
Effectiveness of New Media Commercials in the Promotion of Church Programmes in Benin City

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of new media commercials in the promotion of religious programmes in Edo State. The objectives of the study were to find out how often new media are used in promoting religious programmes in Benin City; x-ray the advantages of new media commercials in promoting religious programmes; and examine the effectiveness of new media in promoting religious programmes in Benin City. The study was anchored on the Framing theory. The research method employed was survey using the questionnaire as instrument. Findings from the study showed that new media commercials of religious programmes are very influential and help persuade people to attend a church's programme. Based on the findings, it was recommended that church organizations should continue using new media commercials in the promotion of their programmes. In addition, to encourage more placements of adverts on new media, advertising agencies should further reduce the cost of advert placement on new media.

KEY WORDS: *New media, church, programmes, Benin City, religion.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious bodies and new media commercials as independent organisations have a unique symbiotic connection, and according to Kayode and Afolami's (2013), new media commercials of churches impact the creation and sustenance of churches through religious programs to some level. In other words, new media commercials must be supported and grown by such churches in order for church programs to get the vast attention, funding, and exposure that they need.

New media commercials are on the rise in modern Nigeria, and the efficacy of new media commercials in promoting church programs cannot be overstated. Due to increased worldwide competition, many churches are looking for new methods to promote their programs. As a result, new media ads are increasingly being used as a communication tool to strengthen the promotional efforts of various church programs, and by extension, the churches' views. Many businesses (Wysong and Beldona, 2014) and churches use new media commercials to generate visibility and, as a result, raise awareness of their programs. As a result, it should come as no surprise that new media commercials have a significant role in determining the amount of awareness of certain church programs. This occurs in a variety of ways, all of which have an influence on the advertising organisation's perception of the churches and the programs being sold. New media ads have an impact on how programmes are viewed and, as a result, on viewer choices. Smart churches may profit from the results-driven marketing that new media can give at a time when conventional media is frequently disregarded or tuned out.

Religious bodies may use a variety of media forms, modifying one or more to communicate and promote their programs in the most efficient and successful manner possible. Each sort of media is distinguished by its cost, influence, and breadth. Due to the continually changing patterns and trends in evangelism, churches may choose to employ a variety of media, but most choose to utilize new media because of their relative low cost and great reach of particular target audiences. Despite the fact that new media are our modern-day town criers, announcing what is popular and what is not, it has been noted that many consumers do not enjoy new media ads. This might be explained by some marketers' belief that the efficiency of new media ads has decreased as a result of the introduction of various alternative advertising tactics on the market (Wysong and Beldona, 2014).

New media advertising, on the other hand, have shown to be useful for a number of churches throughout the world. Despite the fact that the majority of churches use electronic and other types of advertising and marketing methods, new media ads remain an efficient way to reach a huge portion of the marketing audience (Proctor, 2013). Because these advertisements may be watched by targets at any time, they are very effective when used in combination with other commercial options (Dada, 2012). This research aims to determine the role of new media commercials in promoting religious programmes, among other things.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been a noticeable increase in the use of new media for church program advertisements. Recently, below-the-line advertising, particularly via new media, has exploded in popularity (Fletcher, 2015). The difficulty with using new media advertising to promote church programmes is that they do not reach the elderly, particularly those in rural regions who do not have access or don't know how to utilize it. Based on the aforementioned issues, the purpose of this research was to determine how successful new media is in promoting religious programs in Benin City and to provide answers to the difficulties that exist.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to:

1. find out the frequency of new media commercials in promoting religious programmes via in Benin City;
2. determine the dominant new media platforms through which churches promote their programmes;
3. examine the degree of effectiveness of new media in promoting religious programmes.

REVIEW OF CONCEPTS

Understanding Commercials

Commercial (advertising) can be defined as any impersonal communication of information about products, services or ideas through the various media, and it is usually persuasive by nature and paid by identified sponsors (Klepper, 1999). In other words, advertising is the information distributed in any way, in any form or by any means, addressed to an uncertain number of people and aimed at attracting attention to the subject of advertising, the

establishment or maintenance of interest in it and its promotion on the market. Sandage (2001) assert that advertising is “a paid form of persuasive communication that uses mass and interactive media to reach broad [mass] audiences in order to connect an identified sponsor with buyers [target audience] and provide information about products [goods, services and ideas]”.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) based in Chicago, USA, describes advertising as “any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor”, while Arens, Weigold, and Arens (2008) said it is a structured and composed non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods), services and ideas by an identified sponsor(s) through various media.

From this, it follows that advertising is usually a non-personalized form of communication, paid by an identified sponsor, implemented in a certain way through the media and other legal means and aimed to familiarize with some products and its further acquisition by possibly large audience of consumers.

Conceptualisation of New Media

New media which is often also referred to as social media generally refers to emerging information and communication technologies and applications such as mobile phones, the Internet, streaming technologies, wireless networks, and the world wide web, which has high-quality publishing and information-sharing capabilities (Asemah, Nwaoboli & Beli, 2022; Asemah, Nwaoboli & Nwoko, 2022; Nwaoboli, Ezeji & Osife-Kurex, 2022). Esamah (2018) describes new media as media that are both integrated and interactive at the same time, as well as those that make use of digital code. As a result, integration, interactivity, and digitalisation are all required in order for a medium to be classified as new media.

Akase, Igyuve, and Agbele (2018) in agreement with Asemah & Nwaoboli (2022) asserted that new media are technological breakthroughs and digital channels such as websites, blogs, social and interactive platforms, mobile telephony that enable real-time interactive communication, while emphasizing that the internet and new media, though frequently used interchangeably by people, are not the same thing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New media commercial and the Promotion of Church Programmes

The new media are very veritable in bringing about behavioural change in any organization (Arijeniwa, Nwaoboli, Ajimokunola & Uwuoruya, 2022; Nwaoboli, 2023; Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). New media commercial is a vital tool for most businesses, especially for introducing new products or services to the public. According to Adebayo (2015), new media advertising can be highly effective for church organisations when the organisations have limited base of committed members of which the church can rely upon. It is therefore important that promotional strategies are done through the media especially new media advertising or word of mouth or invitation of friends for church activities when the church has a significant pool of members it can capitalize on. In this vein, Adebayo (2015) argued that media adverts are very effective in the area of church growth and development especially in the promotion of church programmes.

Belch & Belch (2005) opine that outdoor advert using posters, bill boards and banners plays significant role in selling and exposing the opportunities of the church to the outside world. Based on the number of people passing where the board, poster or the banner is located, many people are attracted to read the advert which influences how they perceive the church and its programmes. Belch & Belch (2005) also indicated that the effectiveness and success of bill boards, banners and posters is dependent on the amount or number of traffic within the location of these advert indicators.

The stronger the traffic that passes by these advert indicators the more success the church is prone to attain and the lesser the traffic the lower the success of the advert on influencing people. New media advertisements consequently help churches promote their programmes. Buttrussing this point, Jefkins (1995) shows that in Kwazulu-Natal many churches have adopted posters, bill boards and banners as a means of reaching out to people on the road. These have been located around high traffic areas of the town, as well as areas of strong pass ways, in order to expose their church messages, programmes and others to people. Similarly, in Benin City, Edo State, there is a high use of new media by churches in inviting people to their programmes. This in turn helps promote and sustain the programmes of those churches when the new media adverts attain high traffic and as well meet the target audience and interest the public.

According to Mangwana (2009), although the church has somehow not paid critical attention to the social context upon which it functioned in early years, church growth movements have hammered institutional and social factors within the church and outside the church that propels church growth. The internal dynamics of the church has been the focus of concentration to the neglect of the social milieu upon which members and the church functions; however, the external indicators have been emphasized by the church growth movement. Mangwana (2009) argued that church growth is not a man's affair or by the wisdom of man, but by the spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit that changes the heart and minds of men in order to become part of the church.

It is a truism that, one basic concept that has been part of the church's mission and agenda is evangelism. Diverse strategies, methods and techniques exist in the spreading of the gospel including one on one witnessing, discussion in churches, using a tribe head, and many more (Esamah, 2018). Despite these techniques, strategies and methods, recent methods of evangelism have changed the principal focus of soul winning resulting in a decline in mass evangelism across the globe and making more people secularized in recent times (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2008). New media advertising has also become a tool of advertising God and bringing to the remembrance and conscience of man the existence of Jehovah God. Therefore, we can say that new media advertising truly helps promote church programmes.

Functions of New Media Advertising

New media advertising has many functions. Esamah, (2018) avowed the following to be the functions of advertising:

1. **Economic function:** The nature of the economic function of advertising is first of all to stimulate sales and increase the volume of profits from the sale of a certain product for a certain unit of time. Advertising informs, creates the need for a product or service, and encourages people to purchase. The more people have responded to the ad, the better it is for the economy and the economic well-being of society (Kotler, 2002). As Daramola (2012 p.

208) asserts, “Advertising stimulates commerce and industries and of special importance...a lot of revenue is generated from advertising which sustains the media”. By promoting consumption, demand is created and with more demands, the factory produces more, thus, resulting into high domestic product, creation of wealth and employment.

2. Social function: Advertising information has a significant impact on the formation of the consciousness of each individual when advertising is addressed to consumers. Besides the promotion of a products, it also helps to form ideological values of the society and at the end has an effect on the character of social relations, influences consumer instincts, encouraging people to improve their financial state improves the culture of consumption. Comparing different products and services, the consumer, in any case, tends to get really the best (Kotler, 2002).

3. Marketing function: Advertising is an important component of marketing an organisation’s products and services to consumers. It is entirely connected to the tasks of marketing, whose final aim is the full satisfaction of customer needs concerning goods and services.

4. Communicating function: Advertising is also one of the specific forms of communication. It is designed to perform an appropriate communicating function, linking together advertisers and consumer audience by the means of information channels.

Review of Empirical Studies

In a study conducted by Esamah (2018) titled: “The Effectiveness of New media Advertising on Product Promotion (A Study Of Benin Metropolis), the objectives of this study were to find out the extent of New media advertising in Benin City, examine the attitude of the residents of Benin metropolis towards New media advertising, establish the effectiveness of New media adverts in Benin Metropolis, and determine the effects of New media advertising on the residents of Benin metropolis. The study was anchored on the Framing theory. The research method employed was survey using the questionnaire as instrument.

To answer the research questions in this study, one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were administered to residents of Benin, Edo State. Findings from the study showed that New media advertisements are very common in Benin metropolis, New media advertisements are very influential in the choice of consumers’ products and services, and are relatively cheaper than other media adverts such as television, radio and newspapers.

Based on the findings, the study therefore recommended policy makers should enhance the effectiveness of New media adverts by ensuring advertising agencies strictly follow the 7Cs of communication which are context, content, component, cuts, contrast, and composition. This would make New media advertisements better understandable and appreciated by consumers. In addition, it was recommended that new media adverts should be developed in order to be readable by consumers not just in the day but also at night.

In another study by Kayode and Afolami (2013) titled: “Economic Influence of New media Advertisements as Communication Infrastructure on Churches in Lagos Landscapes”, the paper argued that New media are street furniture as well as communication infrastructure for economic vitality of businesses. The objectives of the study were to determine the economic influence of New media advertisement on churches in Lagos State. Two research questions were set to guide the study while one hypothesis was formulated to find out if there is

significant relationship between New media advertisements and the economy of people of Lagos State.

As a survey research, 62 registered advertisers and 362 Christians in Lagos were selected purposively as sample sizes. Data was collected with the aid of questionnaire and analyzed with percentage frequency count and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. It was then tested at significant level of 0.05. The correlation method revealed the significant relationship between variables being studied. Findings of the study revealed that new media advertisements have significant influence on the economy of Churches in Lagos State. While alcoholic beverages are the most patronized product in Lagos State, the study also showed that church programmes are highly attended due new media advertisements of the churches and their programmes.

The study concluded that any service or amenity such as new media advertisements that attracts additional flow of resources or stimulates aggregate demand and supply of goods and services is a contributor to economic system of churches in Lagos landscapes. Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that churches should continue to harness New media in advertisement as it helps product the images of the churches.

Dhliwayo (2013) examined how promotion marketing strategies influence growth of churches in Zimbabwe. The study argued that recent development in management has changed the focus of non-profit making organisations of which the church is no exception. It was indicated that churches currently have taken the business approaches of management of which promotion techniques have become their focal point of church management.

In view of this, the study examined the effect of promotional strategies such as advertisement, personal selling, face to face church service selling, invitation of friends and relatives, miracle service, communion service and many more on church growth among Pentecostal churches. The study also examined the perception of people towards the church services performed by African Pentecostal congregations. Using the purposive and convenience sampling techniques, the study sampled six Pentecostal churches and 140 respondents across these churches.

Through the quantitative approach the study utilized cross sectional descriptive research design to obtain relevant information from the sampled respondents. The study found complete acceptance of promotion strategies as effective instrument for church growth. The result also shows that promotional strategies or elements have different effect on church growth; however, the combination of the elements has stronger impact on church growth. The study concluded that it is vital that church leaders, pastors and service coordinators develop their skills and become more marketing oriented in order to apply marketing principles and tools in meeting the increasing needs of church and individual members of the congregation.

These studies are related to the current study in terms of research objectives, literature review, findings and conclusions. However, most of them differed with this study in terms of research population and sample size.

Theoretical Framework

Yale Attitude Change Theory

The Yale Attitude Change hypothesis, also known as the Yale Model of Persuasion or Yale School Research, is a psychological investigation of the circumstances in which individuals

are most likely to change their minds in response to persuasive communications. Carl Hovland and his Yale University colleagues originally explored this strategy of persuasion in the 1940s and 1950s, and it became known as the Yale attitude modification Approach (Anonymous, 2016). In terms of the substance of the message, the Yale school concentrated on issues such as motivating appeals and organizing arguments. In contrast to logical/rational appeals, they concentrated on "emotional" appeals, which were deemed a type of stimuli whose contents may elicit emotion. The group focused on fear-inducing arguments in particular (Anonymous, 2016). According to the theory, various variables influence the likelihood of a persuasion-induced change in attitude; after all, behavioural change is impossible without persuasion and attitude change. The source, the message, and the audience are the three most important aspects. According to the Hovland-Yale paradigm, the message's substance is critical. As a result, it is more beneficial to provide all sides of an argument before demonstrating why one's point of view is valid (Cook, 2012). The Yale model of attitude adjustment places a premium on paying attention, comprehending what you're saying, and accepting what you're saying.

This theory is crucial to comprehending the persuasive process. However, the theory's flaw is that it simply describes the phases in the persuasive process, not how yielding (persuasion) really happens (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). It's common to presume that understanding a message's notion leads to a change in attitude. While a messaging concept may lead to persuasion, learning does not guarantee persuasion, and persuasion can happen even if a message is not learnt. As a result, memorizing a message does not convey the whole tale of persuasion.

The theory is relevant to this research because it suggests that the perceived legitimacy of a church new media's source might influence audience appeal and attendance. Aside from source credibility, incentives in a church's new media advertisement, such as the promise of divine healing, counseling, prayers, and so on, might promote the commercialized programmes and entice visitors to the church.

METHODOLOGY

Survey method was adopted for this study and the research instrument was the questionnaire. The choice of survey research method was informed by the nature of the research, which is social-scientific. The population of the study was Benin City which has a population of three million, two hundred and thirty three thousand, three hundred and sixty-six (3, 233, 366). The sample size of this study was determined by the Taro Yamane's sample size calculation propounded by Taro Yamanes (1967). As a result, the sample size of this study was four hundred (400) but sequel to the distribution of the questionnaire, 379 copies were retrieved while 21 copies were lost. More so, the random sampling technique was chosen as the technique for this study.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Frequency of religious programme commercials on new media

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	191	50.4
Often	160	42.2
Not Often	28	7.4
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents watch or see adverts of religious programmes on new media. The table reveals that 50.4% of the respondents watched or saw church programmes on new media very often, 42.2% of the respondents saw it often, 7.4% of the respondents did not often see or watch such adverts. The implication is that religious programmes on new media are frequent.

Table 2: New media platforms through which churches majorly advertise programmes

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	87	22.3
Twitter	51	13.5
Instagram	76	20.1
Tik-tok	40	10.6
Youtube	39	10.3
Whatsapp	75	13.2
Others	11	2.3
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 2 shows that Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp were the major new media platforms through which religious programmes in Benin City are promoted. The reason may be as a result of the long existence of these new media platforms and their popularity as well as high number of active users.

Table 3: Perception on whether new media commercials are effective in the promotion of religious programmes

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	147	38.2
Agree	175	46.2
Neutral	13	3.4
Disagree	24	6.3
Strongly Disagree	20	5.3
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents think new media commercials are effective in the promotion of religious programmes in Benin City. This explains the reason why there are many new media commercials of religious programmes in Benin Metropolis and the continual advertisements of religious programmes on new media by churches in Benin City.

Table 4: Degree of effectiveness of new media commercials in the promotion of religious programmes in Benin metropolis

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	119	31.3
High	190	50.1
Neutral	5	1.3
Low	36	9.4
Very Low	29	7.7
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Data on table 4 revealed that 50.1% of the respondents agreed that the degree of effectiveness of new media commercials in the promotion of religious programmes in Benin metropolis is high. This implies that new media adverts of church programmes truly have impacts on Benin City residents who are on social media.

Discussion of Findings

This study made many findings. In the first place it was found out that there is a high awareness of new media commercial of religious programmes by Christians in Benin City. This was as a result of the many new media commercials of churches in Benin City as well as their many advantages to the churches. Also, the study found out that churches advertise their programmes via new media for several reasons. Esamah (2018) avows that these reasons for people's high usage of social media for campaigns are the fact that new media have a wide reach; adverts on new media are relatively cheaper compared to other media such as radio and TV, and that new media commercials reach the targeted audience through other strategic placements. The imports of this findings is that the money churches spend on new media commercials is not a waste as such adverts in turn yield positive results for them.

Similarly, new media commercials of religious programmes were found to be thoroughly via Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp. In addition, the findings showed that new media commercials are also very effective in selling the image, ideas, and products advertised on them and thus, churches should not assume only television, radio and newspapers can convey their adverts to people or reach a wide audience. Moreso, although some people may think new media commercials have no influence on them, the study has shown that the perception is not totally true as most people are persuaded to attend religious programmes due to the new media commercials they are exposed to. In other words, if such people were not exposed to the church adverts, they would not have attended the programme. Thus, new media commercials of religious programmes have effects on the audience whether directly or indirectly.

Summary

This study evaluated the effectiveness of new media commercials in the promotion of religious programmes in Edo State. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that new media commercials of religious programmes are very influential and help persuade people to attend a church's programme.

Advertising is a fundamental aspect that contributes to the survival, success or failure of any organization. In particular, attitudes toward advertisements are important mediators of advertising effectiveness, both in terms of the impact the adverts have on the audiences' cognition, and in terms of the impact such adverts have on individuals' behavioral intentions. People attend religious programmes for many reasons. Not only because they need them but sometimes because they are well-packaged and presented bonuses and fascinating pictorial ideas. This is one thing new media commercials help churches achieve because new media commercials are creative, aesthetic, far reaching, and often strategically planned. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Churches should continue using new media commercials in the promotion of their programmes.
2. In addition, to encourage more placements of adverts on new media, advertising agencies should further reduce the cost of advert placement on new media.
3. Since advertisements are very effective in promoting religious programmes, churches should often utilize the medium not forgetting to complement their efforts using other media of advertisements such as television, billboards and radio.

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