



## Appraisal of Public Relations Practices among Select Pentecostal Churches in South-South Nigeria: Techniques, Patterns and Gratifications

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The growth and influence of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers and Bayelsa States, underscore the importance of effective public relations practices. These churches face challenges in managing their image, communicating with diverse publics, and addressing misconceptions, highlighting the need for strategic public relations approaches.

**Objective:** This study appraised the public relations practices of select Pentecostal churches (The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Salvation Ministries) in Rivers and Bayelsa States, Nigeria, focusing on techniques, patterns, and gratifications.

**Method:** Anchored on Excellence, Social Exchange, and Relationship Management theories, the study employed a survey method. A sample of 400 was drawn from a population of 7,385,734 using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and Yin's Explanation Building Technique.

**Result:** Findings show that the churches adopted a multifaceted approach, with gratifications hinged on increased membership and widespread evangelism which yielded significant benefits, including increased membership, positive feedback, and a sustained membership base.

**Conclusion:** Pentecostal churches in the South-South region of Nigeria prioritise public relations, establishing dedicated full-time communication units and investing in them. Effective public relations efforts yield significant gratifications, emphasising the importance of strategic communication.

**Unique Contribution:** The study highlights the role of public relations in church growth and image management, emphasising the need for churches to invest in dedicated communication units.

**Key Recommendation:** Pentecostal churches should sustain investment in public relations units and diversify techniques beyond social media use, leveraging multiple mass communication channels to build a positive image and engage with their publics.

**Key Words:** Pentecostal churches, Public relations practices, South- South Nigeria, Bayelsa State, Rivers State



## INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, particularly in the South-South region, has led to increased competition for membership and influence (Onwe, et al., 2017). As these churches seek to expand their reach and maintain a positive image, effective public relations practices have become crucial. Public relations plays a vital role in shaping the image and reputation of organisations, including churches, by fostering relationships, managing communication, and addressing the needs of diverse publics (Ezike, et al., 2016). This is more so because churches are revered institutions, and as such, expected to embody the epitome of integrity, transparency, and compassion, making public relations a vital cog in shaping their image and reputation. In realisation of the above, Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have been at the forefront of using various communication channels to spread their message and attract followers. From social media to traditional media, these churches have leveraged multiple platforms to engage with their publics and promote their activities. This has become important in the light of the heightened perceived commercialisation of churches and the performance index of the role churches are meant to perform.

The South-South region of Nigeria, comprising states such as Rivers and Bayelsa, is a hub of Pentecostal activity, with numerous churches and ministries vying for attention. The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Salvation Ministries are among the prominent ones with significant presence in the region. Meanwhile, the communication landscape in the area is complex, with diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious influences (Aligwe, & Nwafor, 2016). Pentecostal churches operating in this region must navigate these complexities to effectively engage with their publics and maintain a positive image. This requires a deep understanding of the local context, including the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape public opinion and behaviour. By adopting a nuanced approach to public relations, Pentecostal churches can build trust, credibility, and loyalty among their followers, while also addressing the criticisms and concerns of their detractors.

Meanwhile, scholars such Nwafor, et al., (2023), Aligwe, et al., (2017) and Gilaninia, Taleghani, & Mohammadi, (2016) have looked at the relevance of public relations to organisations, however, only a few studies (Tilson, 2011; Ugwuanyi & Odigbo, 2012) have looked at the relevance of public relations to religious organisations among which none seems to have identified the patterns and gratifications from public relations practice in the South-South Pentecostal churches; hence the need for this study.



## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the predominant public relations patterns and strategies adopted by Pentecostal churches in Rivers and Bayelsa states, Nigeria?
2. What gratifications do Pentecostal churches in Rivers and Bayelsa states derive from their application of public relations techniques and approaches?
3. To what extent do Pentecostal churches in Rivers and Bayelsa states utilize mass media channels to engage with their diverse publics?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the theories on which this study was hinged is the Social Exchange Theory. Social Exchange Theory (SET) emerged at the end of the 1950s and has since developed into a large body of research on social behaviour. The theory has been widely used to explain both utilitarian and sociological views on relations within social networks (Blau, 2017; DeLamater & Ward, 2013). The emergence and the development of the theory were largely attributed to the works of John Thibaut, George Homans, Peter Blau and Harold Kelley. The theory postulates that resources are exchanged based on the subjective cost-reward analysis (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Such an analysis is contingent on two main conditions defining the decision of the person to perform exchange relations. These conditions are: the degree to which a similar performance has been rewarded to a person or other people in the past and, the degree to which the result of the exchange is valuable to a person (Blau, 2017).

This is generally attributed to Homans's views that the more often individuals receive a reward for an action, the more likely they will engage in future actions under similar conditions (Homans, 1961). Cost and benefit factors in the social exchange are different from the economic exchange, as the conditions and obligations are not clearly specified (Blau, 2017). People have developed mental matrices on the balance of rewards-costs in relations that underpin decision making (Hoffman, McCabe & Smith, 1998). On the one hand, reciprocity represents the norm defining beliefs about the outcome of exchange and motivating behaviour. People embark on relations with an expectation that the favour (i.e. contributions to relations) will be returned, though without the requirement to do it immediately. The lack of a specific time-frame of the return of favour makes social exchange long-term oriented (Molm, 1997). This expectation can be rooted in cultural norms or individual moral orientation revolving around the beliefs that the parties will reach a fair agreement, in which unfair treatment by a party will be punished, while fair treatment will be rewarded (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). On the other hand, the rule of reciprocity acts as a regulating mechanism, ensuring mutually rewarding relationships based on actors' interdependence (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).



In relation to the current study, the social exchange theory provides explanation on how the churches and the church members build relationships by exchanging intangible rewards like a sense of belonging or spiritual fulfilment, etc. for costs like time or emotional effort, etc. fostering reciprocity and commitment when benefits outweigh costs.

As the world becomes increasingly connected, the role of public relations is becoming more important than ever. Public relations professionals help organizations and individuals communicate with the publics, build relationships and manage their reputations (Nwafor, et al., 2020). In a modern society, public relations are essential for businesses and organizations of all sizes. PR helps promote a product or service, build brand awareness, and manage customer or client relationships. It also helps organisations navigate crises and protect their reputation. For individuals, public relations help build and maintain a positive image. It can also help individuals navigate difficult situations, such as a media scandal.

Overall, public relations in modern society helps businesses and organizations communicate effectively, build strong relationships, and protect their reputations. For individuals, PR can help build and maintain a positive image. A question that many commentators ask of publicists is how public relations has changed and what comprises the most effective public relations playbook right now. The answer is largely determined by looking at what type of outcome a client seeks and the right playbook is one that is tailored to the specific needs of the client. It should be comprehensive and cover all aspects of the public relations process, from media relations to community outreach.

The most effective public relations playbook is one that is developed by a team of experienced public relations professionals (Nwafor, 2019). It should be heavily researched and based on best practices. It should be constantly updated and revised as new challenges and opportunities arise, as the media sphere is constantly changing as new channels to market are created (Adrian, 2022). The benefits of public relations are many and varied. By definition, public relations is the strategic management of communication between an organization and its publics. The aim of public relations is to build relationships with key stakeholders, manage reputation and create a positive image for the organisation.

According to John (2022), the public relations industry is under pressure as it faces a number of challenges. The first is the rise of social media. Social media has given rise to a new breed of customers, one who is more informed and more demanding. ] The second challenge is the increasing skepticism of the public. In an age of fake news and alternative facts, the public is increasingly skeptical of anything they read, see, or hear. This makes it harder for public relations firms to get their message across. The third challenge is the rise of activist investors. Activist investors are those who buy up shares in a company in order to force change. They are often critical of the way public relations firms operate and are pushing for more transparency. The fourth challenge is the changing media landscape. The traditional media is under pressure as more and more people consume news online. This has made it harder for public relations firms to reach their target audience. The fifth challenge is the increasing regulation of the industry. The public relations industry is now subject to a number of regulations, including the recently introduced General Data Protection Regulation.



As millennial fever hit some areas with the radical preaching of certain heretics, along with it came the restoration of the role of the prophet. This was more than just the use of encouraging ‘prophetic’ ministry, but was the adoption of Elijah type characteristics by certain men, seeking to dominate people, churches or even whole towns in the case of Munster. The tools of such quacks were: visions, dreams, revelations, prophecies, pronouncements and predictions, which all helped to tailor their authoritarianism. Not all people were as wild as Thomas Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets, proposing war against the opposition, but many became ‘inspirationists’ who followed a subjective spiritual feeling which gave them assurances and emotional tingles. The false exuberance, despotic leadership and erroneous doctrine of these extremists caused both reformers and Roman Catholics to fear and persecute all Anabaptists, tarring all with the same brush. Godly men and women suffered persecution as a result of the extravagances of the prophetic heretics.

It is important for us to realise that what was passed on in Pentecostal missions was not a doctrine, even a doctrine about an experience; it was the experience itself, passed on by the laying on of hands. The same excesses which Azusa Street gained from the Shakers via the Holiness Movement were passed on to centres world-wide. It was the spiritual power called ‘the anointing’ which was transmitted from one person to another which led to the international spread of Pentecostalism, not truth or ecclesiastical distinctives.

In realising the key doctrinal basis of early and later Pentecostalism, Synan (2017) admits that, ‘many “winds of doctrine” blew at Azusa Street’ but identifies five major teachings of Azusa Street to include: Justification by faith, Sanctification as a definite work of grace; (a second work, the imparting of a new life to the believer), the baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in other tongues, divine healing ‘as in the atonement’ (i.e. automatically available at any time for a saved person, and the personal premillennial rapture of the saints at the second coming of Christ.

This basis formed a standard for the first wave of Pentecostals, but would also apply to several current denominations e.g: the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and the Church of God in Christ. Furthermore, Pentecostalism continued in the Arminianism of the Holiness Movement thus abandoning the historically sound theology of the Reformers. All the criticisms of Arminianism apply also to Pentecostalism.

Many other Pentecostals, especially those which originally came from a Baptist background, believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit can happen to any believer, without a special prior sanctification experience. Examples would be the Assemblies of God and Elim (UK). World-wide, the AOG has recently followed the Toronto experience and fallen into many deviations so that, in Australia, whole congregations have withdrawn from the denomination. The Elim church has also endorsed Toronto and Word Faith teachers like Morris Cerullo. Some Elim churches are now becoming virtual Word Faith centres (like Kensington Temple), adopting stranger and stranger practices, experiences and teaching.

The third main grouping is the anti-Trinitarian Oneness Pentecostals (also known as ‘Jesus Only’ or ‘Apostolic Pentecostals’). These believe that in the early Christian church, baptism was in the





name of Jesus Christ only. They do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity. When this group arose in 1916, a crisis developed in the Assemblies of God over these new beliefs. The AOG remained Trinitarian, both in its baptismal formula and its concept of deity, but almost 200 pastors left as a result. The United Pentecostal Church and the Pentecostal Assemblies of The World are the main Oneness Pentecostal denominations.

Patrick (2017) did a work on “The Impact of Public Relations on Church Growth in the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Cross Rivers State.” The study averred that church is a gathering or an assembly of people or believers in the name of Jesus Christ who joined together for the purpose, aspiration and fellowship as well as worshipping God. The findings of this study from the analysed data showed that in applying public relations strategies it includes identifying the publics, drawing systematic plans and preparing budget for the evaluation process of the church growth. The study concluded that public relations impact positively in the monumental of church growth according to the redeemed Christian church if God. It recommends that in order for the Redeemed Christian Church of God to be in order, it must always keep its public relations machinery active and functional. The relationship between this study and the present study is that both looks out public relations as a tool for church growth but the specificity of this study is in the appraisal of public relations practices among selected Pentecostal churches in South-South Nigeria.

James and Ogedebe (2012) carried out a study on “The Role of Public Relations in a Non-Governmental Organization: A Study of select Churches in Maiduguri”. This study averred that public relations is concerned with how and what others think about you as an individual or an organization. The method of data collection used in this research is self-administered questionnaire which comprises four questions on various aspect relating to the topic of study. The study identified finance as the major problem associated with the practice of public relations in churches. The study concluded that public relations is not applied by many churches in Maiduguri, this is as a result of low level of education on the part of our Christian leaders. The study identified the following: Ignorance of the role of public relations in a Christian was seen as a problem, the use of media (public relations) by the Christian churches was also necessary especially during visitation to the orphanage, and each department in our Christian church should have a public relations unit that is active. The relationship between this study and the present study is both looks at the involvement of public relations in our different churches but the specificity of the present study will look at an appraisal of public relations practices among selected Pentecostal churches in South-South in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study due to its peculiarity. Burns and Grove (2003) assert that the purpose of a descriptive research is to examine a phenomenon that is occurring at a specific place and time. The population of the study was in two streams. The first stream comprised the population of members of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Salvation Ministries in Rivers State and Bayelsa State. According to the Public Relations Officials in the aforementioned churches, RCCG, Rivers State has a population of 3,076,435; and RCCG, Bayelsa State has a population of 1,296,147. Salvation Ministries, Rivers



State has a population of 2,394,737; while Salvation Ministries, Bayelsa State has a population of 618,415. The population of the first stream of the study therefore comprised the total sum of the members of the churches which is 7,385,734.

The second stream of population comprised the staff of the Public Relations Unit of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Salvation Ministries in Rivers State and Bayelsa State. According to the Public Relations Officials in the churches, RCCG, Rivers State has a population of 121; and RCCG, Bayelsa State has a population of 67. Salvation Ministries, Rivers State has a population of 73; while Salvation Ministries, Bayelsa State has a population of 47. The population of the second stream of the study therefore comprised the total sum of the staff of the Public Relations Unit of the churches which is 3

For the first stream of the study, the sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula stated as follows.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where

n - Sample size

N - population of the study

I - constant

e - degree or error expected

To determine the number of employees to be included in our study, formula below was used:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \\ &= \frac{7,385,734}{1 + 7,385,734(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{7,385,734}{1 + 7,385,734(0.0025)} \\ &= \frac{7,385,734}{1 + 18,464.35} = \frac{7,385,734}{18,465.35} \\ &= 399.987 \\ &= 400 \end{aligned}$$

A proportionate distribution of the sample in the states was given thus:



**Table 1: Proportionate Distribution of Sample**

S/N	State	Population	Sample	Percentage (%)
1	RCCG, Rivers State	3,076,435	167	41.8
2	RCCG, Bayelsa State	1,296,147	70	17.5
3	Salvation Ministries, Rivers State	2,394,737	130	32.5
4	Salvation Ministries, Bayelsa State	618,415	33	8.3
<b>Total</b>		7,385,734	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

The data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire and interview guide. Face and content validation of the instruments was done by the supervisors. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the coefficient was 0.89, indicating the reliability of the instrument

The Pearson formula is given as:

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2] [N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where  $r$  = correlation;  $X$  and  $Y$  = original scores;  $N$  = Number of pairs of scores and  $\sum$  = summation symbol.

Data were presented in frequency tables and analyzed using simple percentage for items that had **yes** or **no** responses. The items that were structured on the 4-point Likert scale was analyzed using the weighted mean score with 2.5 as the criterion mean. Qualitative data from the oral interview and the open-ended items were analyzed using Yin's Explanation Building Technique

## Results and Discussion

**Table 2: Public relations patterns in The Redeemed Christian Church of God**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
We engage in community outreach programmes	111	69	36	18	234	741	3.2	Agreed





We occasionally engage in content marketing in our church	24	29	79	102	234	386	1.6	Disagreed
There is a team of professionals that manage online reviews and feedbacks	140	54	29	11	234	791	3.4	Agreed
There is a uniform PR pattern in all our church branches nationwide	104]	71	35	24	234	723	3.1	Agreed
My church utilizes the public information system to reach out to the public	113	66	36	19	234	741	3.2	Agreed
Evangelism is a pattern mainly used for public relations in my church	99	83	31	21	234	728	3.1	Agreed

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With a weighted mean score of 3.4, it is agreed that there is a team of professionals that manage online reviews and feedbacks in The Redeemed Christian Church of God. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.6, it is disagreed that the church occasionally engages in content marketing in the church



## RESULT

**Table 3: Public relations patterns in Salvation Ministries**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
We engage in community outreach programs	81	41	26	10	158	509	3.2	Agreed
We occasionally engage in content marketing in our church	11	21	47	79	158	280	1.8	Disagreed
There is a team of professionals that manage online reviews and feedbacks	68	59	20	11	158	500	3.2	Agreed
There is a uniform PR pattern in all our church branches nationwide	76	52	23	7	158	513	3.2	Agreed
My church utilizes the public information system to reach out to the public	85	39	23	11	158	514	3.3	Agreed
Evangelism is a pattern mainly used for public relations in my church	73	53	18	14	158	501	3.2	Agreed

With a weighted mean score of 3.3, it is agreed that Salvation Ministries utilizes the public information system to reach out to the public. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.8, it is disagreed that the church occasionally engages in content marketing in our church.



**Table 4: Gratifications from Public Relations in The Redeemed Christian Church of God**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
Our church's public relations efforts lead to large increase in membership.	116	61	42	15	234	746	3.2	Agreed
We receive a lot of positive feedback from the public.	98	83	43	10	234	737	3.1	Agreed
Our public relations efforts lead to a sustained membership base for the church.	118	71	32	13	234	762	3.3	Agreed
The public relations unit in our church contribute to the financial stability and independence of the church.	21	36	59	118	234	428	1.8	Disagreed

With a weighted mean score of 3.3 it is agreed that the public relations efforts of The Redeemed Christian Church of God lead to a sustained membership base for the church. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.8, it is disagreed that the public relations unit in the church contributes to the financial stability and independence of the church.



**Table 5: Gratifications from Public Relations in Salvation Ministries**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
Our church's public relations efforts lead to large increase in membership.	73	42	29	14	158	490	3.1	Agreed
We receive a lot of positive feedback from the public.	81	33	28	16	158	495	3.1	Agreed
Our public relations efforts lead to a sustained membership base for the church.	73	49	24	12	158	499	3.2	Agreed
The public relations unit in our church contribute to the financial stability and independence of the church.	19	22	49	168	158	308	1.9	Disagreed

With a weighted mean score of 3.2, it is agreed that the public relations efforts of Salvation Ministries lead to a sustained membership base for the church. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.9, it is disagreed that the public relations unit in the church contributes to the financial stability and independence of the church.

**Table 6: Extent of Mass Media Utilization for public relations in The Redeemed Christian Church of God**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
My church utilizes mass media channels such as newspaper, radio and television extensively.	95	80	46	13	234	725	3.1	Agreed
Our church rarely uses mass media channels for outreach	13	24	74	123	234	395	1.7	Disagreed
We depend solely on our private mass media channels outside the public media when reaching out to the public	17	34	69	114	234	422	1.8	Disagreed



With a weighted mean score of 3.1, it is agreed that The Redeemed Christian Church of God utilizes mass media channels such as newspaper, radio and television extensively. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.7, it is disagreed that the church rarely uses mass media channels for outreach.

**Table 7: Extent of Mass Media Utilization for public relations in Salvation Ministries**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\Sigma$	Mean	Remark
My church utilizes mass media channels such as newspaper, radio and television extensively.	79	44	21	14	158	504	3.2	Agreed
Our church rarely uses mass media channels for outreach	10	18	36	94	158	260	1.6	Disagreed
We depend solely on our private mass media channels outside the public media when reaching out to the public	15	24	49	70	158	300	1.9	Disagreed

With a weighted mean score of 3.2, it is agreed that Salvation Ministries utilizes mass media channels such as newspaper, radio and television extensively. However, with a weighted mean score of 1.6, it is disagreed that the church rarely uses mass media channels for outreach.

**Research question 1: What public relations patterns are adopted by Pentecostal churches in their day-to-day operations?**

According to Tables 2 and 3, community outreach programmes are a significant public relations pattern, with a mean score of 3.2 for both RCCG and Salvation Ministries indicating agreement. This suggests that engaging with the community is an essential aspect of public relations for these churches. The data show a mean score of 3.4 for RCCG and 3.2 for Salvation Ministries, indicating that many churches have a team of professionals dedicated to this task. This highlights the importance of online presence and reputation management in the public relations strategies of these churches.

Both churches utilize a uniform public relations pattern across their branches nationwide, with a mean score of 3.1 for RCCG and 3.2 for Salvation Ministries. This suggests a level of standardization and coordination in their public relations efforts, ensuring consistency across different locations. In addition to community outreach and online management, the churches also leverage the public information system to reach out to the public, with a mean score of 3.2 for RCCG and 3.3 for Salvation Ministries. This indicates that these churches recognize the value of



using public information systems as a tool for public relations. Evangelism is another significant public relations pattern adopted by these churches, with a mean score of 3.1 for RCCG and 3.2 for Salvation Ministries. This suggests that Pentecostal churches view evangelism not only as a core religious activity but also as an essential aspect of their public relations strategy.

Results suggest that RCCG and Salvation Ministries adopt a multifaceted approach to public relations, incorporating community outreach, online management, uniform patterns, public information systems and evangelism. These patterns highlight the churches' efforts to engage with their audience, manage their reputation, and promote their message effectively.

These findings can be linked to the relationship management theory, which emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). The data suggests that community outreach programs are a significant public relations pattern, with a mean score of 3.2 in both churches, indicating that these churches prioritize engaging with their community to build relationships and foster mutual understanding. This approach is consistent with the relationship management theory, which posits that organisations can build strong relationships with their stakeholders by engaging in behaviours that demonstrate mutual understanding and benefit (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

The excellence theory, which emphasizes the importance of strategic communication and stakeholder engagement, also provides a relevant framework for understanding the public relations patterns in these churches (Grunig, 1992). The data suggests that Pentecostal churches adopt a multifaceted approach to public relations, incorporating community outreach, online management, uniform patterns, public information systems, and evangelism. This approach is consistent with the excellence theory, which posits that organisations should strive for excellence in their communication efforts by engaging in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation (Grunig, 1992).

The use of online reviews and feedback management, with a mean score of 3.4 for RCCG and 3.2 for Salvation Ministries, also highlights the importance of reputation management in the public relations strategies of these churches. This approach is consistent with the relationship management theory, which emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining a positive reputation with key stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Leveraging public information systems and adopting uniform public relations patterns across their branches demonstrate a commitment to strategic communication and stakeholder engagement, which is central to the excellence theory (Grunig, 1992).

The emphasis on evangelism as a public relations pattern, also highlights the importance of communication in building relationships and promoting the church's message. This approach is consistent with the relationship management theory, which posits that organisations can build strong relationships with their stakeholders by communicating effectively and demonstrating mutual understanding and benefit (Hon & Grunig, 1999).





**Research question 2: What gratifications do Pentecostal churches in South-South derive from their application of PR techniques and approaches?**

According to the results on Table 4 and 5, one key gratification is the significant increase in membership, with a mean score of 3.2 in RCCG and 3.1 in Salvation Ministries, indicating agreement. This suggests that churches' public relations efforts are effective in attracting new members. Another gratification is the positive feedback received from the public, with a mean score of 3.1 in both churches. This indicates agreement, suggesting that public relations efforts are yielding positive outcomes in terms of public perception.

The data also reveals that public relations efforts lead to a sustained membership base for the church, with a mean score of 3.3 in RCCG and 3.2 Salvation Ministries, indicating agreement. This implies that churches' public relations strategies not only attract new members but also help retain existing ones, contributing to a stable membership base. However, the contribution of the public relations unit to the financial stability and independence of the church is less clear. With a mean score of 1.8 and 1.9 for RCCG and Salvation Ministries respectively, the data suggests agreement, but given the scoring pattern, this seems inconsistent.

Despite the inconsistency in the financial stability aspect, the overall data suggests that Pentecostal churches derive significant gratifications from their public relations efforts. These efforts lead to increased membership, positive feedback, and a sustained membership base, all of which are crucial for the growth and survival of the church.

The application of public relations techniques and approaches yields substantial benefits for Pentecostal churches in the South-South region.

**Research question 3: How well do Pentecostal churches in Rivers and Bayelsa States utilize the mass media in relating with their various publics?**

The research question seeks to determine how well RCCG and Salvation Ministries in Rivers and Bayelsa States, utilize mass media in relating with their various publics. According to Tables 6 and 7, churches extensively utilize mass media channels such as newspapers, radio, and television, with a mean score of 3.1 and 3.2 for RCCG and Salvation Ministries respectively indicating strong agreement. This suggests that mass media plays a significant role in the public relations strategies of these churches.

The data also reveals that churches rarely use mass media channels for outreach, with a mean score of 1.7 for RCCG and 1.6 for Salvation Ministries, indicating disagreement. This further supports the notion that mass media is a vital component of churches' public relations efforts, helping them reach a wider audience. Moreover, the table shows that churches do not depend solely on their private mass media channels outside the public media when reaching out to the public, with a mean score of 1.8 for RCCG and 1.9 for Salvation Ministries indicating strong disagreement. This implies that churches recognize the value of public media channels in reaching a broader audience and prefer to utilize these channels extensively. The extensive use of mass media channels by Pentecostal churches suggests a strategic approach to public relations.



Churches can increase their visibility, reach a larger audience, and promote their message effectively through the mass media.

The findings also imply that churches understand the importance of mass media in shaping public opinion and perception. Through the utilization of mass media channels extensively, churches build positive image, address misconceptions and engage with their publics more effectively. Pentecostal churches in the South-South region demonstrate a high level of mass media utilization in their public relations efforts. This strategic approach enables them to reach a wider audience, build their image, and promotes their message effectively, ultimately contributing to their growth and success.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study looked at the public relations capacities and potentials of Pentecostal churches using The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Salvation Ministries Church in Rivers and Bayelsa states. Findings showed that Pentecostal churches adopt a multifaceted approach to public relations, incorporating community outreach, online management, uniform patterns, public information systems, and evangelism to engage with their audience and promote their message. Pentecostal churches derive significant gratifications from their public relations efforts, including increased membership, positive feedback, and a sustained membership base, which are crucial for the growth and survival of the church. It was also found that Pentecostal churches in the South-South region extensively utilize mass communication channels such as newspapers, radio, and television, demonstrating a strategic approach to public relations that enables them to reach a wider audience and promote their message effectively.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that Pentecostal churches in the South-South region prioritize public relations, establishing dedicated units and invest in full-time teams. These units are functional, with many churches striving for effectiveness in their public relations efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Pentecostal churches should continue investing in their public relations units to enhance effectiveness and maintain functional teams. Regular training and capacity-building programmes can help public relations teams stay updated on best practices.
2. Pentecostal churches should consider diversifying their public relations techniques beyond social media engagement, exploring media pitching, influencer partnerships, and crisis communication to enhance their image and audience reach. Developing a comprehensive public relations strategy can help churches achieve their goals more effectively.
2. Pentecostal churches should continue utilizing mass media channels effectively, exploring new ways to reach a wider audience and promote their message. Building strong relationships with media professionals can help churches secure more coverage and build a positive image. This research highlights the significance of community outreach, online management, and mass media utilization in public relations strategies, providing valuable lessons for other non-profit organizations.



### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Vivian Albert Amadi conceived and conducted the study, including the design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and wrote the initial manuscript under the guidance and supervision of Godwin Bassey Okon, Richard Nlemanyam Amadi and Barigbon Gbara Nsereka. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Data availability statement**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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