

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

The life of man has been influenced greatly by modern Mass Media in the 21st century. Such Media include the radio, television, newspaper, magazines, billboards, internet, cable networks, mobile phones, pamphlets, handbills among others.

They have greatly enhanced the instant or rapid transfer of information, opinion and ideas. These have influenced man positively and negatively in all aspects of life, ranging from physical, educational, moral, economic to spiritual and religious. Hence this write up has been conceived to explore and highlight the role of the mass media in church development in the 21st century.

The mass media is very influential in human life. This is because it enhances rapid communication of news, information, ideas and opinions which affect and influence human life positively and negatively. This two edged influence is also applicable in the religious life of man. The mass media has been used to communicate and influence the growth and development of religious organizations, such as churches. On the other hand, the media in some cases, has contributed to some problems in the church through its abuse and misuse, such as the communication of false doctrines, propaganda and inciting of members to rebel against church authorities. This paper attempts to highlight both the positive and

negative roles of the mass media in church development, in addition to suggesting ways of improvement.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

a. Mass Media, Medium (Singular)

This is defined as a means, instrument, agency or substance through which communication is maintained or effected (Kirkpatrick 782). Such medium or media[^] include public address systems, radio, television, magazines, journals, pamphlets, compact and digital disc, projectors, cinemas, internet and social media like facebook and tweeters.

In other words, it involves any means of communication with a large number of people (Webster 301). It is the means of delivering information, ideas and attitudes to a sizeable and diversified audience through the use of media developed for the purpose.

b. Church

Church refers to a group or association of professing Christians and to the building in which they worship. It also refers to the body and bride of Christ (Concise 1 69), which is universal, invisible and spiritual.

These views are confirmed by Wharton, as he identifies the church both as a place of worship and the body of believers (83). This body of believers which are called out, exist in various parts of the world and in different generations. Some have departed from this world.

The church can be viewed in two ways, the invisible and universal church on one hand, and the visible congregation of believers that meets locally in a particular place.

In summary, it refers to a called out people who profess the same faith in Christ; it also refers to a group of such believers who meet and worship together in a local place.

c. Development

Development could be used to describe a negative or positive occurrence. In the negative sense, it could describe the worsening of a situation.

On the positive side, it could describe an improvement of a situation. Mussen defines psychological development as a sequence of stages that define progress towards a most mature level and function (34). Notable here are the word "stages" and "progress towards maturity".

Chambers adds that to develop, means to unroll, to lay open by degrees, to bring out what is latent or potential, to bring to a more advanced or more highly organized state; to work out the potentialities of, to cause to grow, to build, to advance through successive stages to a higher, more complex or more fully grown state (340). While Uduigwomen holds that development goes beyond economic sphere to other areas of human endeavors such as moral, social, spiritual or political life (Lecture Series).

It is in the light of this meaning of development that this paper will examine the role or contribution of the mass media towards it in the next section.

The Positive Role of Mass Media in Church Development

Mass media is used in most meetings and activities of the church, before, during and in some case afterwards. Such meetings range from Sunday meetings, rallies, prayer meetings to conventions, fund raising functions, weddings, funerals, memorial services, singsong nights, outdoor witness services, evangelical campaigns among others.

These meetings are vital in the development of the church, and since mass media is greatly used in these meetings and activities, it is necessary to look at the place and role of the media in these meetings and in other areas which have contributed to the development of the church. These include the spiritual, numerical, social and economic development of the church.

a. Spiritual Development

This refers to an increase in godliness, and Christ-likeness. It is initiated and enhanced through evangelism, conversion, water baptism, preachings, teachings, exhortations, prayers, fastings, Bible studies among others. Most of these activities require the use of mass media organs which ensure and enhance their effectiveness and success. For instance public address systems, tracts, pamphlets, magazines, internet and cable networks are utilized in evangelism and teachings in the twenty first century church.

Some sermons and teachings are communicated and recorded in compact and digital discs, and through close circuit television systems and video recorders. This manner of communicating the word of God ensures that it reaches a wide audience effectively and clearly.

The durable nature of the magazines, compact and digital disc, ensure there durability of the messages they contain. This situation contributes to the spiritual growth of the church as the members study and utilize the contents of the **media**.

b. Numerical Development

The mass media also plays a part in the numerical development of the church. This numerical development is in the form of growth and expansion of the church. It is both internal and external. It is internal in the sense that each congregation grows in membership and new intakes, and external in the sense that

the church is establishing new assemblies, groups, area, fields, parishes, zones or dioceses as the case may be. Some of the ways through which new members join the church are through invitations, evangelical meetings, gospel and prayer meetings, conventions, crusades, conferences, while some are born into the church.

The mass media and their personnel, contribute to ensure this numerical growth by enhancing effective publicity and communication of the word of God to the prospective converts, it is also utilized in publicizing, creating awareness and inviting people to these meetings.

In addition, the word of God can also be communicated to many people in far and widespread areas over a long period of time, through media organs like books, journals, magazines, digital and compact discs. All these contribute to enhance the numerical growth and development of the church.

c. Social Development

The social Development of the church should be seen in terms of its growing relevance, popularity and acceptability by the society, it should also be viewed in terms of the growing cooperation and unity among members of the church in different congregations and denominations, which enhance social interaction among members.

The media plays a part in this development because it is often used to create awareness and publicity of church programmes. Information, news and instructions are also circulated to members and others about church affairs. The use of the media contributes to and enhances the success of church programmes and interactions amongst members, this in turn enhances the social development of the church.

d. Economic Development

Economic development refers to the increasing ability to finance and implement various projects, and to maintain the smooth operation of the church. Such projects may include the purchase of lands, building projects, purchase of equipment, establishment of new churches and the financial empowerment of the church and members.

One important way of financing these is through donations, offerings and fund raising functions. The mass media plays an important role in these functions, because it ensures the publicity through the use of radio, television, adverts, handbills, posters and flyers. Thus it creates awareness and serves as an invitation to many. A proper and effective use of the mass media on these occasions, ensures a large turnout and consequently a large income. Economic development is closely linked to numerical development, it is assumed that as the church grows numerically, so it will also develop in financial and economic ability. More members imply an increase in offerings, church income and economic ability. It should be recalled here, that the mass media contributes to the numerical growth which in turn contributes to the economic and financial growth of the church.

4. The Negative Role of Mass Media

Various views exist concerning the negative role of the Mass media in the church. Some are debatable and depend on the circumstances and background of the people concerned. For instance, some people are of the view that the use of mass media has the following negative effects, they cause excitements, distractions and pride, they tend to be worldly and unspiritual, they are expensive to acquire and maintain, and many people are unable to utilize or benefit from them.

Other views hold that some of the mass media circulate falsehoods, heresy and fanatical doctrines, slander and incitements to rebellion or riot.

This paper will critically look at these views of the negative role of the mass media in church development today. The view that it creates excitement, distractions and pride depends on other circumstances. It may be applicable in a church in which most of the members are not educated, unenlightened or exposed to modern technology. Hence, the introduction of such media equipped will create such excitements and pride which could hinder the church development temporarily. But this may not happen in a church in which the members are enlightened and used to modern technology.

The view that mass media encourage worldliness and carnality can be neutralized by the argument that it is a neutral tool which can be used positively and negatively like a knife, which can be used to slice meat and fruits, or to attack and injure a person. The effects depend on the intention of the controllers and users of the mass media.

The view that they are expensive to acquire and maintain is true to an extent. The acquisition and installation of electronic and print media is costly, but the production of posters, handbills, magazines and production of commercial adverts are not very expensive. Moreover, their positive contributions to church development somehow overwhelm the negative impact of their cost.

The view that many are unable to utilize or benefit from some of them is true to an extent. A certain level of education is needed in order to understand, send and receive information through the mass media.

An uneducated member cannot read or write in a magazine. He will not benefit from the handbills or posters that communicate information to many. On the other hand, some educated people do not have time or interest to read and receive the

information. Some information that are sent through radio and other electronic media may not be received by some members due to lack of power supply.

Similarly, information communicated through internet or websites, are not accessible to many due to ignorance and inability to access the interest.

In addition, the cell phone has also distracted and hindered church development. Many misuse the phone, some are distracted by phone use during church programmes, some others waste precious time on the internet viewing harmful things.

CONCLUSION

The paper has revealed and established that the mass media has greatly influenced the life of man in the twenty first century, including the religious aspect. This is through the instant or rapid transfer of information, ideas, teachings, seminars and other programmes of the church. This has contributed to the growth and development of the church. This development is observed from various perspectives, namely; spiritual, numerical, social and economic, all of which are related and unite to bring about the wellbeing of the church.

The mass media has enhanced and simplified mass evangelism, teachings and conferences which involve people in different locations for apart.

It has enhanced the running and administration of the church, through the easy communication of policies to a large congregation.

On the other hand, the media has been misused by some people to communicate heresies, slander, lies or incitements. The misuse of the phone can result in worldliness, waste of precious time on ungodly things and distractions during church meetings.

It is also expensive to acquire, maintain and utilize some of the media tools, and all members of the church are unable to do this due to several reasons.

Despite these disadvantages, the benefit of using the mass media far outweighs them. Thus the twenty first century church needs the mass media, in order to be relevant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the role of the mass media in church development today, the adoption of the following recommendations will further enhance its roles. More churches should be encouraged to utilize aspects of the media which may be useful in their operations. Examples include handbills, bulletins, journals or notice boards.

Personnel should be regularly trained to operate and maintain the media equipment and to utilize them. This issue of training is supported by Chaplin who stresses the need for trained media practitioners to communicate the word of God in order to do it effectively (21).

Akinfeleye also supports this view as he stresses the need for adequately trained people to ensure effective practice of mass communication (22).

In addition there should be a proper maintenance of mass media equipment, tools and personnel. On the other hand in order to check the negative role of the media, members should be encouraged to put God first in everything and to do everything to God's glory. Seminars should be organized in which members are taught the benefit of the mass media to the church and how to enjoy these benefits fully.

Mass media units should be set up in various church congregations or assemblies. These units should ensure the effective use of mass media by the church, and also coordinate all related processes.

These suggestions, if implemented, could go a long way to sustain and in enhance the positive role of the mass media in church development in the twenty first century.

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