

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF TELEVANGELISM AMONG SOUTHEAST RESIDENTS

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Abstract

Many ministers aspire to preach the gospel on television, yet neither televangelism operators nor broadcasters fully understand how viewers engage with the content or the gratifications they derive. This study examined the uses and gratifications of televangelism among residents of Southeast Nigeria, focusing on Abia, Anambra, and Enugu States. Using a survey research method, data were collected through questionnaires and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (frequencies and percentages). Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the findings revealed that 86% of viewers watch televangelism for spiritual fulfilment, yet its overall impact on residents is limited. While televangelism provides inspiration and religious guidance, the study found that many programs focus excessively on prosperity and personal popularity rather than genuine soul winning. Additionally, the study identified gaps in audience engagement, with some viewers feeling disconnected from the messages due to repetitive content, commercialization of faith, and lack of interactive participation. As a result, many viewers seek alternative sources for spiritual growth. The study recommends that televangelists expand their knowledge, conduct audience research, and prioritize content that fosters deeper spiritual connections. Additionally, broadcasters should improve program structure, integrate interactive elements, and emphasize messages of faith, morality, and community service to enhance engagement and impact.

Keywords: Christianity, Contents, Gratifications, Mass Media Audience, Televangelism, Televangelists and Television

Introduction

The mandate to spread the Gospel, rooted in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20, Revised standard version (RSV), has driven evangelists to employ various strategies to reach audiences globally (Ekwueme, 2011).

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.....(Matthew 28: 18-20, RSV).

Since the mid-20th century, televangelism has emerged as a key method for disseminating Christian teachings, leveraging the mass media—particularly television, radio, and the internet—to connect with diverse audiences (Mokaya, 2015). Televangelism is a modern religious practice that integrates technology and media to produce, distribute, and consume religious content (Denson, 2011). Its roots date back to the 1930s in the United States, when Congress mandated broadcast license holders to air content in the public interest, including religious programming (Fore, 2007). Over time, televangelism evolved as television preachers like Archbishop Fulton Sheen and Rex Humbard used the medium to reach wider audiences (Mokaya, 2015). By the 1970s, paid religious programming had dominated the airwaves, marking a shift from free to monetized airtime.

Televangelism emerged after World War II as a deliberate effort by religious organizations to use mass media, such as radio, film, and television, to spread evangelical messages and win souls (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2012). Pioneered by figures like Billy Graham and Pentecostal evangelists, this approach combined broadcasts, literature distribution, and direct outreach, enabling global influence and establishing lasting networks in regions like Africa, South America, and beyond (Kay, 2009).

During the Cold War, Pentecostal evangelists capitalized on global opportunities, using creative campaigns and media to spread their message in regions like the Philippines, South Korea, and Latin America, while building networks and influencing politics, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil establishing a vast media empire (Kay, 2009; Anderson, 2004). By the 1990s, Pentecostal and charismatic ministries worldwide leveraged broadcasting to grow their influence, from political engagement in the Philippines and Latin America to dramatic televangelism on platforms like the UK’s God Channel, contrasting with the BBC’s more restrained religious programming (Kay, 2009; Quicke & Quicke, 1992).

In countries like Australia, Ghana, and Sweden, Christian broadcasters are expanding the scope of religious programming, with Pentecostals and charismatics using a mix of local and international media to shape public consciousness and raise funds through testimonies and services (Kay, 2009). Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), founded in the U.S. in 1973, is the world's largest interdenominational Christian network, reaching millions through innovative programming and partnerships with evangelists like Benny Hinn (Kay, 2009; Melton et al., 1997). However, Pentecostal broadcasts rely heavily on fundraising telethons, but their effectiveness in attracting new followers is unclear, as research suggests they primarily reinforce existing beliefs, particularly among women without professional qualifications (Kay, 2009).

With the expansion of televangelism, especially via television and internet platforms, comprehending audience participation becomes imperative. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a valuable framework for examining how people engage with televangelism to fulfil their spiritual, emotional, and informational requirements. Viewers may engage with religious programming for the reinforcement of religion, moral instruction, community engagement, or enjoyment. Though, Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944) pioneered the development of uses and gratification theory (UGT) during World War II and initially focused on radio serial programmes (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwa-Uwama, 2016). The theory has three specific objectives. First, UGT attempts to explain how specific viewers use mass media to meet individual needs. Second, researchers endeavour to discover a viewer's underlying motives for using the media. Finally, theorists want to identify the positive and negative consequences of an individual's mass media utilisation.

Katz (1987) was the first researcher to employ the UGT approach by initially questioning what individuals do with mass media. Katz named a Bernard Berelson (1959, p.23) study that examined "a two-week newspaper strike, but from the individual reader's perspective". Katz found that while some readers felt compelled to do so for social or informative reasons, many individual readers used newspapers for diversion, relaxation, and entertainment. Katz's work demonstrates that different individuals can "use" the media in different ways.

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, which also explains why people use certain media to satisfy needs, has been applied to study televangelism, showing that audiences engage with media for varied social-psychological benefits, as evidenced by the rise of Pentecostal

television use in countries like Nigeria after its media liberalization in 1992 (McQuail, 2010; Ihejirika, 2006). This form of evangelism blends religious content with entertainment, featuring preaching, singing, and discussions to engage viewers and encourage participation (Naggar, 2014). It caters to those unable or unwilling to attend traditional church services, offering spiritual engagement in the comfort of their homes (Chigbo, 2007). In Nigeria, televangelism is thriving, with TV stations airing sermons, gospel music, and live church services to diverse audiences. Nmai (1997) studied televangelism in Lagos, Nigeria, using survey research and the Uses and Gratifications theory to examine audience engagement. The author found that many Nigerians watch televangelism programs, favour sermons, and are unlikely to switch churches due to these broadcasts. He recommended better communication on financial contributions, noting viewers' willingness to support the programs, even modestly.

Televangelism stands apart from general religious broadcasting due to its reliance on audience support, charismatic leaders, and entertainment-driven approaches. Fundraising, often through merchandise sales, is central to sustaining these ministries (Schultze, 1999). Programs frequently feature captivating messages and sophisticated technology to attract and retain viewers (Kyle, 2010). However, critics argue that some televangelists prioritize commercial gains, diluting theological depth with sensationalism and entertainment (Kyle, 2010).

Despite these critiques, televangelism remains a powerful tool for evangelism. Its ability to bypass geographical and cultural barriers makes it effective for reaching millions instantaneously (Mokaya, 2015). Televangelists have also capitalized on the ritualized and instrumental viewing habits of audiences, catering to their needs for relaxation, companionship, and spiritual guidance (Rubin, 1984). The uses and gratifications theory offers insight into televangelism's appeal. This approach views audiences as active participants who use media to fulfil personal needs, from seeking information to finding spiritual solace (Frank & Greenberg, 1980). Televangelism meets both ritualized and instrumental viewing needs, blending entertainment with goal-oriented content to attract and retain viewers.

This study aims to explore how televangelism satisfies its audience's spiritual and emotional needs while navigating the complexities of modern media. By examining the evolution, strategies, and reception of televangelism, the research sheds light on its role in contemporary Christian practice and its potential for fostering spiritual

engagement in a technologically driven world. Television enhances the visibility and influence of churches and televangelists, serving as a promotional tool for gospel propagation, with televangelism leveraging its power to overcome political and cultural barriers to global evangelization (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Ihejirika, 2006). However, studies show that televangelism's audience is highly segmented, and while usage has increased, there is limited research on the specific uses and gratifications derived from these broadcasts, which this study aims to address. The general goal of this study is to examine the uses and gratifications television audience obtain from televangelism.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the extent to which residents of southeast expose themselves to televangelism programmes?
- 2. What do southeast residents do with the contents of televangelism programmes?
- 3. What gratifications do they derive from exposure to televangelism programmes?

Materials and Method

This study adopted survey research method. The study's population consists of 14,232,872 individuals who reside in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The region encompasses five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.

Table 1
The table below shows the population of each state selected

S/n	States	2006 Population	2018 Population Estimate
1	Abia	2,833,999	3,922,254
2	Anambra	4,182,032	5,787,932
3	Enugu	3,267,837	4,522,686
4	Total	10,283,868	14,232,872

Therefore, **14,232,872** would become the population for the study

The study used a sample size of 385 respondents, calculated with the Australian Calculator provided by the National Statistics Service (NSS). A multi-stage sampling method was employed, following Asemah et al.'s (2012) approach, which involves selecting samples in stages.

Sampling Technique:

- 1. **Stage 1:** Simple random sampling was used to select three states from the five in Southeast Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, and Enugu.
- 2. **Stage 2:** Cluster sampling grouped each state into senatorial districts. From the nine senatorial districts, purposive sampling selected one district per state, prioritizing state capitals based on their urban orientation, media presence, educational institutions, and better TV reception.
- 3. **Stage 3:** Simple random sampling identified two LGAs from each senatorial district. A town was then randomly selected from each LGA.

Table 2: Structured approach for representative and methodical sample selection.

S/N	State	Senatorial District	Local Government Area	Towns
1	Abia state	Abia Central	Umuahia South Umuahia North	Ngodo Umuahia urban 1
2	Anambra state	Anambra North	Awka North Awka South	Amansea Ezinato
3	Enugu	Enugu East	Enugu East Enugu North	Abakpa Okpara Avenue

Proportional stratified sampling was used to allocate respondents from each state and LGA based on population size, ensuring representation as outlined by Ogbuoshi (2006).

The procedure is demonstrated below using the formula, $\frac{n}{N} \times \frac{S}{1}$

Where n= population of each stratum

N= total population

S= total sample size

Thus:

ABIA: $\frac{3922254}{14232872} \times \frac{385}{1} = 106$

ANAMBRA: $\frac{5787932}{14232872} \times \frac{385}{1} = 157$

ENUGU: $\frac{4522686}{14232872} \times \frac{385}{1} = 122$

Therefore, overall sample is 106+157+122 = 385

Accidental sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents who filled the questionnaire.

This study used a questionnaire as its data collection instrument. The researcher, assisted by three trained aides, self-administered the research instrument. This approach ensured a faster response rate and provided clarification for respondents when needed. Quantitative analysis employs frequency distribution tables and descriptive statistics to summarise the data and inferential statistics to draw conclusions.

Results

Research question One: What is the extent residents of southeast are exposed to televangelism?

Table 3: Responses of respondents on extent residents of Southeast are exposed to televangelism

	Responses	Freq uenc y	Percen tage(%)
Responses of Respondents on whether they own television set or have access to one	Yes	365	100%
	No	-	-
	Total	365	100%
Responses on type of programmes respondents prefer watching on television	Programmes	Freq uenc y	Percen tage
	Variety shows	39	11%
	News Programme	55	15%
	Documentaries	24	7%
	Music Video	64	17%

	Christian programmes	73	20%
	sports programmes	59	16%
	Films	51	14%
	Total	365	100%
Responses on how important religion is to respondents	Responses	Freq uenc y	Percen tage (%)
	Very important	93	25%
	Somewhat important	157	43%
	Not very important	68	19%
	Not very important at all	47	13%
	Total	365	100%
Distribution on whether respondents have watched televangelism on television	Responses	Freq uenc y	Perce ntage (%)
	Yes	365	100%
	No	-	-
	Total	365	100%
Responses on the kind of televangelism programmes	Televangelism programme	Freq uenc y	Perce ntage (%)
	Church service Sermon	137	38%
	Gospel Music	65	18%
	Christian talk show	78	21%
	Christian drama/soap Opera	85	23%
	Total	365	100%

Extent respondents are exposed to televangelism	Response	Freq uenc y	Perce ntage (%)
	Very High	45	12%
	High	55	15%
	Average	158	43%
	Low	83	23%
	Very Low	24	7%
	Total	365	100%

Table 3 above illustrates that when asked if they own a television set or have access to one, every respondent indicated that they either own or have access to a television. Regarding the type of television programme respondents prefer to watch, the majority of respondents reported watching more Christian programs, accounting for 73 (20%) of the total. Music videos ranked second with 64 (17%), followed by sports programs with 59 (16%), news programme with 55 (15%), and films with 51 (14%). Variety shows and documentaries accounted for 39 (11%) and 24 (7%), respectively. Regarding the importance of religion to the respondents, the majority agree that it is somewhat important to them, with 157 (43%) and 93 (25%), respectively, indicating that religion is very important to them. Religion was not important to 68 (19%) and faith to 47 (13%) respectively.

Additionally, in terms of distribution based on whether respondents have watched televangelism on television, The table above confirms that every respondent has watched televangelism on television. Respondents provided feedback regarding the types of televangelism programs they have watched. Out of the 365 respondents, 137 (38%) indicated that the type of televangelism program they watch on television is church service sermons. This is followed by Christian drama/soap opera, which accounted for 85 respondents (23%), Christian talk shows, which had 78 respondents (21%), and 65 respondents (18%) who indicated that they watch gospel music on television. Consequently, the majority of respondents, 158 (representing 43%), expressed an average level of exposure to televangelism. Following this, 83 respondents (representing 23%) reported a low level of exposure to televangelism, 55 respondents (representing 15%) indicated a high level, 45 respondents (representing 12%) indicated a very high level, and 24 respondents (representing 7%) indicated a very low level.

Research question two: What do south residents do with the contents of televangelism programmes?

Table 4: Responses of respondents on what South residents do with the contents of the televangelism programme

Whether respondents has changed Denomination through Televangelism	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Yes	68	19%
	No	297	81%
	Total	365	100%
Preference of Televangelism Programmes to Church Attendance on Sundays	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Strongly prefer	40	11%
	Prefer	65	18%
	Disapprove	157	43%
	Strongly disapprove	103	28%
	Total	365	100%
Effectiveness of televangelism Programmes to Replace Church Attendance	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
	Very effective	51	14%
	Effective	36	10%
	Fairly effective	62	17%
	Ineffective	137	37%
	Very ineffective	79	22%
	Total	365	100%

The table above shows the respondents' responses to the question of whether they have changed their denomination reveal that only a small minority, 68 (19%), have changed their denomination as a result of watching televangelism programmes. Denomination through televangelism reveals that only a small minority, 68 (19%), changed their churches as a result of watching televangelism programs, while the majority, 297 (81%), did not change their churches as a result of viewing televangelism programs. Thus, preference of televangelism programmes to church attendance on Sundays when asked if they preferred watching televangelism programs over church attendance on Sundays, the majority (71%) of respondents said they didn't. Furthermore, when it comes to the effectiveness of televangelism programs as a substitute for church attendance, the majority of respondents believe that televangelism is not sufficiently effective to replace church attendance.

Research Question Three: What benefits do they derive from exposure to televangelism?

Table 5: Responses of respondents on benefits do they derive from exposure to televangelism

Distribution why respondents watch televangelism	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	For salvation	46	13%
	To feel close to God	73	20%
	To grow as a Christian	132	36%
	For spiritual guide	55	15%
	For behavioural guide	40	11%
	For relaxation	19	5%
	Total	365	100%
Distribution on the benefits respondents derive from	Benefits	Frequency	Percentage (%)

viewing televangelism			
	Religious benefits	313	86%
	Entertainment	38	10%
	no benefit at all	14	4%
	Total	365	100%

The table above indicates that the majority of respondents, 132 (36%), watch televangelism to grow as Christians. This is followed by 73 respondents (20%) who watch to feel close to God, 55 (15%) seeking spiritual guidance, 40 (13%) watching for salvation, another 40 (11%) seeking behavioral guidance, and 19 (5%) watching for relationship advice. However, the distribution of benefits that respondents derive from viewing televangelism is noteworthy. When asked about the satisfaction they derived from watching televangelism programs, a significant majority of respondents (86%) stated that they experienced religious satisfaction in one way or another, unlike those who merely enjoyed entertainment (10%) or reported "no benefit" at all (4%). The fact that 86% of respondents derived diverse religious or spiritual benefit from viewing the programs shows that televangelists are succeeding in their operation.

Discussion

All respondents own or have access to television, and the majority watch more Christian programming. 157 (43%) of the respondents agreed that religion holds some importance for them. All the respondents agreed that they have viewed televangelism on television, and the type of televangelism program they watch most on television is church service sermon. However, the study found that the exposure of Southeast residents to televangelism is average. This finding is corroborated by Nmai (1997), who found that Nigerians are exposed to religious programs to a moderate extent. This finding is of considerable interest, particularly to those who may have thought that nobody or few people view televangelism programs. Nevertheless, most regular viewers are church members of the televangelist who have already been reached through other ways, without the content of these programs. Televangelists, whose primary target audiences may include those unfamiliar with

Pentecostalism and followers of other religions and Christian denominations like the Roman Catholics, may find this content lacking.

This shows that viewers are highly selective in their exposure to media fare. Most of them will expose themselves to information that corroborates their convictions or dispositions. They do resist unwanted influences. This is consistent with the findings of all uses and gratifications researchers (Blumler, 1978) and explains why respondents view televangelism occasionally. According to the research results, it has been established that a majority of Nigerians who have access to television sets are exposed to televangelism programs to an average extent. This study backs up the idea that the reasons people watch TV are connected, that there are instrumental and ritualised patterns in how people watch TV, and that these patterns can be applied to televangelism, which is a special kind of programming.

The findings of the study sought to know what Southeast residents do with televangelism. Finding suggests that viewers of religious television fare do not seem to always respond to the televangelists' call to viewers to join either their churches or other "living" churches. It was also found that respondents do not prefer viewing televangelism programmes to church attendance on Sundays and televangelism is not effective to replace church attendance. This shows that people do not actually heed the calls made by televangelists to change church and they are not using televangelism to replace Sunday church attendance. This finding is collaborated by Nmai (1997), who found that respondents would not change their church because of the televangelism programme. In this regard, televangelism appears to have failed perhaps in one of its cardinal objectives. However, this conclusion must be guarded with caution bearing in mind that the study design for this work did not provide for an examination of the hierarchy of the objectives of televangelism.

Additionally, the study sought to ascertain benefits Southeast residents derive from exposure to televangelism. The show reveals that Southeast residents view and use televangelism programs for a variety of reasons. Most viewers watch televangelism programs for spiritual reasons and feel gratified, while the remaining viewers split their time equally between relaxation and behavioural changes. Thus, televangelists seem to be succeeding in their endeavour. The faithful viewers found their expectations diversely fulfilled. The benefits include a profound understanding of God, a boost in faith, a closer relationship with God, and

a sense of spiritual fulfilment. This is a resounding success for televangelists.

This shows that the major reason why southeast residents view televangelism is for spiritual purposes and not for any other secular purposes. This makes the televangelists to be fulfilling the core mandate of its mission.

Also, satisfaction derived from televangelism programme viewing, show a great majority of the respondents (86%) indicated they derived religious satisfaction in one form or another, as opposed to mere entertainment or “no benefit” at all (14%). The fact that respondents derived diverse religious or spiritual benefit from viewing the programmes shows that televangelists are succeeding in their operation.

Conclusion

Televangelism, a blend of religion and entertainment, involves preaching, singing, and religious discussions on television, aiming to encourage faith and support for religious activities. The findings revealed that the primary impact of televangelism was reinforcing existing beliefs and convictions, with most viewers tuning in for religious reasons and experiencing spiritual gratification. While some watch for inspiration, others find value in the entertainment or motivational aspects of the programs. Viewership varies in frequency and purpose, reflecting the diverse roles televangelism plays in modern media culture.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion the study recommends that:

1. Televangelists should broaden their knowledge, conduct thorough research, and identify the specific needs of their audience. Whether the focus is on miracles, sermons, or messages of repentance, they should tailor their content to address these needs effectively, using the resources of the gospel. This will make televangelists to meet the religious needs of their audience all the time.
2. Televangelists should make the programme more genuine and interesting so that audience can watch the programme more often than occasionally. This can be done by introduction of interactive sessions. This can be in the form of question and answer session so that the congregation can ask questions relating to their faith. This will give those at home more opportunity to participate in the programme.

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