

## A Sense of Belonging and Cultism in Public Universities in Kenya: An Analysis of Christian Union Students' Perceptions

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### Cite this article in APA

Siwa, J. O., & Omondi, A. W. (2024). A sense of belonging and cultism in public universities in Kenya: An analysis of Christian Union students' perceptions. *Journal of philosophy and religion*, 3(1), 47-59. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jpr.v3i1.641>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

### Article history

Received: 28.10.2024

Accepted: 27.11.2024

Published: 28.12.2024

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine Christian Union students' perceptions of a sense of belonging as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. Numerous research indicates that cultism is prevalent and increasing among university students, resulting in several social ills. The study employed a mixed-method research design and was guided by Bounded Choice Theory. The study was carried out in six public universities in Kenya. The total population for the study was 55,600 CU students, and the accessible population was 10,900, out of which a sample of 220 CU students was selected through simple random and stratified sampling methods. The study also included 60 small group Bible study leaders and 6 CU Patrons, one from each selected university through purposive sampling. The study established that a Sense of Belonging ( $\beta=0.638$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) significantly influences cultism. The study concludes that CU students perceived that students were recruited into cults due to the urge to fit into a social group with a promise of social identity and acceptance, especially for fragile learners who are emotionally vulnerable and likely to succumb to recruitment into cultism. The study recommends training of freshers during orientation on critical thinking and discernment to prevent cult recruitment. This study further recommends that universities and CU develop policy frameworks to mitigate cultism. The CU should create an inclusive socio-psychological environment and programs that attract and retain members by addressing members' needs during vulnerable moments of loneliness, transition, grief, pain and loss.

**Key terms:** Christian Union students, cultism, perceptions, public university, sense of belonging.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, cultism has attracted media attention on a global scale with reference to the proponents, leaders, and dissolution of the cults. Their stories are often terrible and horrific. According to several studies, cultism is the strong devotion and zeal for a cause or principle with a religious bent, whose members and activities appear arcane to outsiders (Nnajieta & Ahamefula, 2015). Undergraduate students across the world have been reported to be involved in cults. Pager (2019) notes an account of death and other atrocities caused by fraternity recruitment rituals and cult hazing at the University of Buffalo. He further posits that one in ten undergraduate students belonged to a cult. Zaveri (2019) also stated that the Pennsylvania State University had suspended a fraternity after a teen died during an initiation ritual. He further asserts that fraternities have a history of hosting dangerous parties and hazing rituals. He cites a case in July 2017 when a former student at Louisiana State University was found guilty of homicide and given a three-month sentence for his part in the hazing death of an 18-year-old fraternity pledge.

According to Rotimi (2005), fraternities and sororities are common in American campuses, where they are known as Greek groups due to their names and insignia that are written in the Greek alphabet. Rosenberg and Mosca (2016) hypothesised that a public university in the Middle Atlantic States suspended a fraternity (a cult for men only) after one of its recruits committed suicide because of forced sex and cocaine sniffing.

In Africa, cultism has had a far-reaching effect on its populations and has been considered a crisis in many Nigerian Universities (Omebe & Omobe, 2015). Studies also show that in Sierra Leone universities, there were incidents of cultist activities on campuses characterised by oath-taking, blood-sucking ceremonies, cases of burglary, and rapes targeted at children of prominent members of society. Such atrocities were found to have been committed under the influence of drugs (Uweru, 2010). In South Africa as well, Hampton (2000) noted that the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg banned the International Christian Church (ICC) after receiving complaints against this dangerous cult, which did not allow the youth to withdraw once they joined Lalich (2004).

Cults have been reported within the East African community as well. According to Lalich (2004), in the year 2000, more than 400 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments in Uganda were brutally murdered and buried in secret mass graves; another 300 or more were burned to death in a locked church building (Oxtoby & Segal, 2012; Cherono, 2019; Kigame, 2018).

As Ahmed (2018) reported, over 58 Kenyan students had abandoned universities to join Islamic terrorist groups in Somalia, Libya, and Syria in a period of three years, further stating that 14 of the students had been recruited into cultic terror organisations that year. Njunge (2019) reported that one of the main suspects in the Garissa University attack in 2015, which led to the deaths of 148 students and staff, had been a law student at the University of Nairobi. This underscores the existence and recruitment of students into cultism and terrorism in its various categories and relationship to terror and violence.

The challenge of cultism attracted the attention of the Kenyan parliament in the year 2000 when the matter of cultism and bizarre killings in the Budalangi constituency claimed three lives in the area. Ombati (2019) reported that a Nigerian pastor living in Kenya was among the people who were questioned over the spread of occultism in Nairobi for luring vulnerable Kenyans into cultism alongside ten other foreigners for dangerous occult practices. The government had deported at least 20 other foreigners on that count.

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According to Kimuyu (2016), a Strathmore University student had turned himself in after killing a three-year-old child and drinking the blood in a ritual murder linked to a devil-worshipping cult. The student was later found to have committed suicide in Mathari Mental Hospital, where he had been taken for rehabilitation by Kamiti Maximum Prison after developing psychiatric problems (Omenda, 2018).

Besides cultism cases in the Universities, the Kenyan society has experienced an influx of cults. Referring to the Shakahola massacre in Kenya, Juma (2024) posits that in February 2023, the world and Kenya were shocked when members of the Mackenzie-led church were found buried and upon post mortem, it was confirmed that they died due to fasting, which they did under his supervision. Ahmed and Emma (2024) reported that Paul Mackenzie told his followers to starve themselves and their children to death in the Shakahola Forest, where hundreds of bodies were exhumed. The doomsday cult leader directed his followers to starve themselves, leading to the death of hundreds, including 191 children.

In Kenya, there is evidence that the number of university students engaging in cultism is high and increasing. According to the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS 2020) in the annual general meeting report, the Christian union students in Kenya highlighted cultism as a major challenge facing university students. This challenge had earlier been reported by the Christian Union leaders during a National Students Executive Committee (NASEC), further decrying the mushrooming of cultic groups in Kenyan Universities (FOCUS Kenya, 2019). This has resulted in students losing their productivity, abandoning their studies, failing their examinations, engaging in crimes, committing suicide, withdrawing from friends and family, engaging in drugs and substance abuse, engaging in immoral behaviours, and becoming a nuisance in the universities. This has been attributed to several factors, among them family background, peer pressure, sense of belonging, socio-psychological manipulation, and theological grounding. Wallis (2007) asserts that a growing number of cult groups are recruiting on university campuses, hoping to catch young people at the most vulnerable time of their lives when away from home for the first time, lonely or looking for a sense of belonging.

The Kenya Police Service (2018) reported an emerging cult, namely Young Blood Saints, operating within Nairobi that targets youth, especially students in the Universities. The Young Blood Saints had targeted Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and Technical University of Kenya, among others. This study attempted to establish the Christian Union students' perception of the influence of a sense of belonging on cultism in public universities in Kenya.

Kenyan universities are not spared from the risk of cultism, and according to a Kenya Gazette Notice Vol. XCVII No 10 and Notice No 991 dated March 1 1995, a Commission of Inquiry led by Bishop Nicodemus Kirima was launched by President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, the second President of the Republic of Kenya, to investigate allegations of the existence of devil worship in Kenya. The Commission reported, in part, to the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) that it had found evidence of students' involvement in cultism. It further revealed that cult recruitment was clandestine, with prospects unaware that they were being lured into a cult. This makes a study necessary in order to mitigate the challenges posed by cultism, thus the need to establish the Christian Union students' perception of the influence of a sense of belonging on cultism in public universities in Kenya.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several factors have been reported as responsible for the menace of cultism in universities, including a sense of belonging, which is the hope that the students would find in the cult group a place to find people who would readily accept them regardless of their social status according to Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015), Coates (2011) further found that people joined charismatic groups, some of which are cultic because some of such groups promised to provide certainty and meet the victim's need for friendship, and meaning. Lalich and McLaren (2017) noted that people are social animals and desire to belong to something or be part of something better, such as a better world, a better life, a better weight, and more money, among others. Girigiri (2013) concurs with the above authors and opines that the desire to belong to a group is a natural human activity, and cultists capitalise on this by portraying themselves as the alternative family and drawing their recruits deeper and deeper until the cult becomes their newfound family. The victims of such groups then cease to socialise with anyone outside that circle and are locked in or bound (Lalich, 2004).

University students end up in cultism following the desire for belonging or identification with other people, social groups or any other ideology that may accept and accommodate them. (Kagama & Maina, 2014). The authors further reveal that New Charismatic Movements (NCMs), some of which are cultic, take advantage of situations such as separation, divorce, single parentage, and other disadvantaged situations to try to bring scattered people from different families together by coming up with fellowships, which reach the person as an individual. In their study, Kagama and Maina (2014) reported that 78.4 per cent of their respondents affirmed that they had joined the NCMs in search of identity, a sense of love and belonging, self-acceptance and approval. Rotimi (2005) posits that there are students who engage in cultism because of a sense of belonging and the need to be well-connected or because they are seeking meaning, direction, comfort, and love within a community. Wallis (2003) concurs with Rotimi that cults seem to provide an alternative community for the lonely and alienated members of the institution, some of whom are undecided. This is because cults initially masquerade as friendly and benevolent; cults give gifts, offer scholarships, and seem to really care for their members.

Ogidefa (2016) argues that some students join cult groups to identify themselves with a group that makes them popular and powerful and achieves prestige, greatness, and political advantage during the university students' union elections. Ajayi et al. (2010) agree with the above authors that undergraduates joined cult groups for popularity, a name, and political power. Members of these cult groups believe that there is a change in their status after becoming members, including "popularity, ego-boosting, sense of belonging and boldness" (Chebli et al., 2007). The sense of belonging, therefore, seems to be the main incentive that makes students desire to join cults in universities.

### Theoretical framework

The study was anchored on the Bounded Choice Theory. The Bounded Choice Theory was developed by Lalich (2004), a cult specialist who described the "Bounded Choice Theory" as a model that can be used to examine and analyse cults or high-demand groups. It is a Socio-psychological theory developed to interpret the behaviour of true believers in a closed, charismatic context. The theory explains the seemingly irrational behaviour of the most dedicated adherents and attempts to consider individual choice within the context of an authoritarian, transcendent, and closed group. The author further opined that as the social dynamic closes in on itself, adherents find themselves living within a bounded reality whose parameters are enclosed and defined by the 'self-sealing system'. The theory posits that once people join cultic

groups, they may cease to socialise with anyone outside the cultic group and become locked in or bound. They become irrational in their thoughts, and it becomes difficult for them to exit the group.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed research design involving both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools (Dawadi et al., 2021). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires for Christian Union students. Qualitative data were collected using interview guides for CU patrons and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for small group Bible study leaders. Bell et al. (2018) posit that the qualitative research method through interviews is applicable to understanding people's thoughts and views on a given social issue.

The study was carried out on the main campuses of six selected public universities in Kenya, namely Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Moi University, Egerton University, Maseno University, and Chuka University. These public universities were selected because cases of cultism had been reported in them (FOCUS Kenya 2020; Kenya Police Service 2018). A pilot study was carried out at the University of Nairobi.

The study targeted 55,600 CU students in public universities in Kenya (FOCUS Kenya, 2020), whereas the accessible population was 10,900 CU students. The sample size was calculated and determined using the formula propounded by Nassiuma (2000), which is independent of the population's underlying probability distribution. A sample of 220 CU students was therefore selected using a simple random sampling and stratified sampling method; the study also included 6 CU patrons, 1 from each of the six universities and 60 small group Bible study leaders, 10 from each of the Universities, selected through purposive sampling.

Data was collected using questionnaires for Christian Union students, interviews with Christian Union patrons, and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for small group Bible study leaders. The questionnaire was constructed using closed-ended items. The closed-ended items involved the 4-point Likert scale type based on the extent to which the respondents agreed with statements.

Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis, and responses were grouped into themes. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, and the results were presented in tables of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The study also used inferential statistics through multiple regression analysis to check the relationship between independent, intervening, and dependent variables. Pearson correlation was used to measure the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Factor Loadings for Sense of Belonging

Factor loadings in principal components and factor analysis refer to the correlation between the original and the underlying latent variables or factors. Essentially, factor loadings show how much each variable 'loads onto' a specific factor. This means that factor loadings allow us to understand which variables are most closely associated with a particular factor. The subsequent table illustrates the factor loading for a sense of belonging.

**Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix for Sense of Belonging Domain**

Rotated Component Matrix	Factor loading
The need to associate with others makes students join cult movements	.474
Cultic affiliates take advantage of circumstances such as divorce and separation or broken relationships to recruit new members who are seeking care and support	.804
Students are tempted to enter cultism in pursuit of social identity and acceptance	.775
Cults appear to give the alienated individuals an alternate fellowship and sense of community	.850
Students enter cult groups to become famous or popular	.912
Cults seem to give members a favourable feeling	.773
Cults appear to give their followers spiritual warmth	.812
Students join cultism to realise electoral advantages during student union elections on campus	.653
Students enrol in cults to transform their social status	.451
Cults target vulnerable students when they are emotionally exposed	.656
<i>Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.</i>	
<i>Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.</i>	
<i>a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.</i>	

According to the findings, items that loaded extremely high in the component include "Students enter cult groups to become famous or popular, Cults appear to give the alienated individuals an alternate fellowship and sense of community, " and " Cults appear to give their followers spiritual warmth with coefficients of 0.912, 0.850 and 0.812, respectively. It was consequently ascertained that all items loaded above the benchmark of 0.30 and were retained to be used in subsequent analysis.

### **Descriptive analysis for the Influence of Sense of Belonging on cultism.**

Descriptive analytics is the method of finding patterns and relationships utilising both recent and old data. The fundamental qualities of a data collection can be quantified and described by a researcher using descriptive statistics. They enable investigators to arrange, simplify, and synthesise data, as a result of which they act as the foundation for data analysis. The objective was to establish the Christian Union students' perception of a sense of belonging as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. The statements were provided, from which the data were gathered and rated on a four-point Likert scale. To compute the statistics, percentages, means, and standard deviations were applied as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sense of Belonging and Cultism**

Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD
The need to associate with others makes students join cult movements	3%	19%	58%	20%	2.94	0.71
Cultic affiliates take advantage of circumstances such as divorce and separation or broken relationships to recruit new members who are seeking care and support	0%	12%	54%	34%	3.22	0.64
Students are tempted to enter cultism in pursuit of social identity and acceptance	2%	10%	52%	36%	3.22	0.69
Cults appear to give the alienated individuals an alternate fellowship and sense of community	4%	17%	54%	25%	3.00	0.75
Students enter cult groups to become famous or popular	5%	16%	49%	31%	3.05	0.80
Cults seem to give members a favourable feeling	7%	19%	50%	23%	2.89	0.84
Cults appear to give their followers spiritual warmth	12%	20%	42%	25%	2.80	0.95
Students join cultism to realise electoral advantages during student union elections on campus	8%	32%	42%	18%	2.70	0.85
Students enrol in cultism to transform their social status	4%	15%	53%	27%	3.04	0.76
Cults target vulnerable students when they are emotionally exposed	2%	10%	51%	38%	3.24	0.69
<i>Sense of Belonging Mean Index</i>					<i>3.01</i>	<i>0.46</i>

People are thought to join cults out of a desire to fit in since doing so seems to give them a false sense of security within a social group. According to the results, 78 per cent of respondents established that the need to associate with others and seek approval from their peers makes students join cult movements ( $Mean=2.94$ ;  $SD=0.71$ ). In a similar vein, 88 per cent affirmed that students are tempted to enter cultism in pursuit of social identity and acceptance ( $Mean=2.22$ ;  $SD=0.69$ ). Given that humans are social beings by nature, it is thought that the detrimental socialisation brought about by cultism may eventually have an adverse effect on an individual's well-being once they have been indoctrinated. The conclusion is in line with that of Girigiri (2013) and Coates (2011), who emphasise that the desire to fit in with a group is an inherent human behaviour. Cultists take advantage of this by positioning themselves as the alternative family and recruiting new members until the cult becomes their new family. Additionally, they contend that members of cults do so because some of them offer assurance and satisfy the victims' needs for companionship, purpose, and belonging. The *interview* results by patrons stated that:

*There are instances when students may join cults because their home churches are unwilling to meet their needs. In addition, cultic recruiters take advantage of individual circumstances such as sickness, bereavement, broken relationships, divorce, and separation to recruit new members, promising them a place to feel at home and have answers to their deep questions. They manipulate by giving a justification as to why all these things happen. They explain a way out of everything, and the vulnerable are promised support.*

Similar views were propounded by interviewed participants who cited that cult acts as a parallel to Christianity, but in darkness. Some cults, such as Young Life International, are purely based on fun. Bible study is done during hiking retreats and picnics. These activities warm up the members.

It has been widely attested that prevailing conditions, such as challenges at the family level, are capitalised on by charismatic leaders to indoctrinate new followers. In the current study, 88 per cent of the participants acknowledged that cultic affiliates take advantage of circumstances such as divorce and separation or broken relationships to recruit new members who are seeking care and support ( $Mean=3.22$ ;  $SD=0.64$ ). In support of this observation, 89 per cent asserted that cults target vulnerable students when they are emotionally exposed ( $Mean=3.24$ ;  $SD=0.69$ ). Considering cultic movements appear to offer instant approval, support, and community, those going through a crisis in life or feeling lonely and alienated are especially susceptible and become targets of these cultic groups. The point of view in this investigation is consistent with that of Kagema & Maina (2014), who maintained that New Charismatic Movements, a number of which are cultic, take advantage of circumstances like separation, divorce, single parenthood, and other disadvantageous situations to attempt to reunite the dispersed members of various families by creating fellowships that cater to specific individual needs. The *interviewed* patrons and FGD stated that:

*Cults seem to give members a favourable feeling and spiritual warmth. They give the students half-truths that are used to manipulate them. The truth would set one free. They show students that they belong and influence them to fit in. Cults guard and protect their followers from perceived difficulty from outside. They are promised that they shall be rich both here on earth and in heaven.*

Cultism is thought to use love bombing techniques to give its adherents false impressions of affection so they may feel confident and accepted. In this study, up to 79 per cent of the participants agreed that cults appear to give alienated individuals an alternate fellowship and sense of community ( $Mean=3.00$ ;  $SD=0.75$ ). In congruence with this observation, 73 per cent agreed that cults seem to give members a favourable feeling ( $Mean=2.89$ ;  $SD=0.84$ ). Therefore, it suggests that people from abusive or otherwise uncaring settings may easily be lured into joining a cult. The findings support those of Rotimi (2005) and Wallis (2003), who underscore that students join cults out of a sense of belonging and a desire to be socially linked. Additionally, they claim that some of the lonely members seem to find an alternative group in cults. This is due to the fact that cults often put up an attractive facade when they first start out; they distribute presents, provide scholarships, and generally seem to care about the people who join them.

The interviews with patrons revealed that in cults, there is no place or space for pain. The participants stated that:

*They believe that everything must be good, such as money, wealth, good health, and good feelings. All is good in their health, wealth, and academics. They preach prosperity. Their common belief gives them warmth and happiness.*

The drive to recruit bright and occasionally wealthy members drives some cultic groups to recruit celebrities and students from educational institutions to popularise their agenda and further their mission. This study established that 80 per cent affirmed that students enter cult groups to become famous or popular ( $Mean=3.05$ ;  $SD=0.80$ ). This observation was also buttressed by 60 per cent of those who asserted that students join cultism to realise electoral advantages during student union elections on campus, so that they can emerge victorious ( $Mean=2.70$ ;  $SD=0.85$ ). The implication of this finding is that some people are willing to get into any type of cult in the hopes of gaining social status and respect. This finding is consistent with that of Ogidefa (2016), who contends that some students join cults in order to identify with

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an affiliation that will make them influential and well-liked and help them achieve prestige and fame. These cults hold that joining causes a change in their social standing, including an ego boost and increased popularity. The *interviews* from the sampled participants indicated that:

*Cults get those seeking self-gratification, fame and popularity and seek to meet and address these needs in a network of like-minded people. Additionally, some students graduate but can be spotted within the campus, serving the purpose of recruitment and networking for cult groups.*

Getting social standing and popularity seems to drive individuals to join cults. In this study, 80 per cent of participants affirm the assertion that students enrol in cultism to transform their social status ( $Mean=3.04$ ;  $SD=0.76$ ). A similar view was observed by 67 per cent of those who attested that cults appear to give their followers spiritual warmth ( $Mean=2.80$ ;  $SD=0.95$ ). In another study, Kagema & Maina (2014) found that 78.4 per cent of their participants joined new charismatic movements NCMs in pursuit of identity, feelings of affection and belonging, acceptance of themselves and approbation. Individuals enter some social groups or any other organisation that accepts and accommodates them. The findings established that the Sense of Belonging mean index was 3.01 with a 0.46 standard deviation. This confirms the significance of this variable in impacting cultism. The interviews indicated that some students are tempted to enter cultism in pursuit of identity, love, and acceptance of themselves. They stated that:

*When questions like, "Why am I poor?" arise, and students begin to search for answers, cults seem to give them an answer. When trust in God is at its lowest, and they begin to ask, why did God allow this?" cults seem to offer quick solutions.*

The findings from SGBS leaders indicated that in the need to be unique, famous, or popular, students are attracted to cultic groups to stand out from the crowd. Some students may express their rebellion against authority by joining cultic groups in the hope that this may make them famous or popular. The student leaders noted that since humans are social beings, their inherent search for identity pushes them towards cults that may exude unity and communion. Students, therefore, mistakenly assume that joining cults will make them feel accepted. Isolated and alienated students may be pressured to join cultic groups to have an identity within the social setting of the group. They added that cults often offer new members a chance to express their talents when they feel like they are denied the opportunity in other mainstream denominations or churches.

They further opined that, as a means of attracting new members, cults offer students a cordial welcome and attention to the individual at the beginning. This aspect may not be present in the previous denominations that students may have been to; therefore, they easily join the cults. Cultic members take advantage of individual circumstances and promise solutions to no avail. Some individuals join cults in pursuit of identity and a sense of assurance and meaning. Some students join cultic groups in search of accommodation, acceptance, and understanding.

The need to belong or to associate with others makes students join cult movements, especially confused first-years who are trying to find their way. This is because cults do not brand themselves as a cult, so they cannot be identified easily. They tend to behave like normal Christians and cannot be easily identified. They study the prevailing culture and enhance association since they do not declare and are well-blended with the community.

The leaders further opined that cultic affiliates take advantage of individual circumstances, such as divorce and separation, to recruit new members. Students are tempted to enter cultism in pursuit of identity, love, and acceptance of themselves. The cults sometimes appear so warm and welcoming, loving and identity is noticed. Gifted students, such as singers and healers, who feel ostracised within the existing Christian groups, join some of the cultic groups to use their abilities and gifts more freely. Being given the chance denied elsewhere, such as to preach, sing, etcetera.

## Correlations Analysis

A statistical technique called correlation analysis is used in research to quantify an association between two variables and to evaluate how strongly two variables are linearly correlated (Mukaka, 2012). In contrast to a low correlation, which indicates a weak association between the two variables, a high correlation indicates a strong relationship. In this research, Pearson correlation was run at 0.05 alpha, 2-tailed, and the findings are presented in Table 3.

## Correlations for Sense of Belonging and Cultism

The most commonly used technique is the Pearson correlation coefficient, which calculates a linear correlation. When there is a positive or negative association, it is shown by the sign of the coefficient. The most typical approach to gauge a linear correlation is via the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ). The coefficient's sign indicates whether the association is positive or negative. The direction of the association is indicated by the sign of  $r$ . If  $r$  is positive, the tendency is for both variables to rise when one rises.

**Table 3. Correlations for Sense of Belonging and Cultism**

		Prevalence of Cultism
Sense of Belonging	Pearson Correlation	.638**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	193

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results recognised a statistically significant relationship between a sense of belonging and the prevalence of cultism ( $r=0.638^{**}$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This suggests that individuals may become caught in cultism in an effort to have a sense of belonging to a prominent organisation through acquiring power and prestige, affection, and acceptance. The results are consistent with those of Girigiri (2013), who highlights that people naturally want to fit in with a group. Cultists take advantage of this by presenting themselves as the alternative family and gradually enticing new members to join them until the cult becomes their new family. After that, the victims of these cults are confined or locked up and stop interacting with anyone outside of their immediate circle, in what Lalich (2004) refers to as the bounded choice.

## Regression Analysis

The model summary table displays the degree to which the model and the dependent variable of the research are correlated. By using regression, one may predict how a dependent variable will shift as it varies.

**Table 4: Model Summary**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.638 <sup>a</sup>	.407	.404	.36717
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), Sense of Belonging</i>				

The model established that a 40.4 per cent variation in the prevalence of cultism can be explained using the Sense of Belonging variable. The residual proportion was 60 per cent, which can be accounted for by other variables excluded from this model.

## ANOVA

The statistics used in the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) serve as a foundation for tests of significance and reveal the degrees of variability present in a regression model.

**Table 5: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.665	1	17.665	131.033	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	25.749	191	.135		
	Total	43.414	192			
<i>a. Dependent Variable: Prevalence of Cultism</i>						
<i>b. Predictors: (Constant), Sense of Belonging</i>						

According to the results, the model is significant at the 0.05 alpha level in predicting the prevalence of Cultism,  $R^2=0.404$ ,  $F(1,191) = 131.033$ ;  $P<0.05$ . This demonstrates that the independent variable (*Sense of Belonging*) has a significant contributory effect on the Prevalence of Cultism.

## Coefficients

The link between a predictor variable and the responder is described by regression coefficients, which are estimations of the unknown parameters of the population.

**Table 6: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.097	.175		6.269	.000
	Sense of Belonging	.657	.057	.638	11.447	.000
<i>a. Dependent Variable: Prevalence of Cultism</i>						

The regression analysis shows that Sense of Belonging ( $\beta=0.638$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) significantly affects the prevalence of cultism. This suggests that individuals who get brainwashed and who also crave socio-psychological support could be easily recruited to cultism.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** This study concluded that Christian Union students perceive a sense of belonging as a contributing factor to cultism in public universities in Kenya. It was perceived that students join cults out of an urge to belong because doing so appears to give them safety within a social group. Cults are perceived to prey on fragile learners who are emotionally exposed and are more likely to succumb to the temptation to join a cult in search of social identity, belonging, and acceptance. The study further revealed that cultists are believed to use love bombing techniques to give cult recruits a false sense of affection, security, association, and acceptance. The need to associate with others makes students join cult movements that take advantage of their circumstances, such as divorce and separation or broken relationships, to recruit new members seeking care and support. Cults were perceived as targeting vulnerable students when they were emotionally exposed. This study further established that cults appear to give alienated individuals an alternate fellowship and sense of community. Additionally, cults seem to give their members a favourable feeling of spiritual warmth, and students enrol in cultism in the hope of transforming their social status. Students enter cult groups to become famous or popular, especially for electoral advantages, during campus student union elections. The results showed that the mean index for a sense of belonging was 3.01, with a standard deviation of 0.46, demonstrating how important a sense of belonging is in influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya.

**Recommendations:** This study recommends strengthening and providing targeted student counselling services to university students to mitigate the influences and effects of cultism. Moreover, the Christian Unions should create a more homely and inclusive environment to embrace members and discourage them from switching to cults. There is a need for a university policy framework to check religious excesses, which may lead to radicalisation and loss of life. Furthermore, the development of the code of conduct for internal control for churches should be accepted and adopted as a means of mitigation against cultism, not only in public universities but in the church and society in general. The study recommends training of freshers during orientation on critical thinking and discernment to prevent cult recruitment. Moreover, the universities and Christian Unions should develop internal policy frameworks to mitigate cultism. The CU should create inclusive socio-psychological care groups and discipleship programs that can help attract and retain members and address members' needs during vulnerable moments of loneliness, transition, grief, pain, and loss.

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