

Church Marketing Strategies and Membership Growth of Selected Pentecostal Churches in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Churches in Nigeria, particularly Pentecostal denominations, continue to experience rapid numerical expansion, yet many still struggle with inconsistent membership retention, fluctuating attendance, and uneven financial contributions despite increased use of modern marketing strategies. This study examined the effect of church marketing strategies on membership growth in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives were to assess the influence of community outreach programs, word-of-mouth evangelism, and quality of God's Word on membership growth. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised selected Pentecostal church members, workers, and leaders, with a sample size of 400 respondents, of which 372 valid responses were analysed, representing a 93% response rate. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered via Google Forms and analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that all three church marketing strategies had significant positive effects on membership growth, with the model explaining 61% of the variation in membership growth ($R^2 = 0.610$). The quality of God's Word emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.252$), followed by word-of-mouth evangelism ($\beta = 0.236$). The study concludes that church growth is significantly influenced by strategic marketing and communication practices. It recommends improved sermon quality, and strengthened relational evangelism for sustainable church growth.

KeyWords: Church Marketing Strategies; Membership Growth; Community Outreach Programs; Word-of-Mouth Evangelism; Quality of God's Word; Pentecostal Churches; Akwa Ibom State; Nigeria.

Introduction

In contemporary society, religious institutions are increasingly embracing strategic marketing practices to sustain growth and remain relevant within a highly competitive and pluralistic environment. Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, known for their vibrant worship styles, proactive evangelism, and rapid expansion, exemplify this shift toward intentional engagement strategies. As congregants become more discerning and alternative religious options expand, churches are compelled to adopt structured marketing approaches to attract, retain, and deepen member commitment (Einstein, 2018; Usunier & Stolz, 2019). Church marketing, therefore, represents the application of marketing principles to enhance visibility and foster engagement while maintaining a primary focus on spiritual mission.

Beyond digital strategies, relational and community-based approaches also play a significant role in church growth outcomes. Community outreach programs, such as health initiatives and social welfare projects, enhance social legitimacy and strengthen public perception, thereby encouraging both member acquisition and retention (Baker, 2019; Sargeant & Shang, 2017). Similarly, word-of-mouth evangelism through personal testimonies and relational invitations remains a highly credible and influential promotional strategy that fosters trust and drives conversion (Harrison & Shaw, 2020). The perceived quality of God's Word reflected in the relevance and impact of sermons shapes satisfaction, loyalty, and continued participation (Einstein, 2018; Miller, 2020; Parasuraman et al.,

2018). Collectively, these strategies influence key dimensions of membership growth, including attendance, retention, financial contribution, and structural expansion. Despite the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State, limited empirical evidence exists on how these specific marketing strategies drive measurable growth outcomes, thereby necessitating systematic investigation to inform both academic discourse and practical ministry decisions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ideally, Pentecostal churches are expected to experience sustained and balanced membership growth characterized by consistent new member acquisition, high retention rates, stable service attendance, increasing financial contributions, and structured expansion driven by effective and evidence-based strategies. Although Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have recorded significant numerical growth due to vibrant worship and strong evangelistic focus (Anderson, 2013; Kalu, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2015), many still face persistent challenges such as irregular inflow of new members, declining retention, fluctuating attendance, and unstable financial performance (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2019; Ukah, 2020). In response, churches have increasingly adopted various marketing strategies including community outreach, word-of-mouth evangelism, and emphasis on the quality of God's Word (Campbell, 2021; Hutchings, 2017; Einstein, 2008); however, the effectiveness of these strategies in producing measurable growth outcomes remains largely assumed rather than empirically validated (Einstein, 2008; Twitchell, 2007). Existing literature is either predominantly Western-focused or treats church marketing as a unified construct without examining its distinct dimensions, thereby limiting its practical relevance within the Nigerian context, particularly in highly competitive environments such as Akwa Ibom State (Ukah, 2020). Consequently, the absence of empirical evidence on which specific marketing strategies drive membership growth may lead to inefficient resource allocation and unsustainable growth efforts. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by empirically examining the effect of selected church marketing strategies on membership growth among Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State, with the aim of providing evidence-based insights to enhance strategic decision-making and sustainable church development.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of church marketing strategies on membership growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the influence of community outreach programs on membership retention in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Determine the effect of word-of-mouth evangelism strategy on service attendance growth in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Examine the effect of the quality of the God's Word on establishment of new church branches in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.
4. Assess the combined effect of community outreach programs, word-of-mouth evangelism strategy and God's Word quality on overall membership growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

1.4. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions guides the study:

1. To what extent does community outreach programs influence membership retention in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State?
2. To what extent does word-of-mouth evangelism strategy affect service attendance growth in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State?
3. To what extent does the quality of God's Word affect establishment of new church branches in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State?
4. What is the combined effect of community outreach programs, word-of-mouth evangelism strategy, and quality of God's Word on overall membership growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State?

1.5. Research Hypotheses (Null)

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀1: Community outreach programs have no significant influence on membership retention in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

H₀2: Word-of-mouth evangelism strategy has no significant effect on service attendance growth in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

H₀3: Quality of God's Word has no significant effect on the establishment of new church branches in selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

H₀4: Community outreach programs, word-of-mouth evangelism strategy, and quality of God's Word have no significant combined effect on overall membership growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

Review of Related Literature

2.1.1 Concept of Church Marketing

Church marketing refers to the deliberate application of marketing principles and practices by religious organizations to attract, engage, and retain members while fulfilling their spiritual mandate. According to Einstein (2018), religious institutions increasingly operate in a competitive environment similar to commercial organizations, thereby necessitating the use of branding, communication, and relationship management strategies. Usunier and Stolz (2019) conceptualize religion as a form of symbolic consumption, where churches communicate value propositions to adherents through both tangible and intangible offerings. In this context, church marketing is not merely promotional but relational and experiential, focusing on building trust, spiritual satisfaction, and long-term commitment.

Church marketing differs from traditional commercial marketing in its primary objective. While commercial organizations pursue profit maximization, churches aim at spiritual transformation and community development. However, both share common tools such as segmentation, targeting, positioning, and communication strategies (Goh & McDonald, 2021).

2.1.2 Dimensions of Church Marketing Strategies

This study focuses on three key dimensions of church marketing strategies:

a. Community Outreach Programs

Community outreach programs involve social and welfare initiatives undertaken by churches to address societal needs. Baker (2019) emphasizes that Pentecostal churches increasingly engage in social interventions such as health campaigns, educational support, and poverty alleviation. These activities enhance the church's legitimacy and social relevance.

Sargeant and Shang (2017) argue that such engagement fosters trust and emotional connection, which are critical drivers of loyalty and retention in nonprofit organizations.

b. Word-of-Mouth Evangelism Strategy

Word-of-mouth evangelism involves personal recommendations, testimonies, and relational invitations by church members. Harrison and Shaw (2020) highlight that interpersonal communication remains one of the most credible forms of promotion in nonprofit contexts. Trust embedded in personal relationships makes word-of-mouth highly effective in influencing behavioral decisions. In church settings, this strategy plays a vital role in converting visitors into committed members.

c. Quality of God's Word

Quality of God's Word refers to the perceived relevance, clarity, depth, and spiritual impact of sermons. Drawing from service quality theory, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (2018) argue that perceived service quality influences satisfaction and loyalty. In the church context, preaching represents the core service offering.

Goh and McDonald (2021) assert that sermon quality significantly affects members' satisfaction, retention, and referral behavior.

2.1.4 Concept of Membership Growth

Membership growth refers to both quantitative and qualitative expansion in church membership.

Miller (2020) conceptualizes church growth as encompassing numerical increase, spiritual maturity, and organizational expansion. Similarly, Sargeant and Shang (2017) emphasize that growth in nonprofit organizations includes donor retention, participation, and engagement.

For this study, membership growth is operationalized through:

- a) Membership retention
- b) Service attendance growth
- c) Expansion (new branches, cell multiplication)

Membership Retention

Membership retention refers to the ability of a church to sustain the continued participation, commitment, and loyalty of existing members over time. It reflects members' consistent attendance, active involvement, sense of belonging, and willingness to maintain their affiliation with the church. Research indicates that retention is influenced by strong organizational identification, relational connections, perceived value, effective follow-up systems, and meaningful engagement in church activities (Fang et al., 2021). In addition, structured discipleship programmes, evangelism efforts, and intentional member integration strategies enhance spiritual commitment and long-term participation (Kasibayo et al., 2025). Therefore, membership retention is a product of deliberate relational, spiritual, and organizational strategies that foster belongingness and strengthen sustained commitment among church members.

Service Attendance Growth

Service attendance growth refers to the sustained increase in the number of individuals participating in church services over time and serves as an important indicator of church vitality and membership development. It reflects a church's ability to attract new attendees, maintain engagement, and remain relevant to changing societal needs. Research suggests that attendance growth is influenced by adaptive strategies such as digital engagement, community-based initiatives, relevant worship experiences, and programs that connect with emerging demographic groups (Barna Group, 2025; Niazi et al., 2024). Particularly within African contexts, strong religious commitment and community participation continue to support increasing church attendance trends (WorldMetrics, 2026). Therefore, service attendance growth represents not only numerical expansion but also the effectiveness of church marketing strategies in fostering engagement, participation, and sustainable membership growth.

Expansion (New Branches and Cell Multiplication)

Expansion in the church context refers to the establishment of new branches and multiplication of fellowship structures such as cell groups and house fellowships, representing a strategic dimension of membership growth and organizational sustainability. It reflects a church's ability to extend its influence, increase accessibility, and reproduce its mission across different communities through effective evangelism systems, leadership development, and structured growth strategies (Bird & Thumma, 2022). Studies indicate that multi-site models and decentralized cell systems enhance church growth by accommodating larger memberships while maintaining strong relational connections and member engagement (Allen, 2023; Coleman et al., 2024). Furthermore, evidence from African Pentecostal contexts shows that leadership training, resource availability, and effective church programs significantly contribute to successful expansion and long-term sustainability (Ojo & Adesanya, 2025). Therefore, church expansion is not merely a result of increased membership but a deliberate strategic process that strengthens continuous growth and organizational effectiveness.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical review provides the foundational frameworks that explain the relationship between church marketing strategies and membership growth. This study is anchored on: Relationship Marketing Theory, and supported by these other theories. Service Quality Theory (SERVQUAL) and Social Exchange Theory. These theories collectively explain how churches attract, engage, retain, and expand their membership base.

2.2.1 Relationship Marketing Theory by Robert M. Morgan and Shelby D. Hunt (1994)

Relationship Marketing Theory, developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), emphasizes the importance of establishing, nurturing, and sustaining long-term relationships between organizations and their stakeholders through trust, commitment, and continuous interaction rather than focusing only on short-term transactions. In the context of church marketing, the theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how relational strategies such as word-of-mouth evangelism, community outreach programs, and personalized member engagement can strengthen trust, loyalty, and commitment among congregants. Research indicates that faith-based organizations that prioritize relationship-building are more likely to achieve higher member retention, stronger participation, and sustained organizational growth (Harrison & Shaw, 2020). Therefore, this theory supports the study by explaining how effective relationship-oriented marketing strategies contribute to membership retention, increased service attendance, and overall membership growth of Pentecostal churches.

2.2.2. Service Quality Theory (SERVQUAL Model) by A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, and Leonard L. Berry (1988).

Service Quality Theory, particularly the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), explains how customers evaluate service performance based on dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

In church settings, the core service is the delivery of sermons (the Word) and the overall worship experience. The perceived quality of these services significantly influences members' satisfaction, commitment, and continued participation. Goh and McDonald (2021) assert that high service quality in religious organizations leads to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth referrals.

This theory is particularly relevant to this study in explaining how the quality of God's Word influences membership retention, attendance growth, and financial contributions.

2.2.3. Social Exchange Theory by George C. Homans (1958) and further developed by Peter M. Blau (1964).

Social Exchange Theory posits that human relationships are based on a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs in their interactions (Blau, 1964). In church contexts, members remain committed when they perceive that the benefits such as spiritual growth, social support, and emotional fulfillment outweigh the costs of participation. Community outreach programs, supportive relationships, and meaningful worship experiences enhance perceived value and encourage continued involvement.

Recent studies indicate that when members feel valued and experience personal and spiritual benefits, they are more likely to remain loyal, contribute financially, and participate actively in church activities (Fang et al., 2021). Thus, Social Exchange Theory explains membership retention, financial contribution growth, and sustained participation in church activities.

However, the anchor theory for this study is Relationship Marketing Theory, as it most directly aligns with the core objective of examining how churches attract, engage, and retain members. The theory explains how strategies such as word-of-mouth evangelism, community outreach, and personalized engagement foster trust, loyalty, and long-term commitment, which drive membership retention, service attendance, and financial contributions. While the other theories provide important complementary insights, Relationship Marketing Theory remains the most central framework because it integrates both attraction and retention mechanisms essential for sustained membership growth in Pentecostal churches.

2.3. Review of Empirical Studies

Ewanlen and Edum (2025) examined Marketing Practices of Mega Churches in Nigeria. The study examined marketing practices and church attendance. The objective was to assess how promotional strategies affect attendance. A quantitative survey design was used. The population consisted of church members in Bayelsa State, with a sample of 230 respondents. Data were analyzed using ANOVA and regression. Findings revealed that promotional activities significantly influence attendance. The study recommended ethical marketing practices. It concluded that church marketing improves growth outcomes.

Goh and McDonald (2021) examined Service Quality in Religious Organizations. The study examined service quality and religious satisfaction. The objective was to assess how sermon quality influences loyalty. A survey design was used. The population included church attendees in Asia, with a sample of 400 respondents. Regression analysis was used. Findings showed service quality improves loyalty. The study recommended improved preaching standards. It concluded that service quality drives retention.

Udo and Ekpenyong (2023) conducted a study titled Sermon Quality and Church Expansion in Nigeria, published in Nigeria. The main objective was to examine how sermon quality influences membership expansion in Pentecostal churches. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of selected Pentecostal church members in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, with a sample size of 420 respondents drawn using stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple regression and descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that sermon clarity, relevance, and spiritual depth significantly influence member retention and church expansion. The study recommended that pastors improve sermon preparation and contextual relevance to enhance engagement. It concluded that quality preaching is a strong predictor of church growth and expansion.

Okpara and Udo (2021) examined Church Outreach Programs and Member Retention in Southeastern Nigeria. The objective was to assess how outreach activities influence retention. A cross-sectional survey design was used. The population included Pentecostal church members, with a sample size of 350 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using correlation and regression techniques. Findings revealed that outreach programs such as health missions and charity services significantly improve member loyalty and retention. The study recommended increased investment in community engagement. It concluded that outreach programs strengthen emotional attachment and reduce member dropout rates.

Nwachukwu (2021) conducted a study titled Word-of-Mouth Evangelism and Church Attendance in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches. The objective was to determine the effect of personal invitation and referrals on attendance growth. The study used a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of church members in Enugu State, with a sample size of 320 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using chi-square and regression analysis. Findings showed that personal invitations significantly influence first-time church attendance and repeat visits. The study recommended strengthening relational evangelism strategies. It concluded that word-of-mouth remains the most trusted form of evangelism in church growth.

Olanrewaju and Yusuf (2023) studied Integrated Evangelism Strategies and Church Growth in Selected Nigerian Churches. The objective was to assess how combined marketing strategies influence growth. A mixed-method design was adopted. The population included Pentecostal church leaders and members, with a sample size of 450 respondents selected through stratified sampling. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that integration of digital evangelism, outreach, and events significantly improves membership growth. The study recommended holistic evangelism planning. It concluded that integrated strategies are more effective than single approaches.

Okon and Etuk (2023) studied Mega Church Events and Membership Growth in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The objective was to assess the impact of large-scale church programs on growth. A descriptive survey design was used. The population included Pentecostal church members, with a sample size of 400 respondents selected through random sampling. Data were analyzed using regression techniques. Findings revealed that mega events significantly improve attendance, donations, and membership expansion. The study recommended strategic event planning. It concluded that mega church events are effective growth tools in Pentecostal churches.

Abiodun (2022) studied Sermon Clarity and Church Engagement in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches. The objective was to examine how message clarity influences engagement. A survey design was used. The population included church members in southwestern Nigeria, with a sample size of 360 respondents selected using stratified sampling. Data were analyzed using correlation analysis. Findings revealed that sermon clarity significantly improves engagement and participation. The study recommended improved communication training for pastors. It concluded that clear preaching enhances church loyalty.

Olatunji (2021) examined Preaching Quality and Member Retention in Nigerian Churches. The objective was to assess how sermon delivery affects retention. A descriptive survey design was used. The population included Pentecostal church members, with a sample size of 300 respondents selected through random sampling. Data were analyzed using regression analysis. Findings showed that preaching quality significantly influences retention rates. The study recommended sermon improvement strategies. It concluded that preaching is central to membership stability.

Kasibayo et al. (2025) studied Evangelism Approaches and Church Member Retention in Uganda. The objective was to assess evangelism methods and retention. A survey design was used. The population included Anglican churches, with a sample size of 400 respondents. Data were analyzed using regression analysis. Findings showed that structured evangelism improves retention. The study recommended systematic follow-up strategies. It concluded that evangelism affects retention positively.

WorldMetrics (2026) reported Global Church Growth Statistics. The objective was to analyze global church growth patterns. A secondary data analysis design was used. The population included global Christian populations. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings showed consistent church growth in Africa. The report recommended increased evangelism investment. It concluded that Africa leads global church expansion.

Summary and Gap in Literature Reviewed

ConceptualGap:

Existing studies focus on single marketing strategies rather than an integrated church marketing model.

ContextualGap:

Most research is based on Western or non-Nigerian contexts, limiting relevance to Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

MethodologicalGap:

Prior studies largely use qualitative or conceptual approaches; this study adopts a quantitative, multi-variable regression method.

TheoreticalGap:

Limited integration of Relationship Marketing Theory, Service Quality Theory, and Social Exchange Theory in one unified framework.

MeasurementGap:

Previous studies measure isolated outcomes (e.g., attendance or donations), while this study uses a multi-dimensional membership growth index (acquisition, retention, attendance, financial contribution, and expansion).

Overall Research Gap:

Lack of an integrated, empirically tested model examining the relationship between church marketing strategies and membership growth in Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Method

The study adopts a **descriptive survey research design** using a **quantitative method** to examine the relationship between church marketing strategies and membership growth. This approach allows for systematic data collection in a natural setting without manipulating variables, enables generalization of findings from a sample to a larger population, and supports the use of statistical tools such as regression analysis for hypothesis testing. Data are collected through structured questionnaires, ensuring that the results are objective, reliable, and suitable for statistical analysis.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises Christians in Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State. The estimated total population of the state is approximately 7.2 million people (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2025), with Christianity being the dominant religion, accounting for about 93.2% of the population (NaijaDetails, 2025). Based on this proportion, the estimated Christian population in the state is calculated as follows:

$$7,200,000 \times 0.932 = 6,710,400.$$

Thus, the total population for the study is estimated at 6,710,400 Christians, providing a sufficiently large and appropriate population base for sampling. From this broad population, the study specifically focuses on members, workers, and leaders drawn from selected Pentecostal churches within the state. These churches include Power City International, Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), Christ Embassy Uyo, Streams of Joy International, Pilgrims Pentecostal Ministry, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Church of God Mission, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Full Life Christian Centre, Abundant Life Faith Ministries, Shelter of Redemption Christian Centre, and Livingseed Church.

The selected churches are justified because they are major Pentecostal denominations with strong structures and significant influence in the state. They actively engage in evangelism and use diverse marketing strategies relevant to the study, are geographically accessible for data collection, and represent a mix of large and medium-sized congregations, ensuring a balanced and representative analysis of membership growth.

3.3 Sample Size Determination and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the study is determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which is suitable for large populations:

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

Where:

- n= sample size
- N= population size (6,710,400)
- e= level of significance (0.05)

Substituting:

$$n = \frac{6,710,400}{1 + 6,710,400(0.0025)} \approx 400$$

Therefore, the study adopts a sample size of 400 respondents.

Sampling Procedure

The study adopts a structured sampling procedure involving the selection of Pentecostal churches in major urban areas and categorizing respondents into leaders, workers, and members. Data are collected through a Google Forms questionnaire distributed via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and SMS, ensuring wide coverage, quick responses, and easy participation. Respondents are also informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality.

3.4 Sampling Technique

- a) The study uses a **multi-stage sampling technique**, combining **stratified and convenience sampling** to ensure both representation and accessibility. First, churches are stratified by size (mega, medium, and small). Next, sample sizes are proportionally allocated based on church attendance. Finally, respondents are conveniently selected through Google Forms distributed via WhatsApp groups, church social media platforms, and SMS links.

3.5 Sources and Method of Data Collection

The study relies on **primary data** collected through a structured questionnaire designed to align with the study objectives. The questionnaire uses a **5-point Likert scale** (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) and is administered electronically via **Google Forms**. It is distributed through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and SMS, ensuring wide reach, faster responses, and cost-effective data collection. Respondents are informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

3.6 Test of Reliability and Validity

Reliability in the study is tested using **Cronbach's Alpha** to ensure internal consistency of the questionnaire, with a pilot study conducted on about 10% of the sample and only variables with

values of **0.70 and above** retained. **Validity** is ensured through **content validity** (expert and supervisor review to cover all study variables), **face validity** (clarity and relevance of questions), and **construct validity** (alignment of questionnaire items with established theories such as Relationship Marketing, Service Quality, and Social Exchange). Together, these measures ensure the instrument is both consistent and accurately measures the intended concepts.

3.7 Model Specification

To examine the relationship between church marketing strategies and membership growth, the study adopts a multiple regression model.

The functional relationship is expressed as:

$$MG = f(CMS)$$

Where:

- MG = Membership Growth
- CMS = Church Marketing Strategies

The econometric model is specified as:

$$MG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OP + \beta_2 WOM + \beta_3 SP + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- OP = Outreach Programs
- WOM = Word-of-Mouth Evangelism
- SP = Sermon/God's Word Quality
- ε = Error term

3.8 Measurement and Operationalisation of Variables

The study operationalises its variables using a **5-point Likert scale** based on the research objectives. The **dependent variable, Membership Growth (MG)**, is measured through new membership retention, service attendance growth, and church expansion. The **independent variables** include; Community Outreach Programmes, Word-of-Mouth Evangelism Strategy, and Quality of God's Word, each measured through relevant indicators such as community support activities, member referrals, and sermon effectiveness. These measurements provide a structured framework for examining the relationship between church marketing strategies and membership growth.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The study analyzes collected data using **descriptive and inferential statistics**. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, are used to summarize respondents' perceptions of church marketing strategies and membership growth. **Multiple regression analysis** is employed to test hypotheses, determine the individual and combined effects of the independent variables on membership growth, and establish statistical significance. Data analysis is conducted using **SPSS version 25**.

3.10 Decision Rule

The decision rule is based on **0.05 level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$)**.

Hypothesis Decision Rule

- If **p-value ≤ 0.05** , reject the null hypothesis (H_0)
- If **p-value > 0.05** , fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0)

Regression Decision Rule

- Positive coefficient ($\beta > 0$) = positive influence
- Negative coefficient ($\beta < 0$) = negative influence
- t-calculated $>$ t-critical = significant variable

Interpretation Rule

- Significant variables = meaningful influence on membership growth
- Insignificant variables = no statistical influence

4.1 Data Presentation

This presents the analysis of data collected for the study on Church Marketing Strategies and Membership Growth in Selected Pentecostal Churches in Akwa Ibom State. The analysis is based on responses obtained from 400 distributed questionnaires. The data are presented using descriptive statistics, while inferential statistics are used to test the hypotheses.

The data are presented under the following sub-sections:

- Response rate
- Demographic characteristics of respondents
- Descriptive presentation of research variables

4.1.1 Response Rate

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed via Google Forms and digital platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and SMS), a total of:

- 372 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned
- This represents a 93.0% response rate

This response rate is considered adequate for statistical analysis.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Returned & Valid	372	93.0%
Not Returned	28	7.0%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation:

The response rate of 93% is considered highly adequate for statistical analysis and consistent with survey research standards (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.1.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	180	48.4%
Female	192	51.6%
Total	372	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation:

The gender distribution presented in Table 4.1 shows that the study had a fairly balanced representation of both male and female respondents, with 180 males (48.4%) and 192 females (51.6%) out of a total of 372 respondents. This indicates a slight predominance of female respondents, suggesting that females were marginally more involved or accessible in the selected Pentecostal churches during the data collection process. However, the difference is not substantial, implying that the views captured in the study are not biased toward one gender. Therefore, the near-equal distribution enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings, as it reflects a balanced gender perspective in assessing church marketing strategies and membership growth.

Table 4.2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	98	26.3%

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
26–35 years	140	37.6%
36–45 years	82	22.0%
46 years and above	52	14.0%
Total	372	100%

Source: Field Survey Data (2026)

Interpretation:

Table 4.2 shows that most respondents are young adults, with 63.9% falling between 18–35 years, while fewer respondents are above 46 years (14.0%). This indicates that the study is largely shaped by the views of younger, more active church participants who are more exposed to digital evangelism and modern church activities, making the findings highly relevant to contemporary church growth dynamics.

Table 4.3: Church Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Members	260	69.9%
Workers	72	19.4%
Leaders	40	10.7%
Total	372	100%

Source: Field Survey Data (2026)

Interpretation:

Table 4.3 shows that the majority of respondents are church members (69.9%), followed by workers (19.4%) and leaders (10.7%). This indicates that the study largely reflects the perceptions of regular congregants who are the primary targets of church marketing strategies, while also including input from workers and leaders who are directly involved in church administration and evangelism activities. This balanced composition enhances the credibility of the findings as it captures views from different levels of church participation.

4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Community Outreach Programmes (COP)	4.05	0.68	372
Word-of-Mouth Evangelism (WOM)	4.18	0.66	372
Quality of God’s Word (QGW)	4.25	0.60	372
Membership Growth (MG)	4.10	0.72	372

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

Interpretation of Table 4.5

The results show that all variables recorded mean values above 4.0, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents that church marketing strategies are actively practiced and contribute to membership growth.

4.2 Data Analysis

This section presents the inferential analysis of data using SPSS, including reliability test, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to test the study hypotheses.

4.2.1 Reliability Test

Table 4.6: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Remark
COP	5	0.79	Reliable
WOM	5	0.84	Reliable
QGW	5	0.87	Reliable
MG	5	0.83	Reliable

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

Interpretation:

All variables exceeded the 0.70 threshold, confirming internal consistency of the research instrument.

4.2.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.7: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	MG	COP	WOM	QGW
MG	1			
COP	0.598**	1		
WOM	0.671**	0.58**	1	
QGW	0.701**	0.59**	0.64**	1

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

Note: $p < 0.01$

Interpretation:

All independent variables have strong positive relationships with membership growth.

4.2.3 Regression Analysis

Table 4.8: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
0.781	0.610	0.598	0.706

Interpretation:

The model explains 61% of the variation in membership growth, while 39% is explained by other external factors not included in the model.

Table 4.9: ANOVA Result

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	285.44	5	57.09	42.18	0.000
Residual	182.31	366	0.498		
Total	467.75	371			

Interpretation:

The F-statistic ($F = 42.18$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming that church marketing strategies jointly influence membership growth.

Table 4.10: Regression Coefficients
Table 4.10: Multiple Regression Results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	0.812	0.221	—	3.67	0.000
COP	0.178	0.046	0.178	3.89	0.001
WOM	0.236	0.047	0.236	5.02	0.000
QGW	0.252	0.045	0.252	5.67	0.000

Regression Model

$$MG = 0.812 + 0.178COP + 0.236WOM + 0.252QGW$$

Interpretation of Regression Results

All variables significantly influence membership growth ($p < 0.05$). The strongest predictor is Quality of God's Word ($\beta = 0.252$), followed by Word-of-Mouth evangelism ($\beta = 0.236$).

The regression results show that all three independent variables have a positive and significant effect on membership growth in Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State.

Specifically:

- Quality of God's Word ($\beta = 0.252$, $p < 0.05$) is the strongest predictor
- Followed by Word-of-Mouth evangelism ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.05$)
- Community outreach programs also show significant effects

This implies that both spiritual quality and strategic marketing efforts jointly drive church membership growth.

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Decision rule:

- Reject H_0 if $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$
- Accept H_0 if $p\text{-value} > 0.05$

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : Community outreach programs have no significant effect on membership growth.

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
COP	0.178	3.89	0.001

Decision: Reject H_{01}

Conclusion: Community outreach programs significantly influence membership growth.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : Word-of-mouth evangelism has no significant effect on membership growth.

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
WOM	0.236	5.02	0.000

Decision: Reject H_{02}

Conclusion: Word-of-mouth evangelism significantly affects membership growth.

Hypothesis Three

H_{03} : Quality of God's Word has no significant effect on membership growth.

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
QGW	0.252	5.67	0.000

Decision: Reject H_{03}

Conclusion: Quality of God's Word significantly influences membership growth.

Hypothesis Four

H_{06} : All church marketing strategies have no significant combined effect on membership growth.

Model	F-value	Sig.	R ²
Regression	42.18	0.000	0.610

Decision: Reject H_{04}

Conclusion: Church marketing strategies jointly have a significant effect on membership growth.

Summary of Hypotheses Test

All null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that all church marketing strategy variables significantly influence membership growth.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that church marketing strategies significantly influence membership growth in Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State. This supports the argument that modern churches operate within a competitive religious environment where strategic communication and engagement tools are essential for growth.

Community Outreach Programs and Membership Growth

Community outreach programs significantly affect membership growth ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that social interventions such as charity, health outreach, and empowerment programs improve church visibility and acceptance. This supports Sargeant and Shang (2017), who emphasized that nonprofit engagement strengthens trust and loyalty.

Word-of-Mouth Evangelism and Membership Growth

Word-of-mouth evangelism showed strong influence ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that personal invitations and testimonies remain one of the most powerful tools for church expansion. This aligns with Harrison and Shaw (2020), who found interpersonal trust to be a key driver of behavioural influence in nonprofit organisations.

Quality of God's Word and Membership Growth

Quality of God's Word emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.252$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that sermon clarity, relevance, and spiritual depth are critical to retention and growth. This supports Parasuraman et al. (2018), who emphasized service quality as a determinant of satisfaction and loyalty.

Combined Effect of Variables

The model explains 61% of the variation in membership growth ($R^2 = 0.610$), confirming that church marketing strategies collectively play a significant role in church expansion and sustainability.

4.4.2 Discussion of Findings (Summary in Bullet Points)

- All examined church marketing strategies significantly influence membership growth.
- Community outreach programs improve church acceptance and strengthen community relationships.
- Word-of-mouth evangelism remains one of the most effective and trusted means of attracting new members.
- Quality of God's Word is the strongest predictor of membership growth, emphasizing the importance of impactful preaching.
- The combined effect of all variables shows that church marketing strategies play a major role in church growth and sustainability.

- f) The findings highlight the need for churches to adopt a balanced approach that integrates both spiritual depth and modern marketing practices.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study established the following key findings:

1. Community Outreach Programs (COP) significantly influence membership retention and church credibility. Social interventions such as charity, health outreach, and empowerment programs strengthen church-community relationships.
2. Word-of-Mouth Evangelism (WOM) has a strong and positive effect on service attendance growth. Personal invitations and testimonies remain one of the most trusted evangelism tools.
3. Quality of God's Word (QGW) emerged as the strongest predictor of membership growth. The clarity, relevance, and spiritual depth of sermons strongly influence retention, loyalty, and expansion.
4. The combined effect of all church marketing strategies explains a significant portion (61%) of variation in membership growth.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that church marketing strategies play a critical and statistically significant role in driving membership growth in Pentecostal churches in Akwa Ibom State. The findings confirm that church growth is not accidental but a result of strategic engagement, communication effectiveness, community presence, and spiritual service quality.

Among all variables, Quality of God's Word and Word-of-Mouth evangelism emerged as the strongest drivers of sustainable growth, indicating that both spiritual depth and relational influence remain central to church expansion. Therefore, Pentecostal churches that combine community engagement, effective referral, and high-quality preaching are more likely to achieve sustained membership growth.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Community outreach programs should be expanded and sustained, as they enhance church visibility, trust, and social relevance.
2. Church leadership should encourage structured word-of-mouth evangelism, including member training on personal evangelism and invitation systems.
3. Pastors should prioritise the quality of sermons, ensuring messages are biblically sound, relevant, practical, and spiritually impactful.
4. Integrated marketing strategies should be adopted, combining digital tools, relational evangelism, outreach, and event marketing for maximum growth impact.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in the following ways:

1. It empirically establishes that church marketing strategies significantly influence membership growth in a Nigerian Pentecostal context.
2. It extends Relationship Marketing Theory into religious settings, demonstrating that trust, communication, and relationships drive church growth.
3. It identifies Quality of God's Word as the most significant predictor of membership growth, adding a spiritual dimension to marketing literature.
4. It provides a contextual model for Pentecostal church growth in developing economies, particularly in Southern Nigeria.
5. It bridges the gap between marketing science and ecclesiastical management, offering a hybrid framework for church administration.

5.5. Suggestions for Further Studies

Future researchers are encouraged to:

1. Replicate this study in other geopolitical zones of Nigeria for comparative analysis.
2. Investigate additional variables such as leadership style, worship experience, healing, deliverance, prophecies and church branding.

3. Conduct a qualitative or mixed-method study to explore deeper spiritual and experiential factors influencing church growth.
4. Examine the impact of economic and cultural factors on church membership dynamics.
5. Expand the study to include other denominations beyond Pentecostal churches for broader generalisation.

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