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The Role of Media in the Spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State

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Abstract

This study explores the role of media in the spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. As a dynamic tool of communication, the media has become instrumental in shaping religious awareness, practice, and outreach. The research examines how various forms of media, including radio, television, print, and social media, have contributed to evangelism, religious education, and church growth across urban and rural areas of the state. It also considers the extent to which the media has helped overcome geographical, linguistic, and cultural barriers in disseminating Christian teachings. Findings reveal that Christian organizations and leaders have strategically utilized media platforms to reach a wider audience, promote inter-denominational dialogue, and foster spiritual development. However, the study also identifies challenges such as media bias, financial constraints, and competition with secular content. The research concludes that media remains a vital instrument for the propagation of Christianity in Nasarawa State, with significant implications for religious communication and social transformation. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the role of media in the spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of religious experiences, practices, and media engagement within the Christian community. Specifically, the study utilizes a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to gather relevant data.

Keywords: Media, Christianity, Spread, Nasarawa

Introduction

Nasarawa State, situated in the North-Central Geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is home to a culturally diverse population with a vibrant mix of religious adherents, primarily Christians, Muslims, and African traditional worshippers. As the state continues to experience urban growth and increased access to technology, the influence of media on all spheres of life, particularly religion, has grown remarkably. The intersection between media and religion has become especially significant in the spread of Christianity, offering new opportunities for evangelism, discipleship, and communal worship beyond the confines of traditional church spaces (Ojebuyi and Salawu 224; Adeboye 53).

Historically, the propagation of Christianity in Nigeria was predominantly carried out through missionary activities, physical church establishments, and personal evangelism. However, in recent decades, with the proliferation of radio, television, and more recently, internet-based media, the message of the gospel has found amplified expression. Christian leaders and institutions have begun to harness media platforms to extend their reach,

transform worship experiences, and connect with both local and global audiences (Campbell 68; Eze 119). This shift has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many churches to adopt media as a primary mode of communication (Eze 125).

This paper seeks to critically explore how the media have contributed to the spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State. It evaluates both the positive transformations brought about by media usage and the emerging challenges, including media ethics, digital divide, doctrinal integrity, and engagement. The research also examines the adaptability of religious institutions in the state and the ways in which they respond to evolving media technologies. By focusing on Nasarawa State, the paper offers a contextualized understanding of the media's evangelistic potential within a multi-religious, semi-urban Nigerian society.

The Concepts of Mass Media

The Mass Media of newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and new media are channels of mass communication; without them, mass communication cannot be mass communication (Chiakaan and Ahmad, 201). Sambe (216) defined the mass media as agents of mass communication whose primary function is to carry information to members of the public regardless of their locations or social and economic status. Apart from their informative or watchdog function in society, the mass media, as noted by Dominick (19) and Ajala (201), educate and entertain the public. The mass media, in performing these functions, also set the agenda for public discourse and place status on individuals, groups, government, and other institutions as well as organizations in the society. The media, especially in Nigeria, are considered agents of attaining national integration; they are tools of attaining national unity and integration due to their ability to manage conflicts and promote peace (Soola, 23). When the mass media are used for the purpose of achieving peace for the sake of national development, it is professionally referred to as peace journalism. Peace journalism, also known as conflict resolution journalism or conflict sensitive journalism, is when editors and reporters make choices about what to report and how to report it that create opportunities for the society at large to consider and value violent responses to conflict (Lynch, 9).

Literature Review

The intersection between media and religion has generated a significant body of research, particularly in the fields of communication studies, religious studies, and sociology. In Nigeria, the media has evolved from a mere information tool to a potent force shaping religious practices and identities. Scholars widely agree that modern Christianity, especially within Pentecostal and Evangelical movements, has enthusiastically embraced media technologies to fulfill the Great Commission.

Ojebuyi and Salawu argue that the media have revolutionized Christian evangelism in Nigeria. They explain that traditional outreach, like crusades and door-to-door preaching, has now been complemented or even replaced by mass media strategies. These include radio, television, and, more recently, online platforms that allow churches to reach both local and international audiences (Ojebuyi and Salawu 224). The authors highlight how Christian leaders adapt their messages to resonate with specific cultural and linguistic groups, making gospel communication more effective.

Similarly, Adeboye discusses how religious groups have used media to engage in moral and political discourse, shaping national conversations on ethics and development. He notes that Christian media personalities often leverage their platforms to influence public opinion, sometimes rivaling political voices (Adeboye 53). This form of religious

communication strengthens Christianity's visibility and reinforces its public role in a religiously diverse country.

Eze, writing on digital Christianity in north-central Nigeria, emphasizes how platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube have created a new "digital congregation." This online space enables believers to worship, study, and interact with church leaders from remote areas. However, Eze warns of the rise of misinformation, shallow doctrine, and commercialization of the gospel, issues that threaten theological soundness and spiritual depth (Eze 119). Campbell contributes a global perspective, suggesting that the internet has transformed religious authority by decentralizing it. She argues that digital spaces often elevate charismatic figures without formal training, allowing them to amass followers and blur lines between genuine doctrine and motivational rhetoric (Campbell 68).

While these studies provide essential insights, most are national or continental in scope. There remains a gap in localized research that focuses specifically on states like Nasarawa. With its mixed religious demography and evolving technological access, Nasarawa provides a unique case for studying how Christianity leverages media in a grassroots, multi-faith environment. This study aims to address that gap by focusing on both the tools and challenges Christian communities face in Nasarawa's media landscape.

The Media Landscape in Nasarawa State

The media landscape in Nasarawa State reflects both the infrastructural challenges of a developing region and the increasing penetration of digital technologies. As one of Nigeria's north-central states with a growing population and semi-urban expansion, Nasarawa is experiencing a steady evolution in media access and usage. Traditional media, radio and television, remains the most widely used, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas where literacy rates and internet connectivity remain relatively low (Ojebuyi and Salawu 225).

Local Radio Stations such as Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS) in Lafia and private outlets like Options FM serve as important platforms for both secular and religious communication. These stations frequently host Christian programs, including worship broadcasts, gospel music hours, and live prayer sessions. Radio continues to be highly influential because of its affordability, accessibility, and reach, even in remote villages without electricity or internet access (Adeboye 54).

Television, though less prevalent in rural areas, plays a key role in urban religious life. Many large churches in towns like Keffi and Lafia produce and broadcast faith-based content through local stations and satellite networks. Ministries often showcase sermons, testimonies, and gospel music videos, strategically using visuals to enhance spiritual engagement (Eze 120).

The most transformative shift is the rise of digital and social media, especially among young people and educated urban dwellers. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have enabled churches to share devotionals, stream services, and facilitate prayer groups in real-time. Churches now operate Facebook pages, post inspirational content, and use WhatsApp to connect with congregants beyond Sunday services (Campbell 69). The growing availability of low-cost smartphones and data bundles has made these platforms increasingly accessible.

However, this shift is not without limitations. A digital divide persists, especially in rural communities plagued by poor mobile network coverage, erratic electricity, and limited digital literacy. These issues affect the consistency and inclusiveness of media-based

evangelism (Eze 123). Nonetheless, efforts by telecommunications providers such as MTN and Airtel to expand coverage are slowly closing this gap.

Media as a Tool for Christian Evangelism

In the contemporary era, the media have become an indispensable tool for Christian evangelism. In Nasarawa State, this reality is evident in the ways churches of various denominations use both traditional and digital platforms to disseminate the gospel. Evangelism, which historically depended on face-to-face outreach, has now embraced radio, television, and online media as vital extensions of the church's mission. Through these channels, Christian messages reach thousands beyond the confines of church walls, across geographic, ethnic, and even religious boundaries.

Radio remains the most widely used medium for evangelism in Nasarawa, due to its affordability, accessibility, and wide coverage. Churches collaborate with radio stations like NBS Lafia, Precious FM and Options FM to air sermons, prayer sessions, and gospel music programs. These broadcasts are often conducted in local languages to ensure that rural and semi-literate audiences are not excluded (Ojebuyi and Salawu 227). The simplicity of radio allows even grassroots churches to participate in media outreach, giving voice to local evangelists and lay preachers.

Television offers a more visual form of engagement and is mostly utilized by larger churches that can afford production and airtime costs. Ministries based in urban centers such as Lafia and Keffi produce televised programs that include praise worship sessions, miracle testimonies, and teachings by prominent pastors. These programs serve not only as spiritual tools but also as branding efforts, enhancing the visibility and reputation of particular churches (Adeboye 57).

In recent years, social media and mobile technology have emerged as the most transformative tools for Christian evangelism. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have enabled churches to reach members in real time, offering live-streamed services, daily devotionals, and prayer meetings. These platforms foster continuous engagement, particularly with young people who are highly active online (Eze 121). WhatsApp groups are often used to share scriptures, organize prayer chains, and provide pastoral counseling, creating a virtual fellowship experience.

Moreover, the media allows for the personalization and contextualization of gospel messages. Pastors and evangelists tailor their sermons to address current social issues, such as insecurity, unemployment, and family problems, thereby making Christianity relevant to everyday life (Campbell 70). Media also facilitates interdenominational networking, as churches collaborate and learn from each other's media strategies. Despite concerns about content regulation and doctrinal integrity, media in Nasarawa State have significantly expanded the reach and impact of Christian evangelism. The immediacy, interactivity, and portability of modern media tools have redefined how the gospel is shared, making evangelism more effective and far-reaching than ever before.

Challenges and Ethical Concerns

While the media has significantly advanced the cause of Christian evangelism in Nasarawa State, it has also introduced a number of challenges and ethical concerns. These issues not only threaten the effectiveness of media-based ministry but also raise questions about the integrity and doctrinal soundness of the Christian message being disseminated.

One of the most pressing concerns is the commercialization of the gospel. Many televangelists and online preachers use media platforms as revenue-generating tools, emphasizing prosperity messages that prioritize wealth acquisition over spiritual growth. This trend can distort biblical teachings and mislead audiences, especially vulnerable individuals seeking hope amid life's difficulties. Adeboye notes that this form of media evangelism often exploits emotions and consumer behavior, turning worship into spectacle and faith into merchandise (55).

Another ethical issue is the lack of accountability and regulation in religious media content. Many churches and individuals produce and disseminate content without theological oversight or formal pastoral training. This opens the door for doctrinal errors, sensationalism, and even heretical teachings to spread unchecked. Eze highlights the problem of self-proclaimed prophets who gain large online followings by making bold, unverified prophecies, often causing confusion or fear among believers (Eze 124). Moreover, digital media creates a platform for spiritual impersonation and misinformation. Fake social media accounts claiming to represent popular pastors have been used to scam believers by soliciting money under the guise of "special prayers" or "miracle seeds." These practices damage the reputation of genuine ministries and weaken public trust in Christian leaders. Campbell discusses how digital anonymity and lack of verification allow for such manipulation, especially in developing regions with minimal digital literacy (71).

Accessibility issues also pose a challenge. While urban churches have successfully adopted digital tools, many rural congregations remain left out due to poor internet infrastructure, low technological literacy, and a lack of funding for media equipment. This creates a digital divide within the Christian community, potentially marginalizing those who lack access to modern evangelistic resources (Ojebuyi and Salawu 229).

Finally, there are concerns about overreliance on media, where believers substitute online engagement for real-life fellowship and communal worship. While the media serves as a powerful supplement, it is not a replacement for the spiritual accountability and relationship-building that physical churches provide. Addressing these concerns requires thoughtful strategies, including content regulation, media literacy training, theological education for media ministers, and improved access for rural congregations. If responsibly managed, media can remain a powerful tool for the expansion of Christianity in Nasarawa State without compromising its core values.

Impact Assessment

The role of media in the spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State has yielded measurable and transformative impacts on religious life, evangelistic outreach, and community engagement. The strategic use of both traditional and digital media platforms has significantly enhanced the visibility and accessibility of Christian teachings, creating new opportunities for spiritual growth and social influence. One of the most significant impacts is increased reach and audience engagement. Media enables churches to connect with audiences far beyond the boundaries of their physical location. Through radio and television broadcasts, pastors in Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga regularly minister to listeners in remote villages and even in neighboring states. Ojebuyi and Salawu observe that churches that consistently use media for outreach report higher rates of participation, including among non-members and seekers (230). This extended reach allows for the evangelization of non-Christians and the strengthening of marginal believers.

Another notable impact is the digital transformation of worship and discipleship practices. Social media and live-streaming have made it possible for Christians to engage with

sermons, prayers, and Bible studies in real time, even while on the move or at home. This flexibility has proven especially beneficial during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 lockdowns, when physical gatherings were restricted. As Eze reports, many believers in Nasarawa relied on WhatsApp fellowships, Zoom services, and YouTube sermons for their spiritual sustenance during that time (125). The media also serves as a platform for youth inclusion. The younger generation, which is highly engaged on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, has found new ways to express their faith and participate in evangelism. Churches that empower youth to create content, such as short skits, gospel music videos, and testimonies, have witnessed increased youth retention and participation (Campbell 74). This digital creativity helps bridge the gap between tradition and modernity in Christian practice.

Additionally, the media has enabled inter-church collaboration and theological exchange. Through online platforms, pastors from different denominations share resources, exchange ideas, and participate in virtual conferences. This fosters a spirit of unity and learning that strengthens the Christian community as a whole. However, the impact is not without drawbacks. As noted earlier, the digital divide means that many rural congregations remain underserved. Furthermore, unregulated media content sometimes leads to misinformation and doctrinal confusion.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of media on Christianity in Nasarawa State is largely positive. It has amplified the voice of the church, expanded its mission field, and enabled new expressions of faith. When properly harnessed, the media remains a critical asset for the continued growth of Christianity in the state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of media in the spread of Christianity in Nasarawa State is both dynamic and transformative. As this paper has shown, media platforms, ranging from traditional outlets like radio and television to modern digital tools such as social media and live-streaming, have played a pivotal role in reshaping how evangelism, worship, discipleship, and community engagement are practiced. Through these media tools, Christian messages have been amplified, reaching people across socio-economic, geographic, and generational divides.

Radio, due to its affordability and wide reach, remains a powerful evangelistic tool in rural areas. Television, while more urban-centered, adds visual appeal and authority to Christian broadcasting. Meanwhile, digital platforms have revolutionized the faith experience for urban youth and tech-savvy congregations, allowing for real-time interaction, creativity, and widespread dissemination of Christian content. These media developments have led to increased church attendance, youth involvement, and inter-denominational collaboration (Ojebuyi and Salawu 231; Campbell 75).

However, the journey is not without its setbacks. The rise of prosperity gospel messages, lack of doctrinal regulation, and the digital divide have raised ethical and logistical concerns. Many churches, especially in rural communities, are still unable to fully tap into the digital opportunities due to infrastructural deficits and economic limitations (Adeboye 59; Eze 127).

To address these challenges and optimize the use of media for evangelism in Nasarawa State, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Capacity Building:** Churches should invest in training pastors and media teams on digital literacy, ethical media practices, and content creation that aligns with sound biblical doctrine.
- **Collaboration with Media Outlets:** Faith-based organizations should work with local radio and television stations to negotiate affordable programming slots, particularly for rural evangelistic outreach.
- **Infrastructure Support:** Government and Christian NGOs should support the development of media infrastructure, especially internet access in underprivileged areas to bridge the digital divide.
- **Content Regulation:** Christian media content should be reviewed by theological councils or inter-denominational boards to guard against heretical or exploitative teachings.
- **Youth Engagement:** Churches should empower young people to lead media innovation within the church by creating content that is culturally relevant, biblically grounded, and engaging.

In conclusion, the media landscape in Nasarawa State presents a rich opportunity for the Church to fulfill the Great Commission in new and effective ways. When used wisely, media can help the Church not only to inform, but also to transform lives and communities in lasting and spiritually grounded ways.

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