ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Audience Perception of "in Touch With God" Radio Programme in Anambra State

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Abstract

Religious institutions in acknowledgement of the power of the media have come to embrace the media as a major tool for the propagation of its beliefs. With the inauguration of the Anglican Diocese of Amichi as the 144th diocese of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), the pioneer Bishop, The Rt. Rev'd. Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor has vigorously preached and canvassed for the transformation of lives and positive change to society through the radio. He preaches every week in many radio stations across South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria and particularly Anambra State where the diocese is domiciled. This research work "Audience Perception of 'In Touch with God' Radio Programme in Anambra State" provides empirical evidence to how listeners perceive the programme. Anchored in Attitude Change Theory, it sought among other things to establish audience perception of the programme and its impact on the lives of listeners in Anambra State. The mixed research method-survey and in-depth interview was used for the study. A sample size of 384 was drawn from a population of 5,624,833. Multi-stage sampling approach was used to select the respondents for the survey while six respondents were purposively selected for interview. The researcher found that listeners have very positive perception of 'In Touch with God' radio programme and view it to be generally helpful both for personal spirituality and social transformation. The research recommends an extension to the duration of the programme to 45 minutes and adaptation of the programme in Igbo language in order to benefit more people.

Key words: Audience, Perception, Faith, Transformation and spirituality

Introduction

Religion, according to *Merriam-Webster* (n.d), is the belief in a god or in a group of gods. It is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2001) defines religion as the belief in the existence of God or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them.

Adeniyi (1993), cited in Michael and Iworkwagh (2008), defines religion as the consciousness of one's dependence on the transcendent being and the tendency to worship Him. Ayinla (2003) submits that, to a certain extent, religion is understood as a particular system or a set of systems in which the doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments and other similar elements are inter-related. It is a set of organized beliefs, practices, and systems that most often relate to belief and worship of a controlling force such as a personal god or another supernatural being (Stibich, 2021). Interestingly, religion can also be seen as a way of life because it is an integral part of culture. There are countless religions in the world today and these religious traditions continue to expand and spread to other parts of the world.

The Anglican Church being one of the Christian denominations came to what is today known as Anambra State on 27th July, 1857 through the efforts of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) under the leadership of an ex-slave Samuel Ajaiy Crowther (Dike, 1962). From this humble beginning till now, it has spread to all the nooks and crannies of the then Eastern region comprising South East and South South of the present day Nigeria. Today in Anambra State alone, the Anglican Church has grown to become an ecclesiastical province having nine dioceses.

The Anglican Diocese of Amichi was inaugurated on 13th January, 2009 as the 144th Diocese of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). It is the last of the nine Dioceses in Anambra State making up what is known as the Ecclesiastical Province of the Niger.

In his maiden Presidential Address to the Synod, the pioneer Bishop, The Rt. Rev'd. Ephraim

Okechukwu Ikeakor highlighted media evangelism as one of the major ministry outlets he intends to utilize.

According to Ikeakor (2019), the motivation for seeking the expansion of the media evangelism strategy is as a result of the tremendous impact it has made on the listeners over the years. The media are believed to be very powerful tools in the propagation of ideologies including religion. He has since gone ahead to saturate the airwaves with his evangelistic messages through his popular "In Touch with God" radio broadcast which comes up in major radio stations across South East Nigeria.

In his undying belief in the efficacy of the gospel message driven through the instrumentality of radio, Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor hosts his "In Touch with God" radio programme on Odenigbo 99.1 FM, Obosi in Anambra State; Unity 101.5 FM, Abakaliki in Ebonyi State; Alpha Radio, Nnobi in Anambra State; Vision Africa Radio, Umuahia in Abia State; Blaze 91.5 FM, Oraifite in Anambra State; and Omega Radio, Umuchu in Anambra State. The broadcast of these messages comes up every Friday and Sunday and is very widely followed by listeners across all faiths, church denominations and ages. Popular themes of the messages preached by Rt. Rev'd. Ikeakor through his 'In Touch with God' radio programmes include genuine conversion, Christian Discipleship, holiness, righteousness, forgiveness, stewardship, efficacy of prayer and Christian marriage among others. His major aims are to convert men from their sinful ways to become obedient followers of Christ here on earth as well as to raise a generation of Christians who by their conduct shall bring transformation to the world. In Touch with God is believed to be widely followed by men and women of all ages and religious persuasion but how have these messages shaped the lives of the listeners and contributed to the transformation of the society? This is the focus of this study.

Research objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the level of popularity enjoyed by 'In Touch with God' radio programme in Anambra State.
2. To ascertain the motivation for radio listeners who listen to 'In Touch with God'.
3. To assess the audience perception of 'In Touch with God' radio programme.
4. To examine the impact of 'In Touch with God' radio programmes on the faith and Christian living of radio listeners in Anambra State.

Research questions

1. What is the level of popularity enjoyed by 'In Touch with God' radio programme in Anambra State?
2. What is the motivation for radio listeners who listen to 'In Touch with God'?
3. What is audience perception of 'In Touch with God' radio programme?
4. What is the impact of 'In Touch with God' radio programme in the life of listeners?

Literature Review:

The Missionary Origins of the Media in Nigeria

The media in Nigeria owe its origin to the activities of Christian missionaries at the turn of the 19th century. Hope Waddel under the Presbyterian Church established the first printing press in Nigeria at Calabar in1846 while Rev'd. Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) founded the first Nigerian newspaper in Abeokuta known as "Iwe Irohin" in 1859. While the Calabar press was printing religious tracts and booklets, Rev'd. Townsend was in Abeokuta publishing his newspaper and running a printing school (Daramola, 2006).

Buttressing the point, Akinfeleye (1985) observes that the year 1859 marked the beginning of religious journalism in Nigeria as well as the birth of newspaper journalism in the country. The proliferation of missionary activities in Nigeria further opened the doors to the emergence of more printing presses and newspapers.

Afolabi (n.d) states that in 1862 Robert Cambell opened his printing press in Lagos where he published "The Anglo-African" newspaper in 1863. This was followed by "The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertizer" by Richard Blaize in

1875 and by the year 1880, there were not less than five printing presses in Lagos. According to him, the missionaries have long been in the fore front of the journalistic efforts before the colonial administration and later the nationalists came on board. The colonial government set up a printing press on Broad Street, Lagos in 1914 and later expanded to Enugu, Ibadan and Cameroon where they printed Trade Journals, Letter of Credence, white Papers, Rules and Regulations, treasury Books and Forms. These were followed by the West African pilot published by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937 and later the New Nigerian Newspaper in the Northern Nigeria. Till date, churches in Nigeria have continued to publish newspapers and magazines.

Apart from the foregoing, Ajibade (2003) notes that these missionary organizations further contributed immensely to the growth and development of Nigerian media.

The Church and Electronic Media

Decree 38 of 1992, which established the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), does not have any provision for granting broadcast license to religious organizations. That notwithstanding, these religious organizations have resorted to producing and packaging contents in audio cassettes, audio CDs, DVDs, etc. as well as producing contents that are broadcast through other stations (Oni et al., 2013).

Again, churches in Nigeria have resorted to webcasting and satellite broadcasting in order not to run contrary to NBC code. Today, there are 19 internet radio stations in Nigeria reaching their numerous audiences around the world everyday (mytuner.com).

There are some religious bodies that receive license from the international media and they operate their own international broadcast media. For example, the Synagogue of All Nations, Christ Embassy and other religious bodies also have their own television stations which they use to disseminate their religious programmes to millions of people across the world (Ogwo et al., 2013).

Radio has been used so widely as a developmental tool. The potential of this medium as a tool for rapid development has been put to test and affirmed to be effective from many empirical studies (Akoja et al., 2017).

Leveraging on this, Churches make extensive use of the radio in propagating their messages to listeners across the globe. According to Anderson (n.d), the emergence of Christian radio during the early twentieth century reflected the religious adaptation of this new form of secular media by Christian leaders. Christians received these messages from the airwaves and tuned in for a variety of reasons including spiritual renewal, physical healing, and tips on how to help convert their friends and family to Christ.

Jones cited in Stoneman (2006) says that the radio provided vast coverage for the masses, circulated the gospel quickly and continuously to its listeners thereby expediting the conservative protestant church's urgent task of world evangelism. More importantly, radio "penetrated" innumerable political, cultural, economic, and linguistic barriers to the propagation of the gospel, reaching domains traditionally inaccessible to the missionary.

Scholars advance so many reasons for which churches and preachers make use of the radio. Dorgan (1993) cited in Anderson suggests that many preachers are on air because they believe they are obeying a divine direction. For such people, radio serves as a platform which provides them with the opportunity to use their talents for God thereby fulfilling the biblical Great Commission.

Theoretical Framework

This research work is anchored in the Attitude Change media theory propounded in 1960 by Daniel Karz, Irving Sarnof and Charles McClintock. The major thrust of the theory is that human beings are both rational and irrational depending on the situation and prevailing circumstances at the time. Attitude change refers to the change or modification that may occur in an individual's perception, attitude or behavior as a result of regular exposures to certain media contents. People's attitudes are sociological byproducts strongly engrained in culture and for

them to change from such strongly held orientations, there must be certain dissonance in the individual's mind as the new idea which constitutes the nucleus of the intended change is being absorbed. To achieve a change contrary to these previously held beliefs, orientation and attitudes, there has to be a planned and sustained communication projecting the intended change. In this instance, biblical messages are intended to convert non-Christians to accept the gospel message and make professing Christians make a commitment to a life of discipleship.

Empirical Review

Akoja, Adekoya and Jegede (2017) in their study titled "Listeners' Perception of Babcock University Radio Programmes on Faith and Healthy Living" selected four faith and health oriented programmes running on Babcock University radio - Hope 89.1 Fm for the study. They used the mixed research method-survey and Focus Group Discussion to study listeners' perception of the selected radio programmes. Their study conclusively revealed that there is a significant impact of these programmes on the life of listeners within the university community.

Another work relevant to this study is "The role of Broadcast media in Attitude change: A Pilot study of a campus radio programme and its LGBT Advocacy" carried out by Clemente, Billiedo and David (2013). 73 students were used for the study examining the effects of exposure to gay-themed episodes on adolescents' knowledge about and attitudes toward gay men. They were exposed to gay-themed episodes of the radio programme on coming out and experiences of pride and prejudice among gay men. The results of the study suggest that the programmes were effective in reducing prejudice towards gay men.

Asema, Anum and Edegoh (2013) studied "Radio as a tool for rural development in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges." The study revealed that radio plays crucial role to achieve positive attitudinal change in the populace. It advocates the use of local languages especially when rural dwellers are targeted.

Research Methodology

The survey research design is considered appropriate for this study because it helped in assessing the audience level of awareness of the "In Touch with God" radio programmes. In-depth interview is a qualitative research method in which the researcher asks open-ended questions and records the respondents' answers. In-depth interview is less structured and allows for flexibility in question construction.

Population of study

The population consists of residents of Anambra State who listen to "In Touch with God" radio programme. Since the exact population is unknown, the 2006 National population census figure is extrapolated and used while the actual listeners to "In Touch with God" were purposively selected at the point of questionnaire distribution. According to National Population Census (2006), the population of Anambra was 4,182,032; however, this figure is as at 15 years ago. As a result, the UNDP annual increase rate of 2.28% was adopted to obtain the new projected population figure which is 5,624,833. However, only FRCN listeners were targeted and used in this study.

Sample size and sampling technique

A sample of 384 listeners who listen to "In Touch with God" radio programme was selected from the projected population using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. The table provides that when a given population is from 1,000,000 and above, the corresponding sample size should be 384.

A multi-stage sampling approach was used to select the 384 respondents across all the three senatorial zones (Anambra North, Anambra Central and Anambra South) of the state, three local governments - one from each of the senatorial zones (Anambra North: Oyi; Anambra Central: Aniocha; Anambra South: Nnewi South) and four communities from each of the selected Local government Areas. 32 copies of questionnaire were purposively administered to 'In Touch with God' listeners who are resident in representative communities from all the designated local governments areas.

Table 1: Listing of Senatorial Districts, Local Governments, Selected sample of Communities and Respondents

Senatorial Zone	Local Govt.	Communities	Number of respondents	Number of questionnaires recovered
Anambra North	Oyi	Umunya	32	30
		Awkuzu	32	30
		Ogbunike	32	32
		Nteje	32	28
Anambra Central	Aniocha	Agulu	32	30
		Neni	32	31
		Ichida	32	31
		Obeledu	32	30
Anambra South	Nnewi South	Amichi	32	32
		Osumenyi	32	32
		Unubi	32	32
		Ekwulumili	32	32
Total			384	372
			100%	96.9%

(Field survey 2022)

Data Presentation and Analysis:

The survey was conducted with a questionnaire consisting of 17 items while the in-depth interview has four open-ended questions. A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed across the three senatorial zones and three local government areas of Anambra State. Out of this number, 372 were returned losing 12 in the process. The questionnaire was sectioned into two major parts. Section A elicited information on the biodata of the respondents while section B consisted of 14 statements focused on evaluating respondent's opinion on "In Touch with God" radio programme. Frequency tables and simple percentages were used to analyze data generated from the study. The survey provided statistical evidences for the findings and these findings were further strengthened by the qualitative data gathered from the interviews.

Likert-scale response (with five options – Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was used in scoring the questionnaire items while responses of the in-depth interview were recorded with the use of a Digital Voice Recorder and later transcribed. For validity and reliability of the instruments, pilot tests were conducted. 10 respondents resident in Ebonyi State who also listen to "In Touch with God" were used for the pilot study. The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative method of data analysis.

Table 2 above was used to test the popularity of 'In Touch with God' radio programme. 1,488 responses were gotten from a set of 4 statements verifying the popularity of the programme. 1,438 responses representing 96.64% of the cumulative responses indicate that 'In Touch with God' radio programme is very popular among the listeners, 2.22% are undecided while 1.14% do not agree that the programme is popular among radio listeners in Anambra State.

Table 2: Popularity of 'In Touch with God' radio programme among radio listeners in Anambra State

S/N	Popularity	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	I listen to 'In Touch with God' radio programme every week	149 (40%)	223 (60%)			
2.	The programme is widely followed by people of all ages	125 (34%)	217 (58.3%)	20 (5.4%)	10 (2.7)	
3.	In Touch with God listenership cuts across all religious denominations	160 (43.1%)	200 (53.7%)	10 (2.7%)	2 (0.5%)	
4.	'In Touch with God' radio programme is a household name among listeners in Anambra State	170 (45.7%)	194 (52.2%)	3 (0.8%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)

Table 3: The motivation for listening to "In Touch with God" radio programme

S/N	Motivation	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	I listen to "In Touch with God" because it addresses the challenges I go through in life	260 (60%)	112 (40%)			
2.	I listen to "In Touch with God" because of the rich contents it delivers	242 (65.1%)	120 (32.1%)	10 (2.7%)		
3.	I listen to "In Touch with God" because the presentation is down to earth and easy to understand.	205 (55%)	165 (45%)			
4.	I listen to "In Touch with God" because I get answers to the questions that trouble my life.	170 (45.7%)	194 (52.2%)	3 (0.8%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)
5.	I listen to "In Touch with God" because it meets my spiritual needs.	168 (45.2%)	196 (52.7%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)

(Field work, 2022)

Table 4: Audience perception of "In Touch with God" radio programme.

S/N	Audience Perception	SA	A	UD	D	S
1.	I get rich contents on faith and Christian living from "In Touch with God" radio programme	205 (55.1%)	167 (44.9%)			
2.	"In Touch with God" radio programme focus on solid biblical principles	223 (60%)	139 (37.4%)	10 (2.7%)	-	
3.	"In Touch with God" radio programme encourage changing bad lifestyles	260 (70%)	93 (25%)	19 (5%)	-	
4.	"In Touch with God" radio programmes promote faith and Christian living	242 (65%)	130 (35%)			

(Field work, 2022)

Table 5: Impact of "In Touch with God" radio programme on faith and Christian living of listeners

S/N	Impact on the audience	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	"In Touch with God" has impacted my life positively	260 (60%)	112 (40%)			
2.	"In Touch with God" is a life transforming programme	242 (65.1%)	120 (32.1%)	10 (2.7%)		
3.	"In Touch with God" has helped improve my spirituality	205 (55%)	165 (45%)			
4.	I now practise biblical teachings taught on "In Touch with God"	170 (45.7%)	194 (52.2%)	3 (0.8%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)
5.	Programme content brought transformation to my community	168 (45.2%)	196 (52.7%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)

(Field work, 2022)

Table 3 above shows a set of 5 statements depicting the motivation for listenership to 'In Touch with God' radio programme. With a cumulative response of 1,860, 98.49% agree and strongly agree that they are motivated to listen to 'In Touch with God' because of the rich contents and value the programme adds to their lives whereas 1.51% are either undecided or do not agree.

Table 4 above demonstrates the positive perception of radio listeners in Anambra State who listen to In Touch with God. A set of 4 questions were asked with a cumulative of 1,488 responses. 1,459 of those responses representing 98.05% either agree or strongly agree to the positive perception they hold of 'In Touch with God' radio programme. Only 1.01% of the responses show indecision.

From table 5 above, in order to ascertain the impact of 'In Touch with God' radio programme on the life of listeners, a set of five questions were put to the respondents. A total of 1,860 responses were gotten and 98.5% of the responses affirm the positive impact of 'In Touch with God' radio programme on their lives. 0.6% of the respondents do not agree the programme has impacted their lives while 0.8% is undecided.

Responses from In-depth Interviews

In order to address the qualitative aspect of this study, in-depth Interview was used to elicit responses from listeners that further validated the data generated from the survey. The sample size for this exercise was six listeners from the three senatorial zones in Anambra State. Using a table of random numbers, two out of the four communities in each local government were selected and two listeners were purposively selected from the designated communities based on their willingness to answer the questions put to them. The questions were designed in such a way that the answers were used to resolve the research questions set out in this study.

Research question 1: All the respondents identified themselves as regular listeners to 'In Touch with God' radio programme. They were able to mention the various radio stations in Anambra State through which they listen to the programme. Some of their responses are reproduced below:

"I listen to 'In Touch with God' all the time. In fact, I don't miss any edition except when I travel outside the East. If I miss it on Friday due to busy schedule, I already know other stations where I can listen to it on Saturday or even Sunday."

"I am an ardent listener to 'In Touch with God'. In my house, it is a family affair. Everybody in the house knows when it comes up and for the next 30minutes, every activity is suspended in my house."

Research question 2: From the responses obtained, the motivation for most listeners lies in the values they draw from the programme. Some expressed their attraction as a result of the programmes commitment to spreading biblical truth and not denominational bias. Some listen because of the programme's rich content and the contemporary issues relevant to everyday living. To many of the respondents, the lessons they learn guide them in dealing with everyday challenges of the Christian life.

"Unlike many other religions programmes I have listened to, 'In Touch with God' is very different. The focus is always on sound Christian living. For me, it has become a necessary guide to everyday challenges."

Research question 3: A majority of the respondents hold very positive perception of 'In Touch with God' radio programme. They perceive the programme as very helpful and relevant to their lives. They see 'Touch with God' radio programme as a tool for personal and social rebirth.

"In Touch with God' radio programme is uniquely different from many other religious programmes I am used to. It is devoid of the usual denominational dogmas and emotionalism that have become the hallmark of most religious programmes. The program is for serious minded people who want to make progress in their spiritual life."

"Anybody who wants to grow as a child of God should not miss 'In Touch with God' radio programme. It is different and so deeply satisfying."

Research question 4: All the people who responded to the questions indicated the various aspects of their lives they have experienced changes as a result of their exposure to the messages coming from 'In Touch with God' radio programme.

"For years, we have endured crisis in our family but the peace we now enjoy today is as a result of the messages I always listen to through the programme. The Bishop will always talk about Christian forgiveness. It was not easy but I needed to obey the word of God. I reached out to my brothers who grievously offended me. Today, we are one big family."

"My attitude to prayer and Bible study has changed as a result of 'In Touch with God' radio programme. Before, it was difficult bringing my family together to pray and read the Bible together. But today, our family altar has been revitalized because the Bishop will always teach that."

Discussion of Findings

From the survey, more than 90% of the respondents in the survey agree that 'In Touch with God' radio programme is widely followed by people of all ages and denominations in Anambra State. This result was collaborated by respondents to the In-Depth Interview who claim to know acquaintances across denominations who are ardent listeners to 'In Touch with God' radio programme.

The study also revealed that the prime motivation for listeners to 'In Touch with God' radio programme is the rich content and the values they draw from it. Listeners are attracted to 'In Touch with God' as a result of the programme's focus on solid biblical principles it teaches. It was discovered that many people are attracted to 'In Touch with God' because it addresses their everyday challenges and struggles and as a result, it has become a necessary guide to them.

98.5% of the respondents affirm they have been greatly impacted by the programme. This claim again is collaborated by the results of the qualitative study where some of the respondents claim that because they now practise biblical principles as taught in 'In Touch with God' radio programme, peace has returned to their families. This finding is an endorsement of the Attitude Change Theory of Daniel Kartz, Irvinga Sarnoff and Charles McClitock upon which this study is anchored. It states that change or modification may occur in an individual's perception, attitude or behavior as a result of regular exposure to certain media contents. In this instance, the audience continual exposure to 'In Touch with God' has brought remarkable change of behaviour in their lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The popularity, rich contents and the powerful impacts of 'In Touch with God' radio programmes among radio listeners in Anambra State have all been firmly established from this study. The study has proven that both personal and social rebirth is achievable with the instrumentality of the gospel messages using the power of the media. 'In Touch with God' through its deliberately structured teachings on Christian life and discipleship has demonstrated that our society can change when the right messages are preached through the media. The researcher therefore recommends that:

1. Religious organizations that use the media should focus on concrete biblical principles that draw men to become true Disciples of Christ instead of denominational dogmas and emotionalism.
2. An adaptation of 'In Touch with God' radio programme should be done in the vernacular to enable more people to benefit from its rich content.
3. The time allotted for 'In Touch with God' radio programme should be increased from 30 minutes to 45 minutes for more benefit to the audience.

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