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**AN APPRAISAL OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC  
RELATIONS TECHNIQUES IN PROMOTING PASTORAL  
COMMUNICATION AT THE GRASSROOTS**

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**Abstract**

The desire to win souls for Christ is a cordial objective of the church. This is to fulfill the injunction given to the disciples by Christ himself when he said: "Go ye to all nations preaching the Good News" (the salvation to mankind). However, carrying out this divine duty has not been an easy task. Those specifically commissioned by the church face various challenges in their bid to carry out this responsibility. At many instances, public relations techniques are applied. This study examines the effectiveness of those public relations techniques in grassroots evangelism. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using the survey method of data gathering, with questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The data analyzed were presented in simple percentages and tables. At the end it was found that majority of the priests sampled have engaged in one form of evangelization or the other using public relations principles. And that public relations techniques can serve as effective approaches in grassroots evangelism.

**Key Words: Public Relations, Pastoral Communication. The Grassroots.**

## **Introduction**

The quest to preach the gospel to all nations has resulted to the proliferation of churches all over the world. However, what is worrisome is the concentration of churches in urban areas as against those at the grassroots - the periphery of the society. This group of people constitutes a larger majority compared to what is obtainable in the cities. Yet, they are, in most cases, far from the tenets of the scripture; though they are the ones that need it most. Hence, there is need for proper evangelization of the people at the grassroots.

It is this desire to change mankind into better beings that has engendered the proliferation of churches - an organized body where people come together to worship their God and listen to the scripture (the Good News). However, this approach has not really proved very effective in eliciting the desired response needed from the people, especially those at the grassroots, due to the image they have of the church. It has been argued, therefore, that evangelization at the grassroots would be effective if the church bear in mind the challenges of those at the grassroots. By identifying these challenges, the Church can then find a way to create the needed relationship and goodwill with the people which would help their acceptance of the gospel. This approach is synonymous with the tenet of public relations (PR).

Supporting the need to employ public relations in the spread of the gospel, Ebebe (1996, p.6) opines that:

*Presently, there are many guises in the name of Christ, thieves stand on the highways to steal dressed in religious habits. Different types of money hunters clutch the Bible in the pretence of preaching the Good News. Many, concealed hypocrites are 'working' miracles, pronouncing the name of Christ while actually manipulating the situation in one way or the other. These satanic activities are not fruits of the gospel while pretending to be.*

" Ebebe's position pin-points the power of public relations in projecting the church in good light by upholding the truth as it is contained in the Bible. The public relations activity needed in this case is that of projecting the truth from the scripture with the sole aim of winning souls for Christ. It equally involves restoring the good image to the Christendom from which others will see the actions of the church and its followers and turn a new leaf. The emphasis here

is on deeds as against words. As St. James would say... let us be doers and not just hearers of the word (James 1:22). Menkir (1992, p.85) captured the essence of this statement when he wrote that:

*The content of Christian communication should recognize that the gospel is not so much about what God has said as about what God has done. Even when the Bible seems to emphasize a word, it is in so far as words shade into deeds. Words were not simply sounds that could be lost on the desert air; they were deeds which changed the course of events.*

Given this background, evangelization in the modern world cannot be limited to mere words as the 'fakes' do to their unsuspecting audience. Rather it will involve a conscious effort geared toward winning souls for Christ by telling people much about the good news and the need to seek first the kingdom of God. Using the principles of PR, the church can build a good image for itself and in that process capture the interest of those that are the target of evangelization. In fact, all the votes about public relations are tailored towards creating favourable image. However, one can say that the premise to maintain good image began with God. Jesus laid emphasis of good image when he opined that; "ye are the light of the world... let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven" (Mathew 5:14).

Therefore, it can be said that the hallmark of public relations and evangelization centres on interaction with people with the sole aim of winning favourable responses. While PR is a planned and conscious effort geared towards winning friends and creating goodwill through communication anchored on truth, knowledge and full information; evangelization also involves a conscious effort aimed at bringing the good news (truth, knowledge and full information) to people with the aim of winning their friendship and goodwill for God.

Therefore, the essence of this study is to examine the effectiveness of public relations techniques in enhancing the proclamation of the "good news" to the people especially those at the grassroots.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Making people to accept an idea, value or attitude has never been easy. It is more difficult striving to make people to drop an existing value or idea for a new one. To convince someone to adopt such change of attitude requires explanation, clarification and above all, some measure of conviction. To achieve this does not only depend on what one says or does, but on how he says

and does it. That everyone is entitled to his faith testifies to the arduous nature of the process of evangelization. Understanding that religion is an obligation is the more reason why any attempt to ensure compliance on the part of members must attract some friendly, persuasive and non-coercive approach. This is in the domain of public relations practice which has in contemporary times, gained recognition by the church.

However, the Church has suffered some terrible image crisis as a result of the attitude of some preachers of the gospel and the parishioners. This image problem has made most people not to take seriously the issues of the good news, because they always consider the attitude of these preachers and believers as contrary to what they preach. The church, on their own part are not ignorant of this challenge, hence they have engaged in PR activities aimed at redeeming their image. But the extent to which the activities work for the church is yet to be ascertained.

Hence, this study sought to examine the effectiveness of public relations techniques in enhancing the proclamation of the 'good news' to the people. The specific purpose of the study were: To determine the extent PR has been used to achieve goodwill and positive image within Christendom; to establish whether PR has been effectively employed over the years by the church in preaching the message; to find out the extent PR could be employed in achieving grassroots evangelization; and to examine the specific public relations strategies likely to enhance grassroots evangelization.

The study was guided by the following research questions: To what extent has public relations been used to achieve goodwill and positive image within Christendom? How effective is the • public relations strategy already employed by most evangelists in their bid to preach the message? To what extent can public relations be used to achieve grassroots evangelization? What specific public relations strategies are likely to enhance grassroots evangelization?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Public Relations in the Church***

Public relations in the church is another way of saying that public relations can perform a tremendous role in the church. This idea has been made manifest by the work of various scholars in the field.

Ebebe Okechukwu in his work of 1996 entitled *Public Relations in the Church: a Case Study of the Catholic Diocese of Awka* established that public relations can be very useful in the

church. Using survey method, Ebebe studied the opinions of clergy and laity of the diocese of Awka. Having presented two sets of questionnaire, one for the priest and the other for the parishioners, he observed that "the public relations goals of a human service organization (such as the church) is to enhance the publics' understanding of the organization's purposes; to educate the public about the organization's contribution to the community; and to promote the public support for the organization". He added that "the church like any other human service organization seeks to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of her actual and potential members. It also seeks audience with the acceptance of lapsed member of the church and separated brethren (Ebebe, 1996).

Writing further, Ebebe notes that public relations is so important in the church especially in the areas of using public relations in enhancing interaction at the grassroots, ensuring crisis resolution and the extension of charitable works to the people at the rural areas. The researcher noted that:

*Traditionally, cases needing the parish attention would first be handled by a committee or council to which the parish priest may or may not be a member. The report of the committee or council next goes officially to the office of the parish priest. If the matter is not resolved at this level, the issue is transferred to the diocesan level, through the office of the Bishop • who may refer the case to a diocesan council or committee before making his authoritative statement on the issue.*

Parish crises and conflicts are best resolved at the parish level with the parish priests working in close union with the bishop who as it were is the first parish priest of every parish in his diocese. He concluded that since the church does a lot of public relations activities for the people, and cannot but continue to do so, it is therefore imperative for the church to exist for the effective spreading of the good news...; the church therefore ought to create public relations office for the co-ordination of her public relation activities.

Another study which illuminates the importance of public relations in the church is the work of Nzewi Iruoma (1992) entitled; "The nature of Public Relations Practice in *Public Relations Practice in Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria*;: A .Need for a more *Organized Set-up*. Using a combination of the survey and participant observation methods, the researcher was able to study five selected Pentecostal churches, with the view of eliciting relevant

information from the authorities of the church and obtaining information based on observation.

In his work, Nzewi (1992, p.82) stated categorically that "the need for public relations department in the church cannot be undermined." He further noted that:

*Inasmuch as the church sees nothing wrong with the duties of public relation in establishing a department, looking into the scripture, it sees the bible as a way of doing it as ideal. In other words, the greatest way any church can do PR is to Perform Miracles, heal the sick and bless the lives of people. In doing this, the final objective of public relations is realized-winning people by projecting an image that will appeal to them.*

The researcher was able to discover in the course of his study that Pentecostalism is fast spreading in the country like wildfire, as a result of the biblical prophecies pointing to this period and secondly as a result of evangelism and preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders and miracles. Nzewi's study revealed that although almost all the principles of public relations are adapted by the church, such principles are:

*(a) Hardly linked or classified as public relations jobs, (b) Not carried out under an official department (PR) specifically designated for PR jobs, (c) Usually, where the knowledge of proper and professional PR is found in the churches, the hands of these people are tied and the boldness to come up with PR packages is not there because the church orientation has no room for worldly things such as PR*

However, the researcher noted that some churches see the importance of public relations department in the church especially as it relates to press relations; counseling based on understanding of human behavior and encouraging church members and leaders to get into donations and other kinds of help for community organizations, etc. It is, therefore, obvious that public relations can serve as a veritable tool in the church, if properly employed in the preaching of the gospel (Nzewi, 1992).

Similarly, Chukwuka Madubike in 1991 conducted a research work titled "*The Need for an Organized Public Relations Unit in the Nigerian Province of Holy Ghost-Congregation*", where he sampled the opinions of 25 respondents from the church. The study revealed that not much is known about the work of the spiritans in the course of

spreading the gospel. And going by the opinions of these sampled, almost all the people interviewed agreed that there is need for an organized public relations unit in the church.

The researcher, therefore, recommended that there should be an organized public relations unit to co-ordinate all the public relations activities that have been going on in the congregation (Church) (Madubike, 1991).

### **Public Relations and Evangelization**

The church is an organised body. Most of its activities are communication based; hence the need for a better approach in reaching out to the people. Considering also the nature of the message of evangelization in the church, it becomes imperative to use public relations strategies in effecting such communication.

The Bible has it that most people who heard the message of salvation did not believe in the time of John the Baptist. However, Jesus Christ came with His own style of preaching the good news which was characterized with elements of public relations strategies. The scripture has it that Jesus went about doing good (Act 10:38). It was until he started performing miracles that the people followed him in large crowd. He attracted the people with good works and then told them about God. Many believed in Him as the scripture noted. His PR was so striking to the extent that many got attracted to him for the reason of the physical benefit to the extent that he had to complain "you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted..."(John 6:26).

Those who took after Christ continued the spread of the gospel through good works. The early Christians were called Christians in Antioch due to their Godly disposition. In this case, the nature of life they lived was a replica of the way Christ passed his own message of repentance and love. Speaking on public relations in the church, Ebebe (1996: 24-25) avers that:

*Christianity has been spread through the most attractive and effective public relations platforms like the establishment of educational centres for the populace, provision of food and clothing, tract and gift to all in the bid to win souls. These acclaimed public relations strategies were undertaken in the spirit of authentic interpretation of the will of the founder of Christianity who went about doing good.*

*Those good things he did when he physically walked the earth included feeding the humble and the lowly, curing the sick, consoling the desolate and teaching the people. Christ shared the joys of humility to the extent of attending the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, where he turned water to wine. He equally shared the sorrows of mankind to the extent of shedding tears for his friend Lazarus, a fact that constitutes the shortest verse in the Bible: 'Jesus wept'. We also remember that it was Christ who said: 'Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven'. (Matt. 5:16)*

Therefore, public relations are not a new concept in Christianity. In fact, people have argued that PR and Christianity are interwoven. Though the level of modification in modern public relations as applied in the church as an organization has improved greatly, that notwithstanding, good works cannot be divorced from the dictates of 'good news' either directly or indirectly. The Church has always recognized good relationships among the people of God as always better way to work out one's faith in God (Ebebe, 1996).

The church is now central in the day –to- activities of the people and needs a better approach in the maintenance of mutual understanding between the people and the church. No doubt, public relations is the approach that can help the church to maintain goodwill with the people while preaching the 'good news.'

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This research work was built on a mass communication theory known as the Psychodynamic theory. This theory was propounded by Melvin Defleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach (1975) and it is of the opinion that for a message to have effect on the target audience, given that it is persuasive in nature, such message must have an impact on the psychological make-up of the individuals or audiences.

Writing on this theory, Folarin (1998,p.74) avers that for a persuasive message to be considered effective, it must succeed in altering the psychological functioning of the recipients in such a way that he or she or they will respond overtly with theories of behavior desired or suggested by the communication. Folarin (1998,p74) quoting Roger Brown noted that



“persuasion is when a message highlights the interest of the receiver or mutual interest of the source and receiver.”

This theory is of the opinion that a persuasive message can only be effective if and only if the interest of the receiver is taken into consideration.. on the other hand, evangelization which is practically a persuasive process based on both verbal and nonverbal communication, is a concept that is preached in the interest of those targeted, since the ultimate aim is to make mankind win salvation.

Therefore, this theory is of immense relevance to the research study since it proposes that all messages (good news), disseminated in the course of evangelization should bear in mind the ultimate good of the people and not the selfish interest of the evangelists, the church or the individual evangelizing.

### **Methodology**

The research design for this work is survey method. Writing on the importance of survey research. Osuala (2005. P.254) opines that the focus of survey is “on people, the vital facts of people, and their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations, and behaviour”. The population is all priests gainfully piloting the cause of evangelization in the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka totaling 190.

*In* adopting the appropriate sample for this study, the view of Nwora (1981, p. 81) was considered. According to him, "if the population is a few 100. a 40 percentage or more samples will do; if many hundreds, a 20 percentage sample will do: if a few thousand, a 5 percent or fewer samples will do". In line with the above statement, a sample of 100 respondents was used to represent a total of 190 priests in the diocese for the purpose of this study. The first stage of the sample involved stratifying the diocese into 9 in Line with the deaneries in the Diocese. The deaneries consist of parishes as indicated below:

Deaneries and number of parishes

Adani = = =7 parishes

Enugu-Ezike Ogrute = 8 parishes

Enugu-EzikeAji	=	=	8 parishes
Ibagwa-Ani	=	=	5 parishes
Ibagwa-Aka	=	=	6 parishes
Ikem	=	=	5 parishes
Aku	=	=	5 parishes
Obollo-Afor	=	=	12 parishes
Nsukka	=	=	12 parishes

Using quota sampling technique, a total of 10 respondents were drawn from parishes under Adani, Enugu-Ezike Ogrute, Enugu-Ezike Aji parish, Ibagwa-Ani, Ibagwa-Aka, Deem and Aku while a total of 15 respondents were drawn from parishes under Obollo-Afor and Nsukka respectively due to their larger number. Individual respondents involved in the study were randomly selected.

The questionnaire was adopted in this study as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was constructed in simple English and contained close and open ended questions to elicit ideas and feelings from respondents. The questionnaire is divided into three parts with section A containing the bio-data of the respondents, section B containing the means of social communication in the dioceses and section C providing answers to the research questions raised.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

### ***Demographic Data***

This study observed that out of 100 copies of questionnaire distributed only 96 copies were retrieved, k means that only 96 copies were returned, thereby, yielding a 96% response rate, which are represented in the table below.

**Table 1: Age of Respondents**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	24	25
31-40	56	58.3
41-50	8	8.3
51-60	8	8.3
61 -above	-	-
Total	96	100

Table 1 above is the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' age bracket. Twenty-four respondents amounting to 25 percent fall within the age range of 21-30. Fifty-six respondents which amounted to 58.3 percent belong to 31-40 age groups. Whereas those within the age group of 41 -50 and 51 -60 have 8 and 8 respondents respectively which amounted to 8.3 percent for both while those within the age grade of 61-above have no representation in the distribution.

### **Psychographic data (Research Questions)**

This section provided answer to the research questions raised in the course of this study. Its focus was basically on the issue of evangelization especially at the grassroots.

**Table 2: Showing whether PR can be used for grassroots evangelization**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Yes</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>No</b>	-	-
<b>Can't say</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

Ninety-six respondents in the table above agreed that public relations techniques can be used in the course of grassroots evangelization whereas, no one shared a disagreement. This means that public relations techniques are effective means of *grassroots* evangelization.

**Table 3: Showing the type(s) of public relations techniques that can be employed in grassroots evangelization**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Persuasive Communication	80	83.3
Attending to community matters	72	75
Use of charitable organization in the church	80	83.3
Extending church facility to the community	72	75
Living a Christ-like life	80	83.3
All of the above	56	58.3
None of the above	-	-
Others	8	8,3

**Table 4; Showing the extent to which public relations strategies can be used to achieve grassroots evangelization**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Large extent	80	83.3
Moderately	16	16.7
Little extent	-	-
Can't say	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

The illustration in the table above shows that 80 respondents representing 83.3 percent of the distribution agree that public relations can be employed to a large extent in the course of grassroots evangelization. Whereas, 16 respondents representing 16.7 percent believe that public relations strategies can only be employed moderately in the course of grassroots evangelization.

The implication of this table is that public relations can be employed to a large extent in grassroots evangelization.

**Table 5: Examines whether public relations strategies have been effective in grassroots evangelization**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>92.7</b>
<b>No</b>	-	-
<b>Can't say</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows that 89 respondents constituting 92.7 percent of the distribution agree that public relations strategies have been effective in grassroots evangelization. On the other hand, 7 respondents representing 7.3 percent of the distribution are indecisive in their decisions.

This means that majority of the respondents are firmly in support of the fact that public relations strategies have been effective.

**Table 6: Determining how effective the public relations strategies employed has been**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	72	75
Moderately effective	24	25 •
Can't say	-	-
Total	96	100

Seventy-two respondents in the table above representing 75 percent of the distribution agree that public relations strategies are very effective in grassroots evangelization. Whereas, 24 respondents representing 25 percent of the distribution agree that public relations strategies have been moderately effective.

The implication of this table is that it portrays the fact that among the sample studied, majority believe that public relations strategies have been very effective.

**Table 7: Showing the extent public relations has been used to achieve goodwill and positive image within Christendom**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	96	100
No	-	-
Can't say	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

Table above shows a 100 percent agreement that public relations strategies are used to create goodwill and positive image for the church, considering the fact that it shows that 96 respondents threw their weight behind it.

This, by implication means that public relations strategies have been used to create goodwill and positive image for the church.

**Table 8: Showing the extent to which public relations strategies can be used to achieve goodwill and positive image within the Christendom**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Large extent	82	85.4
Moderately	14	14.6
Little extent	-	-
Can't say	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows that 82 respondents representing 85.4 percent of the distribution agree that public relations strategies have really goodwill and positive image for the church. Whereas, 14 respondents representing 14.6 percent are of the opinion that public relations strategies have only contributed moderately.

The implication of this table is that public relations strategies can be used to large extent for creating goodwill and positive image for the church.

**Table 9: Showing the specific public relations strategies that would likely enhance grassroots evangelization**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Evangelic visitation	32	33.3
Living like Christ	24	25
Alms giving	16	16.7
Individual contacts	16	16.7
Parish bulletin	32	33.3
Dialogue and Persuasion	16	16.7

The table above shows that 32 respondents representing 33.3 percent of the distribution suggested evangelic visitation and parish bulletin as effective ways of enhancing grassroots evangelization. Twenty-four respondents representing 25 percent of the distribution opined that living like Christ is another way of enhancing grassroots evangelization. Whereas, 16 respondents representing 16.7 percent of the distribution are of the opinion that alms giving, individual contacts and dialogue and persuasion are effective means of enhancing grassroots evangelization.



The implication of this table is that the points listed within it are seen by the study sample as the various effective means of ensuring or enhancing grassroots evangelization.

## **Discussion of Findings**

From the analysis of data gathered through the use of 'questionnaire, it became obvious that majority of the priests sampled have engaged in one form of evangelization or the other using public relations principles. It was equally gathered that the language used in the course of evangelization is very persuasive and in most cases encouraging.

In answering research question one, it was gathered that public relations techniques can be effectively employed in the course of grassroots evangelization. The findings revealed that persuasive communication, use of charitable organizations, and living a Christ-like life are the more effective means of evangelizing at the grassroots. This is because most respondents threw their weight behind the options/A]though, other public relations strategies like attending to community matters and extending church facilities are equally effective approach in grassroots evangelization.

The analysis of data in respect to research question two shows that public relations techniques can be employed to a large extent in the course of grassroots evangelization. This idea became obvious after 100 percent of the sample studied agreed that public relations strategies can be effectively employed in grassroots evangelization.

As for the degree of effectiveness noticed in the use of public relations strategies, it was gathered after data analysis that the public relations strategies employed in grassroots evangelization are very effective.

The research also shows that public relations can be used to advance goodwill and positive image for the church. This is clearly illustrated in table 7 as 100 percent of the respondents said 'yes' to it. This simply means that public relations strategies can be used to foster goodwill and positive image for the church. Generally, the research work has succeeded in proving that public relations strategies can be a veritable tool in the achievement of grassroots evangelization.

## **Conclusion**

It would not be wrong, therefore, if one concludes at this juncture that public relations strategies constitute a veritable tool in the cause of evangelization at the grassroots. This is because the findings from the work have justified it to be so. It would, therefore, be nice if public relations can be employed by the church in dispensing her activities. This, no doubt would make the activities of the church easier and understandable by all. As the popularity of public relations begins to grow, people would definitely start seeing public relations strategies as not just a tool in the hand of the practitioner but a gift to humanity.

## **Recommendations**

In respect to the limitations encountered in the course of this study, the following recommendations have been made to improve the situation. Preachers of the gospel should endeavour to acquaint themselves with the rudiments of public relations in order to run the full course of evangelization without much difficulty. If possible, a diploma in mass communication or public relations is

advised as a potent means of getting oneself ready for the 'shepherding' of God's flock.

It is also recommended that those who find themselves in the course of evangelization should endeavour to employ all the necessary public relations strategies that would aid a smooth and effective evangelization especial]] at the grassroots where access to modern, ,means of communication seems to be difficult. Home-to-home visitation and training of people in the rural areas in the ways of the church and the teaching of the good news would equally serve as a potent means of enhancing evangelization at the grassroots.

It is strongly recommended that considering the poverty rate of most people in the villages and rural areas, alms giving and charity becomes another valuable means of winning souls for Christ.

Above all, it is recommended that preachers practise what they preach for evangelization to be successful; the people behind it must show that the way of life they seek in the people is the best. They can only do so by practising what they preach. And keep perfecting what they have in order to live like Christ lived For further studies, this work is recommended as a resource material for those who will want to carry out research in this area and other related areas.

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