



An Evaluation of the Communication Strategies by Pentecostal Churches for Evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State

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Abstract

This study evaluated the communication strategies employed by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The research adopted a survey design. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected from major Pentecostal churches within Makurdi. Data were collected through questionnaires and analysed descriptively using frequencies and simple percentages. Findings revealed that Pentecostal churches adopt a multifaceted communication approach involving dynamic preaching, community engagement, and the increasing use of digital platforms such as livestreaming, podcasting, bulk messaging, and social media. The study also highlighted a growing need to address public perceptions regarding the use of new media in Christian communication. It was concluded that while these strategies are effective in expanding outreach and engagement, greater emphasis should be placed on ethical communication, capacity building for church leaders, and collaboration among churches for broader societal impact. The study recommends strategic community involvement, continuous media training, and inter-church partnerships to further enhance the evangelical mission.

Keywords: Evangelism, Communication Strategies, Pentecostal Churches, Makurdi, Nigeria

Introduction

Communication serves as a fundamental tool in shaping societal behaviour, disseminating ideas, and facilitating development across various domains, including religion. It transcends the mere transmission of information, encompassing education, persuasion, and the mobilisation of people toward shared objectives (Oyesomi & Okorie, 2013). In contemporary society, effective communication is essential in fostering public understanding, influencing attitudes, and prompting actions that align with specific institutional or communal goals. Omosa (2000) emphasises the necessity of tailoring communication efforts to suit audience characteristics, geographical location, and cultural values, noting that effective messaging requires the strategic alignment of audience, message, and medium.

Within the context of religious practice, communication has evolved from traditional oral dissemination to more structured and technologically driven approaches. This shift is particularly evident among Pentecostal churches, which have adopted diverse communication strategies to advance their evangelical mandate. Evangelism, the process of spreading religious messages with the aim of conversion and spiritual edification remains a core tenet of Christian practice. Its historical foundations can be traced to early missionary activities, which relied on interpersonal communication and community engagement to promote religious teachings (Ekwueme, 2011).

These early efforts, despite facing significant opposition, laid the groundwork for the structured communication approaches observed in modern religious contexts.

Pentecostal churches, characterised by their vibrant worship styles, emphasis on personal spiritual experiences, and strong evangelical focus, have demonstrated considerable innovation in their communication strategies. These strategies often incorporate both traditional channels such as door-to-door outreach and public preaching and modern tools, including radio, television, and digital media platforms. The integration of these methods reflects an effort to reach diverse audiences within urban and peri-urban communities, including those in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The dynamic socio-cultural environment of Makurdi presents unique opportunities and challenges for religious communication. As a growing urban centre with a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous populations, effective evangelistic communication must account for varying levels of media access, literacy, and cultural orientation. In this context, the success of evangelistic efforts by Pentecostal churches hinges on the relevance, clarity, and adaptability of their communication strategies. This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate the communication strategies employed by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Pentecostal churches in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, have increasingly adopted a range of communication strategies to advance their evangelical mission. These strategies include the use of traditional media such as television (notably through tele-evangelism), radio, newspapers, and magazines, as well as digital platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and church websites. Many of these churches also rely on interpersonal communication, public crusades, posters, banners, and in-church announcements to disseminate their messages. These tools are used not only to attract new converts but also to retain members, share doctrinal teachings, and shape public opinion about the church and its activities. Despite these robust and multi-faceted communication efforts, there remains a paucity of empirical studies that document the specific tools being utilised, the extent of their usage, and their overall impact in promoting evangelism within the Makurdi context.

While previous studies on communication strategies have largely concentrated on corporate organisations and governmental agencies focusing on branding, public relations, and policy communication religious organisations, particularly Pentecostal churches, have not received equivalent scholarly attention. Their strategic use of communication to achieve spiritual, social, and community-oriented goals remains underexplored. This knowledge gap is significant, given the prominent role Pentecostal churches play in shaping religious belief systems, influencing moral conduct, and providing social support in urban centres like Makurdi. Therefore, this study is necessary to evaluate how Pentecostal churches utilise communication strategies for evangelism. The findings will not only contribute to communication scholarship but also offer practical insights for religious leaders seeking to enhance their outreach and spiritual impact.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To find out the communication strategies adopted by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis.
2. To determine the influence of the communication strategies used by Pentecostal churches on evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis.
3. To establish the challenges that hinder Pentecostal churches from utilising the communication strategies adopted for evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis.

Conceptual Clarifications Communication Strategies

Communication can be understood as the process through which individuals, groups, or organisations exchange and interpret information to establish connections and engage meaningfully within their social environments. Originating from the Latin term *communis*, meaning “to share” or “to make common,” the concept reflects the idea of mutual understanding and shared meaning. Related Latin expressions such as *communico* and *communicare* underscore the essence of this process as one grounded in the act of sharing (Kristina, 2020). In simple terms, strategy refers to a planned approach towards achieving a set objective. When applied to the field of communication, it entails the deliberate and goal-oriented design of messages and selection of appropriate channels to reach a target audience. For religious bodies such as Pentecostal churches, communication strategies serve as critical tools for evangelism and the realisation of broader organisational goals. These strategies encompass not only the creation of messages but also the thoughtful selection of media platforms to ensure the effective dissemination of information.

A communication strategy, therefore, involves a systematic and purposeful method used to transmit messages in a way that guarantees clarity, relevance, and resonance with the intended audience. It functions as a framework that guides how content is developed, when it is released, how it is delivered, and how it is received (Chirwa & Boikanyo, 2022). Organisations, including faith-based ones, rely on these strategies to manage both internal communication processes and external engagements. Effective strategies take into account variables such as message timing, language, content structure, and media channels used, all tailored to fit audience demographics and contextual factors. Considerations of cultural sensitivity and audience expectations help reduce communication breakdowns and foster deeper engagement (Hyland-Wood et al., 2022).

Servaes (2008) highlights that communication strategies often combine various tools and media including television, radio, print, social media, and face-to-face interaction to optimise message reach and effectiveness. This integration, often referred to as the promotional mix, enables organisations to segment their audiences and customise messages accordingly. Furthermore, as Shadrach et al. (2024) observe, effective communication strategies extend beyond mere information dissemination; they include persuasive engagement, interactive dialogue, and mechanisms for obtaining feedback to enhance mutual understanding and sustained interaction. Lee et al. (2021) explained that historically religious organizations benefit when there are positive communication strategies throughout all church outlets that explain the mission and purpose of the organization. Boggs and Fields (2010) explained that churches that build communication strategies could grow in strength, membership growth, and in “higher measures of church performance” (p. 305).

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal churches are a category of Christian denominations known for their emphasis on the direct experience of the Holy Spirit as a vital aspect of a believer’s faith. Rooted in the early 20th-century Pentecostal revival, particularly the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism draws its name and theological identity from the biblical event of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2 (Anderson, 2013). This event is marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, resulting in speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other spiritual manifestations. Pentecostal churches believe in the continuation of these gifts, commonly referred to as “charismatic gifts,” including healing, miracles, prophecy, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) (Okoroafor, & Okereke, 2019). The movement cuts across denominational boundaries and has

grown rapidly across the globe, especially in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, due to its vibrant worship style, strong evangelistic focus, and appeal to personal spiritual experience.

In Nigeria, the first phase of Pentecostalism is made up of churches called Aladura from the 1920s to the 1960s. The second phase is the foreign Pentecostal churches also called classical Pentecostal churches from the 1930s to the 1950s. The third phase is the indigenous Pentecostal churches from the 1950s to the 1960s such as the Gospel Faith Missions and the Redeemed Christian Church of God in its old mold before its transformation in the 1980s. There are the (independent) Charismatic ministries and churches promoted by college graduates and educated young adults from the 1970s to the present (Ojo, 2006; Ukah, 2008).

Today, Pentecostalism has become a prominent feature of the religious landscape in Nigeria and most Pentecostal churches tend to operate as highly independent, self-governing institutions, often led by charismatic pastors or founders who play a central role in shaping both doctrine and practice. In addition to their spiritual roles, many of these churches engage in social, educational, and media-based initiatives, using contemporary communication strategies to extend their influence and promote their evangelistic mission in urban and rural areas alike.

Evangelism

Evangelism refers to the act of proclaiming or spreading the Christian gospel with the intention of converting individuals to the Christian faith. The term is derived from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good news” or “gospel,” and it reflects the central Christian message concerning salvation through Jesus Christ (Wafula, et al 2021). According to Miller (1993, p. 43), the English word evangelization is derived from the Greek root “evangel” which appears in the Bible as a verb and as a noun. The word is composed of two parts. The first part and root “angel” refers to a message, a messenger or the activity of delivering a message. The second part and prefix *ev* denotes the quality of goodness and identifies the nature of the message and the messenger. Target (1968, p. 28) in also share this view. Hacking (1987, p. 84) defines it as “the presentation of the whole church to the whole world. Evangelism is deeply rooted in the Great Commission, where Jesus commanded his disciples in Matthew 28:19–20 to “go and make disciples of all nations.” It involves various activities aimed at reaching out to non-believers or uncommitted Christians through preaching, personal testimony, teaching, media engagement, and community outreach (Mark 16:15-16) (Englo, 2004). Evangelism may take different forms depending on the context ranging from street preaching, door-to-door witnessing, and crusades to more modern approaches such as social media campaigns, television broadcasts, and digital content dissemination (Okoroafor, & Okereke, 2019).

Review of Related Empirical Studies

The reviewed empirical studies reveal varied, context-specific, and innovative communication strategies deployed by Christian denominations to enhance evangelisation. Marotse (2025), adopting a descriptive research design grounded in Nida’s translation theory, explored the communication strategies of sermon interpreters in Pentecostal churches in Kenya. Through audio-video recordings, interviews, and structured observations, Marotse identified techniques such as lexical addition, intonation, repetition, and mimicry as effective tools in sermon delivery. The study significantly shows how contextual and linguistic considerations shape message reception and clarity, highlighting the pivotal role of interpreters in religious discourse within multilingual congregations.

In contrast, Obayi and Onyebuchi (2013) focused on grassroots evangelism through public relations principles. Using a survey method with 100 respondents, the study found that many priests utilised PR tools like community engagement and relationship-building strategies to

conduct effective outreach. Similarly, Onwubiko (2022) employed survey research with stratified sampling across five southeastern Nigerian states to evaluate the relationship between evangelism marketing and church growth. Despite revealing a strong positive correlation, Onwubiko reported that church leaders had not significantly adopted evangelism marketing approaches. These two studies collectively underscore the potential of structured, secular communication and marketing methods public relations and evangelism marketing as effective tools for church growth and evangelisation when integrated with spiritual messaging.

Also, Jenkins (2023) used phenomenological and ethnographic methods to observe communication styles in ten flourishing American churches, identifying five key themes: inclusion, music, aesthetics, spiritual development, and benediction. These themes showcase how experiential and emotionally resonant communication cultivates community and spiritual growth. Afolabi and Oderinde (2024), on the other hand, examined how Nigerian Pentecostal churches use social media to engage youth. Their analysis revealed that online platforms are not only evangelistic tools but also serve as avenues for religious consumerism, targeting the tech-savvy youth. Both studies affirm the strategic advantage of adapting contemporary media and immersive communication styles in sustaining church engagement and expansion.

Further bridging digital innovation with socio-religious sensitivity, a number of the studies exist that examined the use of artificial intelligence, social media, and institutional media structures respectively. Specifically, Afunugo and Molokwu (2024), using phenomenological and culture-centred analysis, revealed that AI can enhanced evangelism but cautioned against over-reliance on AI, advocating for a balance between technological efficiency and human connection. Nsereka and Nwanze (2021) affirmed the effectiveness of online evangelism for member retention and outreach but highlighted cost barriers. Danaan (2016), in the other hand analysed Catholic and Pentecostal media strategies in Jos, argued that while the Catholic Church is advancing in media-aided mission work, its infrastructure still requires expansion. Collectively, these studies converge on the idea that while technology and media enhance evangelism's reach and engagement, contextual sensitivity, ethical awareness, and infrastructural capacity remain critical for sustainable religious communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. Often described as a functionalist approach, the theory shifts attention from the traditional view of media as having direct effects on passive audiences to a more audience-centred perspective (Sichach, 2024). It focuses on the social and psychological origins of audience needs, which shape their expectations of media content and influence their patterns of media usage. These patterns result in various forms of need gratification, with consequences that may be both intended and unintended. At its core, the theory asks: What do people do with media? This highlights that audiences are active participants in the communication process (Katz, 1959).

The theory posits that individuals actively select and engage with media based on the specific gratifications they seek, such as information, entertainment, personal identity, integration, or social interaction. Thus, media consumers are not passive recipients but deliberate users who choose content that aligns with their personal needs. In the context of this study, the theory supports the idea that members and prospective converts in Pentecostal churches in Makurdi are not merely influenced by evangelistic messages but are active seekers of spiritually and emotionally fulfilling content particularly content that resonates with their values, beliefs, and immediate life concerns. Moreover, the theory aligns with the strategic communication efforts of Pentecostal churches,

which utilise various media such as social media, public relations tools, live streaming, and multimedia sermons to attract, retain, and engage audiences. By recognising that church audiences consume content intentionally to satisfy particular spiritual, emotional, or informational needs, the theory provides a useful framework for evaluating how well these communication strategies are meeting those expectations.

Research Methodology

The research design employed for this study was the survey method. This method is particularly suited for examining and assessing both the demographic and psychographic characteristics of a population. Survey research typically involves the use of interviews, observations, questionnaires, and other tools to gather relevant data. The population of this study comprised members of four major Pentecostal churches in Makurdi Metropolis: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), The Lord's Chosen Charismatic Renewal Ministries, Living Faith Church, and Dunamis International Gospel Centre. These churches were selected based on their large congregational size and their widespread presence across Makurdi, the Benue State capital. According to unpublished headcount data by ushers and greeters, the estimated total population of members across the four churches was over 25,345. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, which yielded a sample of 400 respondents. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. The first stage involved identifying the four selected Pentecostal churches within Makurdi metropolis. The second stage entailed selecting respondents from mega parishes of each church using volunteer and convenience sampling techniques. A total of 392 respondents were drawn from the churches based on their level of engagement with church activities, websites, and live-streamed content. The distribution was as follows: RCCG had 109 respondents; The Lord's Chosen, 63; Living Faith Church, 138; and Dunamis International Gospel Centre, 84. These techniques ensured that only informed and willing participants were included in the sample. The primary instruments for data collection were questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics particularly frequency and simple percentages.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Communication strategies used by the Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Holding religious crusades for healing and deliverance.	79	20.5
Using mass media, especially radio, to preach the gospel with Bible passages for listeners to meditate on and build their faith.	51	13.1
Organising events to share the word of God and distribute gift items such as cash and food to the displaced, the vulnerable, and the sick.	162	41.9
Persuading people from other denominations to join in praise through miracles and signs-and-wonders campaigns.	66	17.1
All of the above.	28	7.2
Total	386	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table presented of data on the communication strategies used by the Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis. Data contained on the table revealed that, 79 (20.5%) of the sampled respondents identified the strategy of holding religious crusades for healing for and delivering people, 51 (13.5%) of them identified the use of the mass media especially the radio to preach the gospel with bible chapters for the listeners to meditate on to build the faith, 162 (41.9%) of them identified organizing events to share the word of God and gift items such as cash and food to the displaced, the vulnerable and the sick, 66 (17.1%) of the sampled

respondents identified persuading people from other denominations to join in the praises through miracles and signs of wonders campaigns while 28 (7.2%) of the sampled respondents agreed with all of the above. Based on data presented on this table, it is evident that, the commonest strategy adopted by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis is oorganizing events to share the word of God and gift items such as cash and food to the displaced, the vulnerable and the sick.

Table 2: Influence of the communication strategies used by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Use of the media for evangelism on radio and television encourages people with spiritual problems to attend services and programmes in Pentecostal churches.	111	28.7
Organisation of signs and wonders crusades by General Overseers and senior/visiting pastors draws people's attention to God, making them believe in His reality.	157	40.8
With the use of media in spreading the gospel, involvement in fetish practices has reduced as such practices are remodelled through constant preaching.	58	15
There is greater fear of God and better treatment of humanity, as people now see the need to serve fellow humans justly and righteously against evil.	46	11.9
All of the above.	14	3.6
Total	386	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above presented data on the influence of the communication strategies used by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis, data contained on the table showed that, 111 (28.7%) of the sampled respondents identified use of the media for evangelism on radio and television encourages people with spiritual problems to attend services and programmes in Pentecostal churches, 157 (40.8%) of the sampled respondents identified organization of signs and wonders crusades by the General Overseers and senior/visiting pastors draws people's presence to God making them believe his realness, 58 (15%) of the sampled respondents revealed that, with the use of the media in the spread of the gospel, people's involvement in fetish practices have been reduced hence their fetish is remodeled through constant preaching about repentance and heaven, 49 (11.9%) of the respondents stressed that, there is more fear of God and treatment of humanity as people have seen the need to serve human in just and right against evil while 14 (3.6%) of the sampled respondents agreed with all the options above as the influences which the adopted strategies have had on evangelism among the people of Makurdi metropolis.

Table 3: Media of Communication Used by Pentecostal Churches for Evangelism in Makurdi Metropolis

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Use of radio to broadcast religious messages aimed at transforming people's relationship with their faith and their Creator.	126	32.6
Use of television for broadcasting live Sunday sermons.	87	22.5
Use of online media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook for mass distribution of religious content.	61	15.8
Distribution of recorded gospel messages for audience engagement through radio, television, books, and church websites.	88	22.8
All of the above.	24	6.3
Total	386	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above presented data on the media of communication used by the Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis. Information gathered on the table revealed that, 126 (36.2%) of the sampled respondents identified use of radio in the broadcast of religious messages for the change in people's tiers with their faith and their creator, 87 (22.5%) of the respondents identified Use of television for the broadcasting of Sunday live sermons, 61 (15.8%) of the sampled respondents opined that the use of online media platforms like YouTube and Facebook for mass distribution of religious contents, 88 (22.5%) of them said the distribution of recorded gospel messages for viewer/listenership through radio/television, book and churches websites while 24 (6.3%) of them agreed with all of the above.

Discussion of findings

The first major finding of this study revealed that Pentecostal churches in Makurdi metropolis employ diverse communication strategies for evangelism. These include the organisation of religious crusades for healing and deliverance, the use of radio broadcasts to share Bible-based messages, community outreach through the distribution of food and cash to vulnerable groups, and persuasive campaigns featuring miracles and signs to attract converts from other denominations. These findings resonate with earlier research, such as Onwubiko (2022) and Obayi and Onyebuchi (2013), which underscored the role of grassroots engagement, relationship-building, and marketing techniques in church growth. In light of Uses and Gratifications Theory, these strategies reflect the churches' understanding of their audience's active role in selecting content and experiences that meet emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. The integration of humanitarian support with religious messaging also aligns with Jenkins' (2023) emphasis on experiential and emotionally resonant communication that fosters inclusion and connection within religious communities.

The second key finding indicated that the communication strategies adopted by these churches have tangible influences on the spiritual and social lives of the audience. Notably, signs-and-wonders crusades were found to strengthen belief in God, while media-based evangelism was said to encourage attendance at church events, particularly among those facing spiritual or emotional challenges. Other perceived impacts include a decline in fetish practices due to the influence of continuous preaching and a heightened moral consciousness among members. These observations support findings by Afunugo and Molokwu (2024), who noted that modern tools like artificial intelligence can reshape spiritual consciousness when used in contextually sensitive ways. Additionally, this reflects the Uses and Gratifications principle that audiences actively seek out media content that affirms their beliefs and promotes behavioural change. The evidence also aligns with the work of Afolabi and Oderinde (2024), who showed that digital platforms, when appropriately utilised, create strong spiritual and behavioural engagement among young audiences.

A third significant finding uncovered challenges that hinder the optimal use of communication strategies by Pentecostal churches in Makurdi. These include limited media reach in rural areas due to poor broadcast signals, public skepticism about humanitarian gestures being a form of manipulation, and the perception of exclusivity when some churches present themselves as the only true path to salvation. These issues reflect the infrastructural and ethical concerns raised by Nsereka and Nwanze (2021) and Danaan (2016), who both highlighted the need for improved media infrastructure and sensitivity to pluralistic religious contexts. From a Uses and Gratifications standpoint, these challenges reveal a potential disconnect between the intended message and audience reception. When media strategies fail to align with the genuine needs and expectations of the audience whether due to technical barriers, cultural insensitivity, or ethical missteps they fall short in delivering the expected gratification, thereby weakening their effectiveness. Therefore,

for evangelistic communication to be impactful and sustainable, it must not only be technologically sound but also ethically grounded and audience-aware.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the communication strategies adopted by Pentecostal churches for evangelism in Makurdi metropolis are multifaceted and strategically designed. These strategies combine dynamic preaching, targeted community engagement, and the effective use of digital media platforms. For these churches to foster a deeper connection with their audiences, there is a pressing need to prioritise direct, emotive, and audience-centred communication. Such approaches enhance the sense of belonging among followers and create urgency around the evangelical mission, ultimately advancing both the spiritual and social objectives of the church. Furthermore, the integration of modern communication technologies—such as podcasting, livestreaming, bulk messaging, and interactive online platforms—has significantly complemented traditional evangelistic methods. These tools enhance accessibility, broaden outreach, and facilitate real-time pastoral communication, especially when deployed ethically and purposefully. A notable shift in perception is also required regarding the use of new media in Christian communication, as these digital tools are increasingly being embraced by Pentecostal churches to enrich pastoral care, manage church events, and sustain spiritual engagement with members beyond physical boundaries.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Pentecostal churches should prioritise outreach that goes beyond the church environment by actively participating in local community events, charitable activities, and social development projects. This approach not only strengthens public trust but also enhances the church's relevance in everyday social contexts, encouraging more individuals to embrace the Christian faith.
2. Churches should initiate regular capacity-building programmes for pastors, media teams, and other leaders to improve their communication competence. This will ensure the message of evangelism is conveyed with clarity, relevance, and contextual sensitivity, thereby increasing its impact.
3. Under the platform of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), churches should work collaboratively with member churches and relevant faith-based organisations. This will help to harmonise evangelistic efforts, reduce duplication, and amplify the collective impact of their outreach programmes in addressing community challenges.
4. Pentecostal churches should develop and uphold clear ethical guidelines for all forms of communication. This will help maintain transparency, uphold the integrity of the gospel message, and counter any perception of manipulation or ulterior motives in their evangelistic practices.

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