

MARKETING PRACTICES OF MEGA CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study sought to unveil the marketing practices of megachurches in Nigeria. The paper in particular, seeks to ascertain the influence of Pastors' message, worship centers ambience, church promotion activities and Pastors' people management style on church attendance. This study adopts a quantitative research design. The study population consist of the entire Pentecostal church members in Yenegoa metropolis, Bayelsa state. Members of Living Faith Church and Salvation Ministries Yenegoa were the accessible population. Three hundred copies of the research instrument were administered while 230 copies were retrieved. Using SPSS 26, the collated data were analyzed with descriptive statistics while the formulated hypotheses were tested with one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression at 5% level of significance. The study reveals that all the drivers of church attendance has positive and significant influence on church attendance. Moving forward, the paper recommends among others that churches discourage the use of doubtful and deceitful testimonies to attract members. The paper concludes that church deployment of marketing principles would enable it achieve its growth objective.

Keywords: Church Marketing, Service Marketing, Social Marketing, Mega Churches, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Literature recognize humans as spiritual beings. As a result of man's spirituality, humans are always in search of connection with his maker. This innate quest fuels man's desire for spiritual products. Consequent upon the growing army of seekers for spiritual connections, several worship centers now abound. In the light of this high demand and resultant competition, it becomes expedient for the leaders of worship centers to deploy strategies that could enable it attract more attendees. One of such strategy is the engagement of marketing. Newman and Benchener (2008) assert that the primary purpose of churches embrace of marketing is increase in attendance. Sad enough, the erosion of marketing principles into religion, several scholars has rebuked (Ayozie & Mohammed, 2021). These scholars' objection is premised on the sacredness of religion. It is their belief that the wholesome adoption of marketing principles would diminish the essence of religion. Quite on the contrary, several other scholars aver that the deployment of marketing techniques have permeated several other non-business areas that include religion.

Interestingly, religion sociologists recently observe the emergence and increasing expansion of mega churches in urban and semi-urban centers. Despite the emergence of these mega churches

less is known about their operational culture and capabilities for achieving local and international growth objectives. In quest for more knowledge, Odia and Osagie (2014) from a marketing perspective, explore the issues implicated in operationalizing marketing in churches. In the same vein, Adebayo (2015) examines the roles marketing play in the fulfillment of the growth objectives of churches in KwaZulu Natal South Africa. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are paucity of research on the application of marketing tenets in the operations of mega churches in Nigeria. This is the gap in literature this paper seeks to fill.

Consequently, this paper seeks to ascertain the place of pastors' message in influencing church attendance. This study in addition, evaluates the effect of worship centers' ambience, explore church promotion activities and examine pastors' people management style in driving church attendance.

Church Marketing.

The construct church marketing connotes the deployment of social marketing principles to church operations. This suggests that social marketing tenets serve as the fulcrum on which church marketing revolves. According to Fjeldsoe, Marshall and Miller (2009), social marketing is a weapon designed to modify behavior. The scholars affirm that the intent of this modified behavior culminates in personal, social and economic wellbeing. Literature is unanimous in locating church marketing tenets within social marketing milieu. In 2009, Kuzma, Kuzma and Kuzma observes that modern day churches have embraced the application of marketing tenets in its operation. The scholars believe this practice is hinged on the fact that marketing fosters the re-conceptualization of religion. With marketing, religious organizations can aspire to build unique 'brands'. This aspiration is attainable through diversified offerings. As a matter of fact, experience has shown that marketing possesses the capacity that enable religious organizations grow. In simple term, church marketing implies the deployment of the word of God to convert individuals and groups into becoming a member of God's kingdom. The truth is that the continuous consumption of spiritual goods helps to strengthen believers' faith to remain in Christ.

Interestingly, Adebayo (2015) study of churches found that many evangelical and Pentecostal churches have shown tendencies of becoming mega churches. Experience has shown that mega churches quest to become global brand necessitates the embrace of marketing strategies. Undoubtedly, technology is reported to have profound impact on church marketing. With advancement in technology, church presence in a physical facility is becoming a rarity. Present day realities reveal that there are several churches on the internet as there are physical churches. In the

light of this reality, the 21st Century church members are confronted with the opportunities to make choices from wide sources.

Church Marketing: As service oriented.

Literature recognize that the theory underpinning church marketing is largely derived from social marketing. As common with social marketing, church marketing practices are designed to enhance the behavior as well as improve the well-being of the individual and the society. Operationally, church marketing activities are generally categorized as service oriented. The distinguishing features of services make it unique to market. This uniqueness tends to make marketing of services relatively more difficult. Just like every other organization, churches often contend with competition for members. This contention has led mega churches to embrace marketing of its services. Just as the traditional marketing mix facilitate the marketing of tangible goods, the additional 3Ps (Process, People and Physical evidence) of marketing has been found useful in the marketing of services.

Specifically, the service components of church marketing are conceptualized in among other forms as Pastors' messages, the mechanisms of service delivery, and the environment in which the services are delivered. As a matter of fact, service-oriented approach to marketing is hinged on the processes of managing relationships. Interestingly, services marketing mix components can as well be used to address these peculiarities (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

Dimensions of Service oriented Marketing

Church Messages

Churches like every other organization offer products that serve as solutions to the needs of its market target. Churches are reputed to offer products that are intangible and spiritual in nature. Church messages are often offered to members of the congregations and the general public for consumption. These messages are tailored to specifically meet the spiritual desires of the church community. Specifically, Pillay (2017) prescribe that church products are expected to be designed and package in conformity with Biblical injunctions. As a matter of fact, the core teachings of Jesus Christ should form the central themes of pastors' messages. In order to ensure congregation ultimate satisfaction, pastors of churches should be adequately trained in Theology and Homiletics (Nkonge,2011), It is equally of great importance that pastors' messages take into consideration church location and prevailing needs of the host community. Due to the intangible nature of church messages, proactive pastors have attempted to make the product tangible. Church products "tangibilization" take

the form of books, audio tapes, video tapes, Compact Disks and other associated forms. This form of product variation enhances easy product distribution while reaching a wider target audience.

Several empirical studies attest to the relevance of church messages in facilitating the propagation of Christ's message and ultimately resulting in the growth of the church. Prominent among such studies are Muriithi, *et al* (2022) study of The Anglican Church Kenya. The authors employed a mixed method research design that consist of questionnaire administration and schedule Interview. Data were collected from 308 members of the church and 28 leaders participated in the interview. The collected data were analyzed with SPSS. The study found that church products were properly designed and package. Similarly, Adebayo (2015) studied church deployment of marketing tactics in the fulfillment of its mandate in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The scholar adopted a qualitative research design method. Data were collected by interviewing church members and professionals in church administration. The study report church marketing tactics has a strong influence on the fulfillment of its' mandate.

From the foregoing, this paper hypothesizes that,

H₀₁: Pastors' message does not significantly influence church attendance.

Worship Centers' Ambience

A church worship center refers to the physical building and its environment. In fact, worship centers serve as a place where a congregant can connect with divinity. Simply put, physical environment in service marketing is often referred to as a location where customers establish a connection with a service. Moreover, the biblical concept of a place of worship closely approximates marketplace. To many, church is a place of encounter. Indeed, the church serves as a connecting point between God and spiritual shoppers. It is altruism that worship centers currently exist in brick and mortar forms. Kotler and Keller (2009) affirm that market place can either be physical or digital in nature. This suggests that churches can as well exist in digital space. Furthermore, Kar (2010) affirms that place has influence on buyer's satisfaction. The implication is that the closer a place is to a consumer, the higher the probability of sales. Ewanlen (2022) reports that convenience greatly influences patronage. Specifically, Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2013) identified convenience as a variable that influence the choice of a service. Consequently, convenience always serve as a crucial factor that influence distribution decisions.

Of great importance to modern day congregants is the friendliness of worship centers' environment. This friendliness is often depicted by the word, warmth, and worship associated with worship centers. Interestingly, present day realities indicate that the aesthetics of a church building to

a large extent influences congregant. The same is true of the extent of ICT deployment, sound management facilities, availability car parking spaces as well as the performance of the church choirs among others things. Furthermore, experience has also shown that persons are attracted to churches as a result of the pull effect of significant others as well as the guarantee of adequate security. Contingent upon the foregoing, this paper hypothesizes that,

H₀₂: Worship centers ambience has no significant effect on church attendance.

Promotion Activities

Literature recognize promotion as a veritable tool that corporations embrace to connect with the public. This connection help to create awareness of firms' activities. Experience has shown that promotion has found practical relevance in profit and not-for-profit organizations. Interestingly, present day churches are reputed for the embrace of promotion activities. Scholars are of the opinion that the biblical injunction "go into the world and preach the gospel" (Matt 28: 18) closely resonates with church promotion.

Bankole and Arowomole (2000) identified acquisition and retention as common forms of church promotion strategies. The scholars conceive acquisition communication as a form of church promotion mechanism solely targeted at non-church members. Within the church context, this form of promotion is commonly regarded as general evangelism. Here, potential church members are persuaded to embrace the teachings and accept the personality of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, church retention promotion strategy is aimed at already established church members. The promotion activities here are with the intent of strengthening the faith of members of the church. Operationally, a church promotional strategy is considered effective once it possesses the capacity to positively influence and alter members behavior. The truth of the matter is that mega churches often deploy promotion sub-mixes that are always result oriented. This connection-oriented activity creates the required awareness in the target audience. Typical among the promotion mixes available to churches are personal evangelism, crusades, conventions, conferences, special events, billboards and handbills. Hitherto, television was the most popular medium for promoting church activities, with the advent of social media, it is now common to view church programs on Youtube and other social media channels. Several empirical studies abound in literature that attest to the influence of church promotion activities on its attendance. Specifically, Opara (2009) study promotion strategies and church growth in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire randomly administered on 50 senior pastors. Chi square statistical tool was employed to analyze the collated data. The study found that Pentecostal churches adoption of promotion strategies significantly contribute to church

growth. In the same vein, Appiah, Dwomoh, and Kyire (2013) study the influence of church marketing on its attendance in Ghana. Quantitative data were gathered from the analysis of a randomly-drawn sample size of 132 that comprise of 12 pastors, and 120 members from six charismatic churches. The study findings reveal positive relationship exist between church promotion and church attendance.

Similarly, Duke (2014) study Living faith church in Calabar. With the aid of 180 questionnaires administered, report shows that about 80% of the respondents were comfortable with the church use of paid advertisement as a vehicle to attract new members. The scholar also reports that about 68% of the respondents were equally satisfied with the church use of large billboards for church advertisement. The foregoing suggests that a greater number of church members approves of their church becoming visible to non-members through the engagement of large billboards.

From the foregoing, this paper hypothesizes that,

H₀₃: Church promotion activities has no significant influence in driving church attendance.

Pastors' People Management Style

Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2012) assert that people management practice has the capacity to influence customers' decisions to purchase a service. Similarly, Wirtz, Chew and Lovelock (2012) identified the importance of people management in new product development. In fact, scholars lament management neglect of people in the development of new products but would rather play more emphasis on the traditional marketing variables. Moreover, several other scholars affirm that people management variable significantly impact on customer's satisfaction and repurchase decisions (Wilson, *et al*, 2012). Despite advances in technology, it is altruism that interactions between customers and service personnel drive service delivery. The foregoing implies interpersonal interactions overtly and covertly drives service encounter. Moreover, due to the inseparability of production from service consumption, service firms now depend heavily on the ability of contact employees to deliver services.

The pastor of a church is its leader. He has oversight functions over the people and church properties. Interestingly, Bass and Riggio (2006) see a leader as an individual that influence others to accomplish a common objective. The people management style of a church can be deduced from the pastors' leadership style and personal characteristics. It is a common expectation that the prevailing church leadership style as well as the resident pastor's personal characteristics could influence church attendance. More importantly, Harris (2002) asserts that pastors' stewardship to God has a significant influence on a pastor's leadership behavior. Furthermore, Hanson (2020) believes that pastor's

ultimate commitment to God enable their transformational or transactional leadership styles influence church attendance. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit is the major influencer, who to a large extent determines message acceptability. Regrettably, Keita (2019) lament that the recent decline in church membership is largely attributable to lack of leadership in church. In fact, this leadership deficiency adversely hinders church growth.

Literature is replete with contradictory findings on pastors' leadership styles influence on church attendance. Luckel (2013) study of pastoral leadership styles of Baptist churches in America reports that leadership styles do not necessarily connote pastoral leadership effectiveness and ultimately church attendance. Similarly, Hanson (2020) America study of evangelical Lutheran church report that Pastor's leadership style has no significant influence on church attendance.

Arising from these contradictory findings, this paper hypothesizes that,

H₀₄: Pastors' people management style has no significant implication on church attendance.

METHODS

This study employs a survey research methodology. This method enables researchers collect quantitative data with the aid of questionnaire. The population of study are the entire Pentecostal church members in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa state. The target population are members of the churches whose weekly Sunday service attendance exceed two thousand. Literature recognizes such assemblies as mega churches. For the purpose of this study, members of Living Faith Church and Salvation Ministries located in Yenegoa metropolis were considered as the accessible population of study. Three hundred members from Living Faith church and Salvation Ministries were conveniently selected as the sample size. The survey questionnaire consists of 2 sections. The study adopted and modified Ewanlen (2022) instrument to measure worship center ambience and Carsello, (2022) to measure pastor's people management style. The draft questionnaire was tested with members of Redeemed Christian Church of Nigeria in Yenegoa. After the pilot test, modifications were made to the final questionnaire before administration. The modified research instrument using the split- half method to test the instrument reliability. The result shows that the instrument was statistically reliable. Using a 7-point Likert-type of scale in the form of 1. Strongly Disagree (SD) 2. Some What Disagree (SWD), 3. Disagree (DA) 4. Undecided (U) 5. Some What Agree (SWA) 6. Agree(A) and 7. Strongly Agree (SA) respondents were expected to state the extent to which they agree or otherwise with the sentences that relate to the subject matters. The wait and get method were employed in the questionnaire administration. From the survey, 230 copies of questionnaire were retrieved from the respondents and found useful. This represents about 77% return rate. The collected data were

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analyzed with mean and standard deviation. With the aid of SPSS version 26, the formulated hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance. In particular, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression was employed to ascertain the influence of pastors' message, worship centers' ambience, church promotion activities and pastors' people management styles on church attendance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Values of Church Attendance and its Drivers.

Variables	Mean	Standard Dev.	1	2	3	4	5
Church Attendance	3.816	.439	1				
Pastors Message	3.872	.441	.816**	1			
Worship Cent. Ambience	3.917	.493	.632**	.569**	1		
Church Prom. Activities	3.108	.574	.593**	.562**	.497**	1	
Pastors' Mgmt Style	3.912	.601	.602**	.575**	.478**	.394**	1

Source: SPSS 26.

On the basis of pull effect, Table 1 reveals that respondents consider worship centers ambience the most important (3.917). Closely following is pastors' people management style (3.912). Church promotion activities respondents consider as the least (3.108). A cursory look at the result reveals that the study standard deviation varies from .493 to .601. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation analysis test was conducted to ascertain the strength of the relationship between church attendance and its drivers. The result shows that Pastors' message report strong (.816**) while worship center ambience, Pastors' people management style and church promotion activities exert moderate (0.632**, .602** & 0.593**) influence respectively on church attendance.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Pastors' message has no significant influence on church attendance

Table 2: Summary of Results

Variable	Beta	T	Sig.
Church Attendance	.711	4.029	.001
Regression Model Y	= 0.921+.711(Pastors' Message)		

Table 2 show the summary of the tests conducted to verify the formulated hypothesis. The ANOVA test result shows an F-value of 2.531, while the coefficient of determination (R) =.823 and the adjusted R² =.802 in the simple linear regression analysis. The adjusted R² result indicates that the Pastors' message can explain 80% variation in church attendance. Similarly, the F-value 2.531 in the ANOVA test connotes the potential of the regression model to estimate a connection between the variables (Hair, Black Jr, Bahin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). Furthermore, Table 2, reveals a p-value of .001. This p-value is below the tolerable limit of .05. The consequence of this p-value is that pastors' message significantly influences members church attendance. The mathematical expression of this relationship is as represented in Table 2.

Hypothesis Two: Worship centers ambience has no significant effect on church attendance.

Table 3: Summary of Results

R= .603	R ² =.591	F= 1.209	Sig. F.= 000
Variable	Beta	T	Sig.
Church Attendance	.596	3.009	.001
Regression Model Y = 1.092 +.596(Worship Centres ambience)			

The ANOVA test result as seen in Table 3, shows an F-value =1.209. Table 4 also reports R=.603 and an adjusted R²= .591 in the simple linear regression analysis. Also in Table 3, the study reports a p-value of .001. However, this value is below .05 level of significance. The p -value 0.001 denotes significance in relationship. In the same vein, the adjusted R²=.591 implies that the worship center ambience can adequately account for about 60% changes in church attendance. Similarly, the F-value 1.209 attests to the ability of the model to establish the relationship between church ambience and its attendance (Hair, *et al*, 2006). Finally, Table 3, depicts the mathematical notation for this relationship.

Hypothesis Three: Church promotion activities has no significant influence in driving church attendance.

Table 4: Summary of Results

R =.814	R ² = .798	F=1.221	Sig. F. = 002
Variable	Beta	T	Sig.
Church Attendance	.621	4.132	.003
Regression Model Y = 2.001+.621(Promotion activities)			

Result in Table 4, shows an R-value of .814 and adjusted R² =.798 in the simple linear regression analysis. The result of the adjusted R² findings imply that the model can explain about 80% variation in the dependent variable. In the same vein, Table 4, reveals an F-value of 1.221 in the ANOVA test. The F-value in an ANOVA test indicates the capacity of a model to explain

relationships (Hair, *et al* 2006). However, the p- value of .003 as in Table 4 is far below the tolerable limit of .05. This finding implies a significant relationship between promotion activities and church attendance. This relationship is as mathematically expressed in Table 4.

Hypothesis Four: Pastors’ people management style has no significant implication on church attendance

Table 5: Summary of Results

R =.591	R ² = .571	F=1.095	Sig. F. = 000
Variable	Beta	T	Sig.
Church Attendance	.913	3.074	.030
Regression Model Y	= 1.701+.913(Pastors’ people management style)		

Table 5, reports an R- value of .591 and adjusted R² =.571 in the simple linear regression analysis. The adjusted R² value imply that the simple linear regression model can account for about 57% variation in church attendance. Furthermore, Table 6, reports an F-value of 1.095 in the ANOVA test. According to Hair, *et al* (2006), the statistical F- value in an ANOVA test indicate the potential of a model to establish relationships. Furthermore, the p-value of .030 as in Table 5 is below the tolerable limit of .05. This finding implies that Pastors’ people management style has significant implications on church attendance. This relationship is mathematically presented in Table 5.

Discussion

The findings of first objective reveal that pastors’ message exhibit positive significant influence on members church attendance. The study further report that pastors’ message can conveniently account for about 80% variation in church attendance. This finding affirms Muriithi, *et al* (2022) Kenya study of The Anglican Church. The scholars report that properly designed and package church products often serves as a medium that attract members to a church. In the same vein, Adebayo (2015) study of churches in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa found that church messages that are especially tailored to fulfilling its intended mandate would naturally be attractive to members. One possible reason for this finding could be located in the congregants’ primary motive of seeking God. Experience has shown that the motives for spiritual shoppers differs. The motivation could relate to health and wellness needs, connectivity with the supreme being could yet be another motive or it could as well be in search for prosperity. In fact, any preacher’s message that enables the congregants achieve their spiritual objectives would continuously elicit attendance to such assembly.

Objective two of this study, focuses on the influence of worship centers’ ambience on church attendance. The study reports that worship centers’ ambience has positive and significant effect on church attendance. Specifically, the study found that worship centers ambience accounts for about

60% changes in church attendance. The foregoing implies that a 0.60 unit alteration in worship centers ambience could result in a unit change in members attendance. This finding affirms Ewanlen (2022) study of customers' revisit intention of restaurants. The most probable reason could be located in extant literature. In fact, literature recognize the crucial roles atmospherics plays in service encounter. Literature acknowledge in particular, seating arrangement, lightings, sound among several others exhibits significant effect on shopping experience. The reason for this effect could be associated with the fact that any alteration in the ambience of a church could help to fulfill the aesthetic needs of the congregants. A cursory look at present day worship centers reveals that choir ministration has become a major item of attraction to every assembly. Indeed, the presence of a near orchestra presentation of choirs would ultimately attract young and dynamic members to the church.

The objective three of this study is to ascertain the influence of church promotion activities on members' attendance. The study reveals that church promotion activities shows a significant influence on church attendance. The study also reports that church promotion activities exert about 80% effort on church attendance. This study corroborates Appiah, Dwomoh and Kyire (2013) study of Ghana churches that found church promotion activities significantly influence members attendance. The study also affirms Newman and Benchener (2008) study of megachurches in America. The study found in particular that advertising had significant effect on church attendance.

Finally, the fourth objective is to evaluate the implication of pastors' people management style on church attendance. Literature recognize intersections between leadership and followership. This study found that pastors' people management style has a positive and significant relationship with church attendance. In fact, the study reports that pastors' people management style exerts about 57% influence on members church attendance. This implies that other factors apart from pastors' people management styles exist that can drive members church attendance. Furthermore, this study report that about 43% extraneous variables exist that could probably account of members church attendance. This finding affirms Hanson (2020) America study of evangelical Lutheran church. The study found that pastoral leadership styles could not alone significantly influence church attendance.

Conclusion

This study sought to establish the place of marketing practices in the growth of megachurches in Nigeria. Literature recognize religious organizations as not-for-profit corporation. On the basis of sacredness of religion, some scholars advocate that deployment of marketing into church operations should be discouraged. Still other scholars assert that on the basis of the inherent benefits accruing from social marketing, church marketing should be embraced.

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This study examines the influence of pastors' message, worship center ambience, church promotion activities and pastors' people management practices in driving church attendance. In the context of marketing, pastors' message is essentially the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is an established fact among Christians that the more members are constantly under the influence of Holy Spirit inspired words, the more observable changes in the life of the people.

In the light of worship centers ambience, experience has shown that congregation members are greatly attracted to places that meets their aesthetic needs. In fact, literature affirm that persons would prefer to shop in a well-organized place, where security of life and properties are guaranteed among other issues.

Another fundamental fact is that promotion activities plays pivotal roles in creating awareness and generating higher traffic to corporations. Undoubtedly, this fact has been demonstrated even in church settings. Finally, church leadership especially the resident pastors play pivotal roles in driving church attendance as well as shaping the characters of their followers. The foregoing suggests that church leadership wholesome embrace of marketing tenets would facilitate the Holy Spirit's work of spiritual rebirth of church members. In sum, this paper contend that church deployment of marketing tenets would enable it fulfill the scriptural injunction of spreading the gospel to all nations.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings of this study, the following are suggested recommendations,

1. Church management should avoid the temptation of holistic commercialization of church products. Church management can achieve this as it takes into cognize government tax exemption policies.
2. Churches should avoid the use of doubtful and deceitful publicities to attract members. This is achievable when churches allow only verifiable testimonies to be shared on their church platforms.
3. The leadership of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and The Christian Association of Nigeria should be less partisan to enable it serve as effective legitimate regulatory bodies. The leadership of these bodies should be bold enough to sanction and discipline any erring minister whose message and conduct are inimical to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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