



**THE INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA ON CHURCH GROWTH IN NIGERIA:
A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

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ABSTRACT

The growth of churches in Africa and especially in Nigeria has been observed globally as unprecedented. A development which has been noted as embracing both the spiritual and physical dimension over the past ten years. Though many reasons have been adduced for the above growth such as economical, political and urbanization, information on the place of mass media and church growth appears to be dearth. This work therefore is an attempt to examine the influence of mass media in promoting church growth in Nigeria. The work involved a descriptive survey design which made use of primary and secondary data. The results from the data collected were analyzed by percentage distribution and findings and relevant recommendations were then made.

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INTRODUCTION

Growth has been the unique feature of the Christian church since the day of Pentecost. This growth according the Biblical record embraces both numerical and geometric dimensions. According to Lukean account right from the Pentecost the church had been experiencing growth numerically and geometrically (Acts 2:41, 47). Merriam-Webster (29) in her work defined numerical growth as the process of increasing by addition whole geometric relate to growth by multiplication.

The African church according to Outreach magazine (2012) has been growing at a phenomenal rate, such that from 1900 to 2000 the church has grown from a population of 10million Christians to 360 millions. Moreover it states that it has been estimated that if the current trend of planting 1000 new churches every week in Africa continues by 2025 the population of the church will rise to 630 million. Further it posits that Nigeria shares a very high concentration of this new generation churches that are attracting thousands of worshippers on daily basis amongst which are the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper life Bible Church, Mountain of fire Ministries.

Many reasons have been adduced for the above development such as economic, political, social, ethnic and spiritual factors.

Nmah (2010:241) puts the above view pointedly when he states that gamut of factors such as socio-cultural configuration, the African initiative, the African religion concepts as well as the domination of charismatic and Pentecostalism approach as opposed to orthodoxy and institutionalized religions are responsible for the church growth in Africa.

Mass media according to Kur *et al* (2010:684) have undergone deregulation and liberalization since the 1990s that is unparalleled in the history of media industries. The result he notes is that in conjunction with the new communication technologies of satellite and cable there is an increasing global market place for the media product. From the foregoing the mass media is being harnessed to several general and specific needs of the human society. The literature is replete with various areas that the media is advancing the society positively. However there appears to be information gap on the perception of church people on the impact of mass media on church growth in Nigeria. Consequently this study is an inquiry of the perception of church members on the impact of mass media on church growth in Nigeria. The mass media has been categorized into seven developmental epochs by Wikipedia (2016) namely

- Print (books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines etc) from the late 15th Century
- Recordings (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CD and DVDs) from the late 19th century.

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- Cinema from about 1900
- Radio from about 1910
- Television from about 1950
- Internet from about 1990
- Mobile phones from about 2000

Furthermore it noted that while the internet and mobile phones are collectively referred to as digital platform of mass media the radio and television are called the broadcast media.

Various schools of thought have defined their views about the power of mass media in promoting the gospel. In his work Gurganus (1976) identified the various opinions of mass media users with regards to their relevance to church growth. The first group states that the media is modern-day miracle designed by God to advance the gospel throughout the world. The second group on the other hand posits that while the church has tremendous opportunity through the mass media it must however be wisely exploited if it is going to yield desired result. The third school of thought however states that mass media do not produce enough conversion or prospects to justify the huge capital resources expended on them. While it is not within the scope of this study to critique the above submissions mass media in modern times however remains a potent tool which can serve as both a destructive as well as a constructive force depending on the purpose, personality and people mix.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on perception theory which was propounded by Berelson and Steiner. The basic premise of the theory according to Iwokwagh (2006:48) is stated inter alia:

Audience members attitudes, beliefs, culture, values, needs and motivations have a way of affecting their perception of and their response to media messages. This situation orients them to (choose to receive only messages that would be beneficial or helpful to them) selectively expose themselves to only information that is of tangential importance to them.

The relevance of the above theory is that the public has information needs which mass media adapt to attract their audience. Baron (2004:245) captures the above view vividly when he states that perception theory relates to the process by which people identify or attend to messages that provide relevance to pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. The above theory is relevant to this study as people have tendency to be attracted or identify with churches that provides diverse mass media programmes that address their existential challenges and needs. McCombs (2004) corroborates the above view when he posits that perception theory which also is referred to as agenda setting theory could be used to “measure the impact of the mass media on the strength and direction of people’s disposition and behavioral opinions and subsequent behaviour”. It is an adaptation of gratification theory which according to Daramola (2012:87) states that people appropriate the mass media to the extent it gratify their desire or satisfy their needs. It is in the context of the increasing mass media product influence in modern society that this study seeks to investigate the perception of church members of Redeemed Christian Church of God on it’s impact on church growth.

Conceptual clarifications

Mass media

According to Marshal (1998) mass media is a means of communication such as print, radio or television. It relates to the various means such as television, radio, print of platform of information communication technology through which information reaches a given people. In this context mass media refers to vehicles of communication employed to promote peoples values, beliefs or culture.

Church

The word church is defined by a Greek word *ekklesia* meaning called out company or assembly. According to Engen (2000:194) as cited in Moreau (2000) it is used to indicate “the consciousness of the early Christians, who saw themselves as the continuation of what God began through the nation of Israel in the wilderness called together by the gospel of Christ to belong to God by the power of the Holy Spirit”. Besides he posits that the word church was used by the Lord Jesus Christ and New Testament writers metaphorically to mean some of the following: the body of Christ, temple, building, household, family, saints, New Israel, New creation and branches of the vine. (Acts 7:38, Ephesians 2:2 & Ephesians 5:25, 32, Heb 19:30-41). The word church as used in this context refers to the people of God identified as believers in Christ. In contemporary society the word church relates to various denominations and assembly of believers bound together by faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Bible.. This work therefore will limit itself to the study of how the members of Redeemed Christian Church of God denomination perceive the impact of mass media on church growth.

Growth

Growth according to free dictionary (2016) is defined as the process of development from a lower or simpler to a higher or more complex form: an increase, in number, value or strength; extension or expansion. It relates to a change over time which maybe quantitative or qualitative, positive or negative, material or spiritual. Church growth as used in this context relates to the geometric or numerical increase of church denomination in size, which may embrace functional, financial, geographical, political or spiritual.

Numerical growth of Christianity in Nigeria

Wikipedia (2016) has stated that Nigeria as the largest Christian population of any country in Africa with more than 85 million persons belonging to various denominations in the country. Moreover it submits that since the national census of 1953 the Nigerian church has increased from 21.4% in 1953 to 49.3% in 2010 population strength. The phenomenal growth of the Redeemed Christian Church of God from one parish in 1952 to more than 2000 parishes at the last count covering various nations and continents of the earth such as Africa, Europe and North and South America underscores the point that the above church has become a force to reckon as for as church growth is concerned both locally and internationally. This work would therefore seek to examine the opinions of the members of Redeemed Christian Church of God on the impact of mass media on the growth of the church in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The various forms of mass media has been described by Sywlka (2000:603ff) as the providential arrangement provided by God to foster world evangelization and have played a major role in modern missions. Consequently he submits that today most missions and national churches use literature, electronic media, gospel recordings, and film extensively for evangelism as well as education of believers.

According to Bolu (2011) more and more Nigerian youths are adopting modern information technology to find personal, social and religious information a development which he notes is being exploited by churches by improving their presence on the web. Ukah (2003) corroborates the above view when he states that the Redeemed Christian Church of God now operates global broadcast of her programmes through the internet. In his own contribution Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor as cited in IEC (2011) states that the internet has proved to be one of the most efficient and reliable means of driving communication globally with little or no restriction. Consequently he avers that for the churches to significantly influence the 21st century with great commission of our Lord Jesus she cannot afford to ignore the modern tools for influencing world opinion. This was equally the view of Bolu (2011) when he states that “the last two decades has seen the adoption of information communication technology (ICT) in contemporary church communications for growth”. The church in other words must exploit the mass media in other to remain relevant in the global market place of ideas.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive design was employed in this study. A descriptive survey design is concerned with finding, describing, collecting and interpreting data from a sample of people or item considered to be the representative of the entire group. The questionnaire is the instrument for gathering data for this study, the study population was drawn from seven parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Lagos. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. The above sampling technique was used to select the population because they were considered to be in a better position to provide information on the subject of the study. Two hundred and ten (210) respondents were randomly selected. 210 questionnaires were therefore distributed to the respondents but only 199 of them were returned. Materials were gathered through personal administration of questionnaire and through different literature review and articles. To ensure that the instrument for the study measured what it set out to measure, experts in social sciences scrutinized them in line with the objective of the study to ensure validity. This explains why Wimmer and Dominick (2006) assert that a valid measuring device measures what it supposed t measure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 Educational Qualification

Response	No	%
Ph.D	3	2%
M.Sc/MA	51	25%
B.Sc/BA	66	33%
WASC/FSLC	79	40%
Total	199	100%

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to their level of education. Out of the 199 respondents, 3 were

Ph.D holders; MSC/MA holders were 51; 66 respondents were Bachelors Degree holders while the remaining were WASC/FSLC holders.

Table 2 Sex Distribution of Respondents

Response	No	%
Male	87	44
Female	112	56
Total	199	100%

Out of 199 respondents, 87 were males while 112 were females. This shows that the female respondents were more than the male respondents.

Table 3 Location of Respondents

Response	No	%
Urban	120	60
Rural	79	40
Total	199	100%

From the table above 120 respondents were urban dwellers while 79 were rural dwellers.

Table 4 Question: I Listen /watch / interact with Christian programmes using the mass media

Option	No	%
Always	104	52.26
Sometimes	70	35.18
Never	25	12.56
Total	199	100%

Table 4 shows the response on the extent to which the respondents make use of the Chrisitan programmes through the mass media. 104 respondents representing 52, 25% affirm that they always use the mass media to watch/listen/interact with Christian programmes while 70 respondents representing 35.18% say they use it sometimes, 25 of them representing 12.56% never use it.

Table 5 Question: Does mass media platform (print, radio, television, internet etc) promote conversion to Christianity and development of Christian character

Option	No	%
Yes	179	89.95
No	20	10.05
Total	199	100%

From the above table 179 respondents representing 89.95% affirmed that mass media promotes the conversion of people to Christianity as well as helps in the development of their Christian character, while 20 respondents representing 10.05% answered no.

Table 6 Question: To which extent has the Christian programmes run through the mass media influenced your conversion and growth in the Christian faith.

Option	No	%
Very great extent	80	40.20
Great extent	70	35.18
Not at all	Nil	0
Low extent	34	17.09
Very low extent	15	7.53
Total	199	100%

The data in table 6 shows the extent to which the media influence conversion and growth through Christian programmes has 40.20% and 35.18% response as very great and great respectively. None of the respondents ticked not at all, while 17.09% and 7.53% ticked low and very low extent respectively.

Table 7 Question: People are attracted to Christian programmes run through the mass media because they provide solution to their needs

Option	No	%
Strongly agree	111	55.78
Agree	50	25.13
Undecided	Nil	0
Disagree	15	7.53
Strongly disagree	23	11.56
Total	199	100%

Table 7 shows response on whether meeting audience need through Christian religious programmes operated through mass media attracts them to Christianity. 111 respondents representing 56% of the respondents strongly agreed; 50(25.13%) agreed; none of the respondents ticked undecided; 15 respondents representing 7.53% of the respondents ticked disagreed while the remaining 23 respondents representing 11.56% of the respondent ticked strongly disagreed. Going by the number of the respondents that ticked strongly agreed and agreed (56% and 25% respectively), it then means that there is a relationship between addition and multiplication of church members through mass media Christian programmes that are solution-driven.

Table 7 Question: To which extent does the breaking of barriers (cultural, economic, social, physical, gender, language etc) by Christian programmes using the mass media influence Church growth numerically, spiritually and otherwise.

Option	No	%
Very Great extent	66	33.17
Great extent	45	22.61
Not at all	15	7.54
Low extent	40	20.10
Very low extent	33	16.58
Total	199	100%

Table 7 shows that the responses on the extent to which mass media Christian religion programmes breaks through various barriers influences church growth. Out of the 199 respondents that returned their copies of the questionnaire, 66 ticked very great extent; 45 respondents ticked great extent; 15 of the respondents ticked not at all, 40 respondents ticked low extent, while the remaining 33 respondents ticked very low extent.

Table 8 Question: I was converted while I was listening to/watching/interacting with Christian programmes on mass media

Option	No	%
Yes	129	64.82
No	70	35.18
Total	199	100%

64.82% of the respondents answered yes to the above question while 35.18% answer no.

Table 9 Question: I joined this present church after listening to/watching/interacting with their Christian programme in the mass media

Option	No	%
Yes	140	70.35
No	59	29.65
Total	199	100%

70.35% of the respondents affirmed that they joined the present church through the agencies of the mass media while 29.65% declined.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding shows that mass 52.26% and 35.18% use mass media always and sometimes respectively. The 12.56% responded that they never use it at all may be rural based dwellers and educationally challenged church members. This shows that location and educational background affects the use of mass media. What this means is that a population of 87.44% of the respondents make use of the mass media. The data therefore shows that mass media has great relevance in advancing church missions and growth.

Furthermore the findings show that there is a strong link between church growth and mass media. This is evident in table 6 where a total of 40.20% and 35.18% agreed that mass media influenced their conversion and growth in Christianity on a very great extent and to a great extent respectively. In other words the finding shows that of the 199 respondents only 49 stated that their conversion and growth in Christian faith were not influenced by the mass media. This may be due to their belonging to the rural dwellers as well as the economically challenged church membership who cannot afford the luxury of modern media technology.

The above findings is further corroborated by the additional data that shows that mass media specifically provided the platform through which they were converted to their present church. This is evident in table 5 where a total 89.95% of the respondent were on the affirmative while 10.05% were negative. Thus the implication of the finding is that mass media influences people to convert to Christianity as well grow in the faith. This explains perhaps why Asemah (2011a) avers that the media is one of the most powerful tool that organization must use in order to promote their products or services. Mass media in order words occupies a frontier place as a force for advancing goods and services to the reach of the public. In securing wider reach and patronage of the church and her missions the mass media therefore should be a handmaid of the contemporary church. This is necessary as advertising or show-casing of the church through the mass-media enables her to achieve the following goals:

- Convince the public that her product/services (the gospel) is indispensable
- Point out and create a need for the gospel amongst the reached and unreached public (believing and the unbelieving community)
- Solicit for acceptance of the gospel through joining the church as well as committing oneself to discipleship training.

More so, findings shows that people are attracted to mass media programme that provide solution to their needs. While it has been noted that human mind is complex and cannot be reduced to a mathematical concept Chavan (2010) however posits that human behaviour and culture are influenced by forces that provide relevance to one's interest beliefs and ego. This is evident in Table 7 where a total of 55.78% and 25.13% ticked strongly agree and agree respectively. The implication of the above data is that the church members were attracted to the media programme because they were providing information that were relevant to their existential needs and challenges. The 19.16% respondents consisting of 7.53% disagree and 11.56% strongly disagree may be a population of church member belonging to old generation of Christians

whose conversion may have been influenced much earlier from childhood before advent of modern information technology. It may equally be the member who though in the church has not experienced the transferring influence of the gospel of Christ. It can therefore be adduced that people's acceptance or rejection of the gospel derive from the factor of how the church makes it attractive. An attractive gospel that is served through the mass media must yield positive impact.

CONCLUSION

The above study has been able to draw attention to the increasing rate of church growth in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. It has equally attempted to establish that mass media has become a veritable tool in advancing the Christian church today. Based on the foregoing if we must fulfill the great commission to take the whole world for Christ mass media doubt becomes an unavoidable imperative.

Recommendations

- The church must encourage her members to adopt modern information technology for nurturing her church membership as well as winning new ones.
- Government should encourage churches to build godly citizens who invariably provides the moral fabric or foundation for socio-political and economic development by subsidizing the cost of Christian religious programmes in government owned media platforms.
- Church members who are wealthy should encourage their churches through mass media trust fund through which indigent churches in the rural areas can be given grant to use ICT platform in promoting the gospel
- Churches must encourage her members to fund mass media based Christian programmes.
- All churches should be involved in training their members, pastors, workers and leadership on the skills needed to use modern facilities or mediums of Mass Media.
- The Church should be involved in the ownership and establishment of the mediums of Mass Media, in order to reduce the cost.
- The church should partner with Media agencies to help in propagating the gospel.
- Churches should sponsor her members for professional training on information technology who on graduation should be hired by the church to run her media department.

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