate and materialise a religious organisation’s ideologies, theology and identity. This materialisation of religion through artefacts such as music, sermons, seminars, conferences, teaching series and books is an attempt to materialise a belief that is essentially intangible, which, in turn, enacts the corporate identity of the church that produced those artefacts.

The theoretical framework that underpins this research is a social constructionist perspective that uses discourse analysis to study corporate identity construction. A discourse approach ‘examines how language constructs phenomena, not how it reflects or reveals it’ (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 6). Seen from this approach, artefacts, along with their language and semiotic compositions, are not merely cultural symbolic carriers. Instead, language and other semiotic resources play an active role in constituting, rather than reflecting, social realities. Departing from a functionalist perspective (Christensen et al., 2008), which views corporate identity as a typology of characteristics, a discourse framework allows corporate identity to be studied as a social construct that is accomplished in enactment through its ‘identity artefacts’ (Hatch and Schultz, 2002) and ‘cultural texts’ that link ideology and institutional practices to the wider context of society and culture (Fairclough, 1992). Putnam and Fairhurst (2001: 79) define discourse analysis as ‘the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context, and the meanings or interpretations of discursive practices’.

Religious artefacts are multi-modal by nature, in that they comprise sounds, words, images and movements (Iedema, 2007). Meanings are not only dependent on one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts. In a church service, the congregation, the music performance, the architectural space, the people (audience, song performers, church pastors) visually and physically enact the ‘church identity’ through an experience. This experience is built upon a combination of established religious discourses and present social tendencies, but is also
organised by specific organisational structures and theology, and provides meanings that serve multiple ideologies. This research attempts to show: how a contemporary megachurch tailors its artefacts to meet the social needs of its audience; how this is accomplished through language; and how discourse constructs a discursive view of corporate identity that is realised in interaction (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006).

Christianity in Indonesia’s religious landscape

Although housing the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. According to the 2010 census, approximately 87 percent of the population of 238 million are Muslims, seven percent are Protestants and three percent are Catholics, with the remaining largely made up of Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists. Religious freedom is upheld by the Indonesian Constitution which officially recognises six religions – Islam, Christianity (Protestantism), Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism – and accords ‘all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief’. Religious diversity is celebrated in the national motto, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which proclaims ‘Unity in Diversity’, and the national ideology of Pancasila – the five principles of belief in One Supreme God, humanism, nationalism, popular sovereignty and social justice.

Despite the idealism trumpeted in the state motto and ideology, religious harmony remains an aspiration rather than a reality. Religious plurality was never seriously dealt with by the state during Suharto’s ‘New Order’ period (1966–1998) because public discourses on social differences or SARA (ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group differences) were officially prohibited. Following the fall of Suharto in 1998, the top-down strong arm tactics deployed in the interminable 32 years of the New Order government were lifted. While this has brought freedom to express religious diversity, it has also meant the opening of the door to inter-communal challenges. Various episodes of ethnic, religious and communal violence have erupted across Indonesia. Although post-Suharto Indonesia can be seen as a more open and democratic society, religious pluralism is being circumscribed by restrictive governmental regulations and rising religious intolerance. Rising conservatism within mainstream Islam is also increasingly evident. The increasingly intolerant religious landscape in Indonesia has a significant impact on the country’s rapidly growing Christian population.

In the past few decades, Christianity has experienced an exponential growth among the rising urban middle class in Indonesia, especially the Charismatic-Pentecostal churches and their variants.1 As official permits to build churches have become increasingly difficult to obtain (due to the Joint Decree No. 1/1969 and the Joint Ministerial Regulation on Places of Worship 2006), many of these churches assemble in restaurants, hotels or private buildings, and some circumvent the regulation by building large ‘multi-purpose’ buildings or conference auditoriums to use as

1. While Christianity is very diverse in Indonesia, most denominations belong to one of the three national communions – the Ecumenicals, Evangelicals or Pentecostals (see Hoon, 2013; Seo, 2013). The Ecumenicals mainly comprise the mainline churches, which have a Dutch Reformed heritage owing to colonial missions. Their Evangelical counterparts are theologically conservative churches mostly established by US missionaries, and are closely associated with the Christian fundamentalism in the United States. The Pentecostal churches were introduced to Indonesia by the Dutch in the early 20th century, and were revitalised in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the arrival of the Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal movement from the United States.
places of worship. A growing minority will always threaten the majority. The Muslims of Indonesia have named ‘Christianisation’ (or *Kristenisasi*), whether real or phantom, as the foremost moral threat. Such fear has resulted in religious violence, where Christian places of worship have often become targets of attack (Seo, 2013).

The research site and methodology

The research site is a contemporary, charismatic ‘megachurch’ (Twitchell, 2004). As Thumma and Travis (2007: xvi) state, there is no ‘typical megachurch model’ apart from size. Generally being associated with, and said to have originated from the United States, the megachurch phenomenon is worldwide (for example, City Harvest Church in Singapore, Hillsong Church in Sydney, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, to name a few). The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (n.d.) refers to a megachurch as ‘any Protestant . . . congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2000 or more persons in its worship services’. This is not to say that churches with large congregations do not exist in the history of the Christian church (Vaughn, 1993). Megachurches, however, are a recent phenomenon that emerged in the 1970s and that appear to be thriving in contemporary society.

We focus on a ‘non-Western’ megachurch based in Jakarta, Indonesia, called Jakarta Praise Community Church (www.jpcc.org). JPCC is founded by its current senior pastor, Jeffrey Rachmat. The church is non-denominational; it is not a member of any of the three largest national Christian communions in Indonesia that oversee the Ecumenical, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Cornelio (2008) describes this type of church ‘postdenominational’ – even though it may belong to a network of apostolic churches, it deliberately deemphasises its denominational root in order to be market-friendly. We argue that not being formally affiliated with the existing structures in the Christian scene gives JPCC more autonomy to create its own branded corporate identity. Moreover, JPCC may not see much relevance in affiliating itself with national associations, and so instead seeks to establish transnational links with international movements such as the City Harvest Church in Singapore and Hillsong Church in Australia. This transnational network is able to capture the imagination of its emerging middle class audience who tend to aspire to a global outlook, as will be further discussed later.

Established in 1999, JPCC is a relatively young church. With an average attendance of 9000 on Sundays (with four services in two campuses), JPCC describes itself as a ‘very energetic and vibrant’ church with ‘a lot of young people and young families’ (in the words of its worship pastor, Sidney Mohede). Dubbed a *gereja selebriti*, or ‘celebrity church’ (with local artists such as Agnes Monica, Ruth Sahanaya and Melani Ricardo involved, to name a few), both the church’s image and its demography reflect a middle class, urban identity. A significant number of the church attendees are ostensibly and visibly ethnic Chinese. This is statistically logical given that Jakarta is home to the largest number of ethnic Chinese compared to any cities or provinces in Indonesia. More than 40 percent of the Chinese Indonesian population are Christians, and a majority of them are middle class and above (see Ananta et al., 2015). Nevertheless, JPCC has always constructed an identity based on class rather than ethnicity. The church is led by a Chinese-Indonesian senior pastor, but its pastoral and ministry teams comprise a mix of ethnicities. This non(post)-ethnic approach allows the church to attract young middle class members from all ethnic backgrounds.

Every Sunday its worshippers put on their best outfits, and carry designer handbags and the latest gadgets and accessories with them to church. In stark contrast to many other churches in Indonesia, where late attendance is common and expected, members of JPCC are uncharacteristically
disciplined. Many of them arrive at church as early as one hour before the service starts, and queue up in an orderly fashion to wait for the auditorium door to open 30 minutes before the worship service takes place. There is a team of young, professionally dressed and well-groomed ushers facilitating the crowd while they wait at the lobby outside the auditorium. Boasting ‘no religious symbols, no stained glass, and no religious statuary’ (Miller, 1997: 13), the auditorium is furnished with hundreds of seats and a massive stage equipped with a band and professional concert lighting. The space fills up very quickly as soon as the door is opened. As seats are allocated on a first come, first served basis, worshippers need to arrive early to secure the best seats in the room. But what is more interesting is the manner in which the church has instilled punctuality in its culture and associated that with its brand.

JPCC can be regarded as a ‘new paradigm church’, which differs greatly from traditional mainline churches, and which can be distinguished from Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in its worship style, sermon content and liturgy or lack thereof. A ‘new paradigm church’, according to Donald Miller who coined the concept, has these characteristics: a non-compulsory requirement for clergy to be seminary trained, contemporary worship, lay leadership, extensive small group ministries, informal dressing of clergy and congregants, tolerance of different personal styles, physical (not just cognitive) participation of their congregant in worship, affirmation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and Bible-centered teaching (Miller, 1997: 20). While these general characterisations are applicable to ‘new paradigm’ churches, we are arguing for a more fluid construction that megachurches such as JPCC are able to strategically construct.

As an ex-businessman with little in the way of formal theological qualifications, JPCC’s senior pastor, Jeffrey Rachmat, wears a smart casual shirt and a pair of jeans to preach. The lively praise and worship, led by the church’s signature band, True Worshippers, is participated in by everyone in the congregation, who stands for 45 minutes, raising their hands and swinging in the groove of the emotion-invoking music. Although the scripture is oft-cited, the preaching can be considered to be what Cornelio (2008) refers to as ‘Christianity Lite’, which he defines as a ‘practice of recasting conventionally aloof religion into bite-sized spiritual experience’.

JPCC utilises social media (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube) extensively as part of its corporate communications. Miller (1997: 16) argues that new paradigm churches are sensitive to the interests and needs of its members which are catered to within the programmes they organise. This is reflected in the ‘cell groups’ organised by JPCC that meet in various geographical locations throughout the city. These groups are given the acronym ‘DATE’ (discipled, accepted & anointed, trained and equipped), which is an interesting use of the word which can also mean a romantic ‘date’. JPCC’s ministries include women (Treasures Women, who have an annual conference), children and a business ministry where entrepreneurs and business owners meet on a monthly basis to ‘be equipped to be marketplace leaders and the salt and light in their own market segment or industry’ (JPCC, n.d. a).

To be answered inductively from the data, the research question we ask is: ‘what discourses are used in constructing JPCC’s corporate identity?’. Discourses cannot be studied directly; they can only be explored by examining the texts that constitute them (Fairclough, 1992). In Christian practice, the textual component of its artefacts (for example, song lyrics, books, sermon transcripts) is a significant identifier. In addressing this research question, we explore the way artefacts draw upon the various discourses that are constituted in its contents and substance. Understanding the context of church artefacts is important in order to be able to understand how religious organisations produce and reproduce both identity and ideology. Hence, an analysis of the artefacts necessitates an understanding of organisational practices and structures, and the theology that
underpins them. Church text, corporate artefacts and music were collected and semiotically ana-
lysed for their underlying structures and discourse. The data includes: the church music; one book
written by the senior pastor; a collection of sermons written by the various church pastors in 2007,
2008, 2010 and 2011; 18 church newsletters; and field notes conducted by the second author in
2012 and 2013. A range of other corporate communication materials such as reports, booklets,
brochures, social media posts, website information, DVDs of the musical performances, together
with pictorial records of events, services and facilities, was also analysed. The textual data is
communicated in both English and Bahasa Indonesia (translated into English by the authors, both
of whom are fluent in the language).

Discourses in constructing JPCC’s corporate identity

Self-empowerment

JPCC’s corporate website (www.jpcc.org) states that it aims ‘[t]o build a generation of stars to
influence the world with the message of truth’. It is noteworthy that the subject position of ‘stars’ is
used in constructing the type of church-goer that the church is targeting. As previously mentioned,
the ‘star’ status of the church is encapsulated in the church being dubbed as a gereja selebriti.
Jeffrey Rachmat has also written a book (originally in Bahasa Indonesia titled Permainan Cantik,
and since translated and published in English (Rachmat, 2004) with the title The Art of Winning),
captured by a central subtitle: ‘Life is not only about winning, but how we will win the game’. This
subject position is also legitimised as a self-empowering pursuit where ‘[p]eople should be amazed
at the light that shines out from within us and should be drawn to seek this same type of life for
themselves’ (Rachmat, 2004: 108). He continues: ‘We are supposed to shine above the people of
this world. We are to be stars amid the darkness. God wants us to be the “celebrities”. We are
designated to be stars!’ (Rachmat, 2004: 109).

This discourse frames JPCC as a church that identifies with the therapeutic ethos (Bellah et al.,
1995) that caters to an individual’s spiritual, personal and psychological development. The ther-
apeutic discourse has a tendency to translate the religious into personal psychological problems
which can be remedied on the basis of the hidden potentialities of individuals (Fairclough, 1989).
JPCC combined this with a self-empowerment discourse which in this instance does not frame the
individual as weak, helpless or hopeless but as the one who has authority to make a difference in
their lives. The church becomes an ‘empowerer’ of individuals rather than a church that merely
preaches the Gospel, as demonstrated by this excerpt:

A person is responsible to build his/her strength alone. It is impossible for strength to just appear on its
own. It needs to be built continuously and without stopping. What is inside a person will determine the
actual strength of that person. (Power to Serve, sermon by Jeffrey Rachmat 2012, our translation).

Drawing upon a similar discourse in the women’s ministry led by the senior pastor’s wife,
Angela Rachmat, the theme of the 2013 annual women’s ‘Treasures’ conference is ‘Unshakeable’:
‘Unshakeable woman – she is a woman who stands on top of a strong foundation; the unshakeable
woman: a woman who does not give up easily; the unshakeable woman – a woman who does not
let fear conquer and weaken her’ (our translation). JPCC’s use of the self-empowerment discourse
transforms religion into a psychological pursuit which its teachings, offerings and artefacts cater
to. For example, for the month of September 2012 the church’s whole theme was ‘Healthy Self
Image’ (in English), not only communicated through its monthly newsletter but also incorporated
into its church sermons. The aim of the theme, according to the senior pastor, is to answer questions of how people look at themselves and how others look at them: ‘How do you view yourself? What is your opinion about yourself? Or do you believe what others say about you? Do you know what God says about you? Whose opinion do you believe?’ (Rachmat in JPCC, 2012: 3, our translation).

While this ‘healthy self image’ theme pervades the entire month’s newsletter for September, articles surrounding the theme and testimonies from its church members are also published. Discourses of positive psychology, self-confidence, self-esteem and positive and negative thinking were invoked as the keys to success and self-empowerment. In the page titled ‘U Say’, one member’s response to the question ‘How do you view and portray yourself?’ is as follows:

I am ordinary woman with extraordinary God [original in English]. I have many strengths, but I also have many weaknesses. My journey in knowing God’s character has helped me manage all that. I can walk and build my future with my head held high and a smiling face, without feeling lowly because of my weaknesses or feeling arrogant because of my strengths. (Laura in JPCC, 2012: 43, our translation)

Coupled with many self-empowering sermons with titles such as ‘A Better You’, ‘Dimana Gawangnya’ [Where is the goal], ‘Apa yang dicari’ [What you are seeking], ‘Vision and Destiny’, ‘Manage it or lose it: Relationship, leadership, stewardship’, JPCC constructs a corporate identity of a church that facilitates psychological well-being and the pursuit of self-empowerment. This particular theology syncretically blends biblical doctrines with secular values of individualism and humanism in the form of ‘developing the human potential’. Prosperity is framed as an individual pursuit that helps one to get ahead in life, a stance consistent with the overly positive ‘prosperity gospel’ megachurches are accused of preaching. The ideology of the human potential sanctifies the empowerment discourse which is used to invoke individual agency and which contributes to the success of this church. It is not that the church does not preach love, peace and other Christian attributes, but JPCC seeks to build its brand of church based on individualistic discourses that appeal strongly to an individual’s well-being.

Westernisation and modernisation

JPCC views itself as a ‘modern and contemporary church’. Their version of excellence, creativity and a contemporary approach is undoubtedly both ‘Western’ and ‘modern’ in an organisational context. The senior pastor views modern as being innovative, where it is important to make church ‘enjoyable’ in order to attract ‘younger’ church-goers by singing and using ‘modern’ music:

I find that churches are very slow in adjusting to change. Some do not have the courage to change or bring new innovations to their members. They sing the same old songs, and never update their old battered musical instruments or sound system. Because of this, many of the younger church members are not enjoying themselves at church and they have a warped view of the church as being out of date, old fashioned and a place for old people. (Rachmat, 2004: 96)

The senior pastor then elaborates and specifies what he means by innovation in relation to preaching and communicating. He equates innovation with the embrace of technology and

2. ‘We value excellence, we value creativity, we value an approach that is contemporary without compromising Christian standards’ (JPCC, n.d. b).
legitimises that embrace for the expansion of God’s kingdom. He justifies this further by using the subject position of ‘winners’ consistent with the mission statement of ‘building a generation of stars’, and stating that it is important to be innovative in order to expand the kingdom of God by using relevant technology which allows for an improved advancement of corporate communication materials (magazines and church newsletters) and ‘interesting’ preaching:

Remember, the purpose of implementing new innovations is for us to be winners. We are planting seeds for the younger generation and for the generations to come. We want them to be won for the Kingdom of God. A good example of new innovations is in the field of graphic arts. With the advancement of computer software for graphic design, we can now create premium quality magazines or church newsletters so that an interesting magazine or newsletter does not end up in the trash bin. A Pastor could also use this type of software and other resourceful software to make his sermons more interesting and dynamic. Thus, he captivates his congregation as they listen intently to what he is teaching. (Rachmat, 2004: 97)

The correlation between modernity and technology is almost unquestionable (Thompson, 1995). Technology made, shaped and propelled modernity while the converse is also true in that modernity creates technology (Brey, 2003). In this light, the church’s motivation to use technology as part of its marketing materials demonstrates a desire to be ‘modern’. And when the ‘Pastor’ uses technology to ‘make his sermons more interesting and dynamic’, this exemplifies his/her role as the leader of the church who is modern. The megachurch thus becomes the signifier of innovative religion that is thriving in modernity, worthy of emulating by its church followers. The use of technology by the church goes beyond marketing materials and is also integral to its services. The concert style on-stage worship in the church’s auditorium is facilitated by state-of-the-art technology such as multiple screens, the latest sound systems, special effects, audio-visual projection, multiple singers (or ‘worship leaders’) and a complete musical ensemble, all designed to create a ‘theatricalisation of worship’ (Cruz, 2009: 120). These technological pursuits are congruent with ‘middle-classness’ as an urban social status (cf. Geertz, 1963), identified through the display of material aspirations in the form of conspicuous consumption (Dick, 1985). Using and possessing the latest technology thus constructs a modern identity for both the church as well as its members.

In addition to the use of technology to construct a modern identity, JPCC draws upon the English language to aspire to a ‘Western’ level of modernisation. Despite operating in a non-English-speaking nation, English is a dominant part of JPCC’s corporate identity and communications. Its senior leadership consists of university graduates from ‘Western’ countries (Jeffrey Rachmat from the Netherlands, Jose Carol from Germany and Sidney Mohede from the USA) and the church regularly sources ‘Western’ speakers, mainly from the US, the UK and Australia. Many of these speakers are sourced from the church’s connection to Australia’s largest megachurch, Hillsong Church, which has featured a similar suite of speakers that regularly patronise both churches. Many of JPCC’s artefacts, practices and styles emulate Hillsong, as well as drawing upon models from other larger, more established megachurches such as City Harvest Church in Singapore. These transnational connections are crucial in constructing JPCC’s identity as global and modern.

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3. These speakers include Robi Sonderegger, Lisa Bevere, AR Bernard Paul Scanlon, Julia A’Bell, Chris Mendez, Lee Burns, Brian Houston and worship singers Israel Houghton and New Breed.
Through a practice of ‘Englishisation’, English is used in JPCC’s worship songs and recorded in its music albums, as well as spoken in sermon deliveries. For example, JPCC’s latest music album is titled ‘Favor’, spelt in American English. Among other means of expression, modernity has been expressed linguistically in Asian languages through the use of English and the borrowing of English terms (Lee, 2006). This phenomenon has increasingly become a feature of Indonesian modernity, especially in urban centres like Jakarta. As an ‘international language’, English is deemed as a gateway for Indonesians to become ‘international’ and ‘modern’. Furthermore, the linguistic and cosmopolitan capital of English serves as a means of upward mobility for Indonesian youths. For example, Tanu (2014) observes, ‘Many students internalize the structure and learn to distance themselves from the inferior (in this case, Indonesia) and align themselves with the superior (the West)...to reinforce their elite status in Indonesia vis-à-vis the lower classes’ (p. 579). Read in this context, the prevalent use of English in JPCC’s songs, sermons, news bulletins, announcements and merchandise can be seen as a deliberate attempt to project an image of being modern and international. In so doing, the church affords its members a global identity beyond the disenfranchised local and national reference.

Business

JPCC does not own a church building of its own, and its congregations gather at commercial premises in two locations in Central Jakarta. The church occupies three storeys of the Wisma Nusantara Complex at the Pullman Hotel located in the main thoroughfare of Jakarta, and two storeys of the Kasablanka Mall. Both premises are facilitated by ballrooms that can seat thousands of worshippers. With the Kasablanka Mall, JPCC literally ‘takes God to the market place’ by acquiring a space in a shopping mall to conduct its worship services. In Indonesia, the concept of a church-mall is more than just an embrace of the market logic. The practical dimensions of conducting church services in shopping malls include the excellent security provided by the mall against vandalism and mob attack; the convenience of a one-stop location where church members can worship, shop and dine; and the circumvention of the need for a church permit, which has been increasingly difficult to obtain (Gudorf, 2012). The market-oriented practice of JPCC further explains why this movement is a successful urban phenomenon among upwardly mobile middle class city dwellers.

The church runs and manages a ‘Christian resource’ shop in a centrally located shopping centre in Jakarta called Grand Indonesia, where it sells its own produced merchandise. Its shop reveals a business division of the church that is essentially a company in its own right:

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4. The privileged position of the English language within the social hierarchy of Indonesia reinforces the cultural superiority and elite status of the user of the language (Sugiharto, 2013). Tanu (2014) defines ‘cosmopolitan capital’ to include ‘western education, fluency in English, international mobility, global social networks, familiarity with global popular culture, and certain ways of carrying oneself’. In her study of students in an international school in Jakarta, Tanu argues that this cosmopolitan cultural capital reinforces the elite status of these students in Indonesia.

5. This further reinforces the blurred boundary between this form of Christianity and capitalism, where the church emphasises self-development and growth and where shopping malls become ‘temples of trade, churches of consumption, synagogues of excess, or mosques of the market’ (Pahl, 2003: 70).

Its thriving music label led by its worship pastor, Sidney Mohede, is the church’s major business. Its operations emulate Hillsong Music Australia, a sophisticated business operation which is considered to be the ‘market leader’ in the genre of Christian praise and worship and has had global success (note JPCC’s claim to be ‘one of the market leaders’ in the excerpt above), with its music being played in many churches across the world. Hillsong partnered with JPCC in producing an Indonesian album in 2012 as part of its global project that translated a collection of its songs into nine languages. JPCC’s music is highly popular in the Indonesian contemporary church scene and has seemed to pioneer this type of music genre in Indonesia, as demonstrated by the record-breaking rank of one of its worship songs titled ‘Bejanamu’ which hit number 1 on Indonesia iTunes in October 2013. Originally known as True Worshippers, the group re-branded to JPCC Worship in 2011 for corporate consistency and to confirm its status as not just a ‘band’ but as a thriving music label nationally and internationally:

JPCC Worship is an extension of JPCC’s Praise and Worship team that reaches beyond the confines of our church services. They have been recording a live concert album in Jakarta once every year and to date they have produced over a dozen such albums under the name of True Worshippers. In 2011, the name has been renewed with a new name JPCC Worship to emphasize that we are one body of Christ as a church; not a group or a band. Numerous JPCC Worship - True Worshippers songs are being sung by churches all over Indonesia and many other parts of the world — the fruit of JPCC Worship - True Worshippers’ aim to bless and help believers express their worship to God through music. (http://www.jpcc.org/jpcc-worship (accessed 28 Oct 2013))

The prominence of music as a major artefact for the church is an explicit strategy directed towards building its corporate identity. Its music is an identifier of its own brand which distinguishes it from other churches. The original intention of incorporating music into church practice was, and is, for the purpose of praising God. While JPCC uses its music for worship purposes, it does not appear to distinguish between worship and entertainment values. It holds an annual ‘live recording concert’, in which the 2013 (held on 29 June) event attracted more than 5000 attendees. The church portrays this event as both worship and a ‘concert’. In other words, the church deliberately dissolves the established dichotomy between the sacred and secular, incorporating discourses from Christianity as well as modernisation and business to construct its own brand of religion along with its own distinctive way of worship. JPCC chose to produce contemporary worship music, which by its nature draws upon popular music’s discourses and ideologies. There are other ways in which an organisation can build its popularity, and there are churches known for ministries other than music (such as healing, community programmes and theology training, to name a few). But JPCC chose to use a tool known for its effects and success potential – popular music. This popularity in turn is used for other purposes such as drawing young people to church and building atmosphere, which feeds into the overarching purpose of building a marketable corporate identity.
Christians are a minority in Indonesia. While nationalist sentiments and discourse in Ecumenical and mainline churches registered under the Communion of Churches in Indonesia are explicitly apparent in issues related to social justice, interfaith relations, pluralism and coexistence with the Muslim majority, JPCC’s use of the nationalism discourse appears to be largely a corporate identity-building exercise. Smith (2001) argues that there are various meanings and usages for the term nationalism, ranging from (a) the process of formation of a nation; (b) sentiments of attachment to, and pride in, the nation; (c) an ideology and discourse extolling the nation and (d) a political movement aimed at creating a sovereign state. The ideology of nationalism according to Smith (2001) is to achieve and maintain the autonomy, unity and identity of a real or imagined nation. JPCC’s use of the nationalism discourse is consistent with extolling a nation but does not appear to extend beyond mere sentiments in its various corporate communication materials, such as on its Facebook page expressed in both Bahasa Indonesia and English intermittently: ‘Happy Youth Oath Day. Let us fill this generation with youth who can shine brightly for Indonesia’ (Facebook post, 27 October 2012, our translation); ‘Long Live Indonesia on its 66th Independence anniversary. We are your supporter, a great and prosperous nation! We bless this nation in Jesus’ name’ (Facebook post, 16 August 2011, our translation); ‘Good morning indONEsia! We speak peace over you today. You are a blessed country and a blessed city’ (Facebook post, 17 March 2011, original in English).

Coinciding with Indonesia’s Independence Day (17 August), JPCC devoted its entire newsletter in August 2013 to this discourse of nationalism. The cover is filled with images of people hoisting the Indonesian flag in its red and white colours. There are articles about Indonesia, filled with nationalist sentiments such as ‘Do you really, really love Indonesia?’, and about the stories behind the games typically played during this national public holiday. In addition to these nationalist sentiments, it is worth nothing that JPCC accords its identity as a church to a larger purpose. It draws upon the nationalism discourse to legitimise its existence: ‘Here’s why we are here. To be the answer to our city Jakarta and our nation Indonesia’ (Facebook post, 29 August 2013, original in English). In a clip that is posted on its corporate website as well as on its YouTube page, the church expanded this nationalist sentiment with a collective and inclusive purpose that identifies the church with typical Christian discourses of building people and disciples of the kingdom. This is then reinforced by an individualist mission of building ‘stars’, a subject position that is highly inspirational, self-glorifying as well as empowering. The nationalism discourse drawn and used by JPCC in this way co-constructs the corporate identity of a church as both nationalistic (and thus safe, as the church operates as a minority religious organisation) and individualistic at the same time:

Jakarta, Indonesia. To this city we have been called. To gather as one; a people unto God; to reach out, connect, serve, worship, inspire, declare, proclaim, make disciples, equip, raise up, celebrate, lead, empower, engage. To be a solution. Jakarta Praise Community Church to build a generation of stars to influence the world with the message of truth. (JPCC: answer to a city and nation, YouTube, 21 August 2013, original in English, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2MmxDDjxbQ)

Discussion and conclusion

The appropriation of a multitude of discourses, as we have argued, is part of the process of constructing a marketable corporate identity for JPCC. These multiple discourses work together to invoke individual agency, as JPCC offers its brand of religion that is constructed from
contemporary discourses that resonate with Indonesian middle class aspirations. Given its ‘unregistered’ status as a Christian church in Indonesia, JPCC has embraced both marketisation and modernisation in order to construct a corporate identity that is flexible and strategically appealing. The multiple discourses constitute and enact JPCC’s corporate identity, which serves both corporate purposes and one that projects an image that is not ‘fundamentalist’ but ethnically inclusive and pro-nation (not a threat to Islam and politics, etc.), and inspiring to its burgeoning middle class. As the megachurch continues to thrive and repackaged the Gospel and its artefacts into contemporary versions, it discursively competes against other discourses produced by other more established churches, especially in relation to artefacts and theology. At the same time, the megachurch is also competing with ‘non-religious’ activities, mindsets and lifestyles, and, in the case of Indonesia, other religions.

Contemporary religious artefacts are not merely material goods that can be understood as having a symbolic value, but are constructive artefacts that are produced with a strategic, intentional objective of achieving certain outcomes for the church. JPCC constructed itself as playing a role in ‘connecting’ not only people to God but to a community of believers of this type of church that enables a ‘modern life’. JPCC interwove discourses of positive belief and a modern aspirational lifestyle to construct the church as a highly experiential place and themselves as facilitators in that project. This facilitation was organised through a structure and processes that reflected a marketised model of the church, that is to say, a corporate model different from a traditional church.

The aim of this article has been to investigate the corporate identity construction process of an organisation that is both ‘non-corporate’ and ‘non-Western’. For this purpose, the research has focused on a megachurch in Indonesia that enacts a corporate identity that is both modern and ‘Western’, resonating with middle class Indonesian ideals, while at the same time being nationalistic. Through the four discourses identified (self-empowerment, modernisation and Westernisation, business and nationalism), we not only demonstrate how its corporate identity is constructed but conclude that corporate identity is not simply a presentation of characteristics that are fixed, stable and/or polished, but rather, a construction that consists of disparate, discordant and even contradictory discourses, crafted to appear coherent through the corporate communication materials.

As an organisation, the megachurch model emerged in the landscape of American Christianity where marketing and consumption discourses are dominant. It is interesting to see its expansion internationally (in Australia, South East Asia and Africa, to name but a few areas) as the practices and dispositions associated with the megachurch spread and colonise other dimensions of Christianity. While the megachurch model draws upon a discourse of ‘Americanness’ (Ahdar, 2006) as well as marketisation discourses (Han, 2014; Simpson and Cheney, 2007), we have demonstrated how this model is deployed and reconstituted in ‘non-Western’ contexts such as Indonesia – the world’s largest Muslim nation. How discourses spread and penetrate various contexts through genres, content and form to construct a marketable corporate identity that is conducive to the local audience not only demonstrates the complexity of discourse but also the ways in which dominant discourses are reproduced and changed to reflect particular cultural contexts.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: We acknowledge the financial support of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC, University of Sydney) in facilitating this research.

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