

# Communicating Evangelistic Messages To Commuters In Port Harcourt Motor Parks; Is It Side Hustling Or Winning Souls’?

Bobmanuel, Karibi Benson Phd

*Department of Mass Communication,  
Ken Saro-Wiwa, Polytechnic, Bori, River’s State, Nigeria*

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## ABSTRACT

There is a movement within the church that is disillusioned with the existing model and methods of preaching and practice nowadays. Adherents of this flapping are the motor parks evangelists seen in some parks across the country. Their aim is to preach, pray for commutes embarking on a journey and ask for monetary assistance in other to propagate the gospel of salvation. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to investigate communicating evangelistic messages to commuters in Port Harcourt motor parks; Is it side hustle or winning souls? In conducting this study, four (4) motor parks, Abali/ Mile one Fly Over, WaterLines, Rumuokoro and Eleme Junction motor park’s and four objectives of study were set which led to the adoption of survey research method design. Questionnaire was the instrument used in gathering data. The analysis of the data gathered reveals the following, that motor park evangelist constitutes nuisance and invade on the quietness of commuters. This study recommends that the Christian association of Nigeria should regulate their practices while government should ban preaching on buses and impose fine on their activities.

**Keywords:** Evangelistic messages, Commuters, Port Harcourt, Motor Parks, Winning Souls.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to human existence. We communicate to persuade, influence relationships, inform and to share, discover and uncover information, Esimokha, (2013). Albeit, communication is pivotal to evangelism (Kirk 2000 p. 60), it is a call to salvation in order to restore the relationship between God and humanity. Overtime, motor parks evangelism has been known to have significant attention and influence to Christians who believes in the gospel of (Mathew 28; 19) ...

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the father, and the son and of the Holy Ghost. The early Christians Peter and Paul preached the Gospel in public places where dozens gave their lives and were Baptized, (Act 17; 21-34).

These verses of the scripture established the need for the “Message of Salvation” to be communicated and or/ preached to all nations of the world irrespective of the place and time. To this end, Engemann (2019, pp 3-4), writes, preaching the gospel is a process of comprehension and communication that consists of several phases of text interpretations and text introductions that involves the interpretations between the authors of the Bible text, the Bible, preacher, the delivered sermon/messages, listeners. While, the preachers’ word, and the listeners are usually the “Foci” of attention in the preaching process, with a few noticeable exceptions (Kaufman & Mosdol, 2018, pp 123-32). They observed, scanty attention has been paid to materiality as an actor in the communication and meaning making process.

Of course, these styles of evangelism have continued to make in-roads despite attendant challenges to Motor Parks. Evangelists who rushes from one filled vehicle to another under stringent condition to share the “Good News”, and sometimes, boards the vehicle to a distant environment in a bid to collect “Offering”. These preachers or evangelists who claims to propagate the Gospel, make reference to the Book of (Luke 6; 38), Give, and it shall be given to you, good measures, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. Proponent of those adherents who seemed compelled and cannot wait seizes the opportunity to continue to propagate the gospel with others irrespective of their feelings. So much at first to gain converts and to bring to others the same joy and renewed confidence that they had

discovered for themselves. Christopher, Mercy&Solomon, (2014, pp; 111—112), suggests in a nut shell, that this is the original and fundamental meaning of evangelism. Sharing the good news is a natural and universal human impulse wholly apart from religion.

In Port Harcourt, as in other parts of the country, apart from the normal Motor Park hustling and bustling, evangelists and/or preachers move close to the door where a vehicle is loading and a voice echo's... Brethren, I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a Bible and sometimes handkerchief, and a corresponding ...Amen. Their aim is obviously, to preach, pray and ask for financial assistance from commuters embarking on a journey. However, passengers at Abali/Mile one Fly Over, Waterlines, Rumuokoro and Eleme Junction etc motor parks witnesses these barrage of evangelists in every minutes of the day. Interestingly, the prayer pattern goes thus; Father Lord, thank you for bringing us to this wonderful day. We are privileged to be amongst the living. We ask for your mercy and grace for your beloved children embarking on this journey. I come against every blood-sucking demon on the way. Nobody will die in this vehicle. I cover the passengers, driver, the tires, steering, engine and the road with the ocean blood of Jesus. You shall not run into armed robbers. Your monies will not be used to pay mortuary bills. I transferred my grace to you. Go and return in peace. The prayer ends and the evangelist / preacher continue, if you are led by the spirit, you can support the work of Jesus Christ. You will see some people with kind hearts, dropping/squeezing money to help the evangelists. In all of this, the driver (s) is very patient to wait for the prayer to end before he zooms off.

Against this backdrop, Ugwu (2016) notes; itinerant preachers have inadvertently become partners with business men and women to keep the economy moving. The preachers, mostly shabbily dressed have devised ingenious ways of winning souls and making a living in a country beset with recession, inflation and joblessness. As a result of this, commuters have persistently expressed their opinions on these never-ending practices that seemingly affect some Motor Parks in the country, especially in Port Harcourt. These experiences encountered by the commuting public are the reason for this study.

### 1.1 Statement Of The Problem

The contention about motor parks evangelism has continued to elicit interpretations amongst commuters and unending bombardment

from well-meaning and ordained pastors across the country. Some have accused the motor parks evangelists in extorting money in God's name using the Bible and church to make their daily livelihood. While some believe in their prayers as spiritual protection embarking on a journey. To a large extent, the churches are also entangled in this quagmire and its reputation is now at stake. As a result, a noticeable shift from believing preachers in some denomination has drastically declined due to counter accusations. While the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of churches stands aloof watching the church go down the drain without check-mating the excesses of these preachers.

Obviously, in spite of this negative materialistic tendencies associated with this, Linn (2020), writes, materiality is a dimension of preaching that must not be overlooked, focusing on materiality might highlight what preaching from a pulpit does or does not do in the communication situation or which body it is that is preaching (pp.122-23). Regardless, the underlying assumption of this study is premised on preaching and collecting offering is the propelling force behind motor parks evangelist interest and degree of involvement

### 1.2 Objectives of Study

The objectives of the study are;

- To find out the level of awareness of motor parks evangelist
- Examine commuters' opinion on motor parks evangelist
- Ascertain if motor parks evangelist constitute nuisance to commuters
- Investigate the church motor parks evangelists represent

### 1.3 Research Questions

The following Research Questions were framed;

- What is the level of awareness of motor parks evangelist?
- What are commuters' opinions on motor parks evangelist?
- Are motor parks evangelist constituting nuisance to commuters?
- What are the churches motor parks evangelists represent?

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual understanding of evangelist messages;

Evangelist messages are a broad concept that encompasses communicating religious messages/ teaching and interpretations of the Bible.

But this research will endeavor to stay within that context. Just as it is difficult to explain some social science activities, in the same manner places limitations in classifying evangelist messages within a social space. By description, evangelist messages are a human activity. It takes place amongst social groups, families, religious, political etc. These messages may be conceived differently by different people. In other words, it has no single universally acceptable definition and/or explanation. It could however be described as the practice of transmitting faith based or religious information to a person (s). Simply put, propagating the good news of the gospel of salvation based on Biblical teachings and ordinances. It underscores comprehension and communication that consists of several phases of the Bible, high moral well-being, skills, energy, astuteness, strength, readiness etc. The ability to convey, interpret such messages arising from the Bible aids the wholesome understanding of the recipient (s).

### 2.1 Spreading the Good News

In the New Testament, the early preachers Peter and Paul spread the good news without limitation and hundreds give their lives to God by responding to the preaching's. Same is applicable in motor parks in Port Harcourt and some states across the county. In a study carried out by Rinawaty & Hannas (2019): Christian missionary's responsibilities in preaching, the researchers note, the Gospel must be preached because this is Jesus Christ command. On that basis there are people who are fully committed to become missionaries. It is very possible for missionaries to carry out preaching or evangelizing tasks at all times but the result is not always prosperous. Various rejections to the gospel seems so clear but cannot be used as an excuse to abandon the responsibility. Bearable as it may seems, in a study conducted by Amanze & Worgu (2014), Internet evangelism: an effective methods for soul- winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Nigeria, the researchers evidently suggest thus, the mission of the SDA Church is to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angles message of Revelation 14; 6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant Church. The communication of the gospel is the most important aim of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This has led to a myriad of evangelist approaches carried out by this church all over the world.

Accordingly, Eng (2012), study on preaching and world view, he adds, the world is ruled by ideas. Many of these are assumptions and half-truths that come from a person's world view. Most people are not conscious that they have a worldview that is filtering and interpreting what they see, this includes the Christian. Rick (2012), in his study, the purpose driven church, also agrees to this position saying: our preaching has to be in harmony with God's overall purpose in people's lives. Solid theology for preaching has to take into account God's purpose for man, for the Bible and for preaching. On this issue, Parker (1985), submits, our behavior is not totally controlled by natural impulses. Behavior begins with belief as well. Beliefs are born of philosophies of doctrine. Doctrine's can be spiritual or secular wholesome or destructive, true or false. True doctrine understood changes, attitude and behavior. Here, the doctrine of the gospel will improve behavioral pattern quicker than a study of behavior. The emphasis is that, unworthy behavior may lead to criticisms, condemnations and disbelief among the Christian fold based on Biblical teachings and principles.

Regardless, Aryeh (2020), in his study, urban public space evangelism: evangelism in market places in Ghana, suggest that, the few churches and pastors who find the need for evangelism in urban market places are those with Pentecostal/charismatic passion. Many often, were labeled as preaching for money. In other words, they preach in the markets due to offerings they take from traders. Koukoura (2014) also conducted a study, Evangelisms in Christian societies; an orthodox homiletic approach argues that, Re-evangelism is the answer to the question of what must be done. Faith originates from hearing and the missionary preaching that is directed towards the people who are ignorant of the world-saving work of Christ needs to be articulated keeping in mind the scheme of communication and the special significance of the following factors; transmitter, receiver, topic, message, channel and code.

While commenting on the relevance of evangelism, evangelism and missions, Heward-mills (2007), stated that, every pastor must be an evangelist at heart. He must know that he is standing in the midst of a great harvest of souls and must understand that in spite of the many churches around, he is still surrounded by many souls. Pastors need to know that they must concentrate on the harvest of souls. Otherwise; they will become distracted by money, positions and popularity (p.1). In the past, preaching and evangelism were centered on the work of God where offering were

freely given and accepted with gratitude. Nowadays, it seems to revolve around money. Some preachers appear more interested in money gain, neglecting the spiritual well-being of their listeners. This shift from the Bible principles of selflessness is concerning, (Penrose, 2023).

Modern researchers has revealed that evangelism is an improved form of Pentecostalism Anderson (2014) cited in Kuponu (2015) observes, Pentecostalism began just a century ago and the movement continue to expand into 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pentecostal believe in the possibility of the gift of the Holy Spirit with a great emphasis on the fact that the Bible Pattern of Baptism in the spirit was an experience subsequent to salvation and evidenced by the ability to speak in tongues, performs miracles and manifest the other gifts of the Holy Spirit as clearly stated in the Bible (Ojo, 2006, cited in Kuponu, 2015).

## 2.2 Are Motor Parks Evangelists Soul Winners

Airiguoh, (2019) in a study, communicating technologies and modern day evangelists' reveals that, evangelist are communicators. The message of salvation that they preach is not a message of coercion but of conviction. Sinners are convicted in the hearts (p.14). But nowadays, there appear to be so many reasons why some people embark in evangelism. More so, the greatest evangelist Jesus Christ gives stem from Luke (4;18;19), Isaiah (61;1) Isaiah (49;24-25), Revelation (3;18) John (4;3-4), John (10;10) and Isaiah (61;2). Can be categorized into five (5) i.e., preach the gospel to the poor, heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed. To a large extent, the evangelists are called but the savior Himself to prepare the saint for the ministerial work (Ephesians 4; 11-12).

According to Nairaland forum, (2023), it is a fraud. Because they talk people into paying them money by quoting the scriptures and telling you that God asked them to collect seed, the way we sow seed in this country is becoming unbecoming, sadly foolish people comply and give them money. I would rather give a beggar who comes clean to demand for money than another who disguised in monkey jacket, reading excerpts of a story book to beg for money. Lord (2020), further explained that, the motive when they start asking for gift in the end negates the principles of freely he have receive, freely give. There is something intrinsically wrong with Nigerian notion of Christianity and its doctrine in every sense of the

word. Hence, you will find religion and wickedness cohabiting together at the same time in the hearts of people who profess to know God.

Interestingly, these bring to bear the relevance of information to a society. Without information, people will be ignorant of what is happening in most motor parks. In the same vein, without some form of patronage by some commuters, these preachers would have been out of business. Enveloped by this new phenomena, Ajibade, (2017) in his study; communicating the gospel to the African Church, identified four (4) basic means of communicating evangelistic messages, the communicator, He or she is the sender of the message. Next is the recipient who receives the message at the order end. It could be an individual or a group of people who may be familiar or not with the message. The third role player and a key one is the message that is being sent. The forth, is the medium or channel, which is dependent on the nature of the message and the recipient.

Motor parks evangelism influences our actions, beliefs and perceptions about Christianity, no doubt, even though such influence may not evoke reactions but definitely they have some effects, Wade (2023,p.1). in a study; maintaining the foolish practice; preaching as evangelism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, notes, even though preaching as evangelism has both a Biblical and historical basis, it is being derived today by a more progressive form of Christianity with the theological/ mission logical slant of Lesslie Newbigin and David J. Bosch, along with the contemporary teachings of Brain McLaren, Rob Bell, with a heavy reliance on post modern appreciation. The emerging church would like to see an end to preaching as evangelism. Here, the emerging church evaluating cultural consideration over any possible offence of the cross, harbors' a serious hesitation towards preaching as evangelism, preferring an attractive approach to sharing the good news, rather than a whole gospel approach rendering emerging church evangelistic theo-praxis as one which learns more towards cultural bias than a Biblical or historical one.

With these developments, Beville (2011), in a study, the church community in contemporary culture: evangelism and engagement, said, there is some concern that some people in this new movement do not have the theological competences to pilot these flimsy vessels. The fact shows that the interest of motor parks evangelism still needs to be checked, especially in this part of the globe where people take advantage of religious beliefs

systems to sweet-mouth people to collect offering in God's name. By imputation, Penrose (2023) in his study, the bus stop evangelist; a hustler or a true servant, argues, unfortunately, some individuals bring their poverty into preaching, giving the impression that they are solely interested in money rather than souls. It would be more effective if they focused on preaching the truth and allowing the Holy Spirit to touch people's hearts. They should avoid intertwining their financial needs with their ministry. Instead, they could seek employment or develop skills to support themselves. Similarly, Kinikini (2011), notes, preaching in a bus is a violation of the right of other occupants who may want their quietness. Preaching in a bus is an abuse of freedom of speech. We should tow the path of moderation in whatever we do in this country. Despite all the noise born again churches in all the streets spreading like wild fire, there is no iota of improvement in our conduct. Corruptions have so pervaded even the churches such that it is a business to make mega Billions for the pastors, the spouse and the offspring. If the religion decides to preach in a bus, would you the fire spiting evangelist like the forced listening, definitely not so why do it to others. Must I be forced to listen?

Obowunmi(2011), writes, there is a difference between freedom of speech and being a public nuisance's. Preaching on buses can and should be banned. If I pay a dollar to be able to enjoy my ride and someone blabbing about their fairly tale is bound to bring discomfort. So in the same vein, evangelicals should be stopped from disturbing the peace in public transportation.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on religious communication theory. The theory assumes that the meaning and purpose of life derive from a faith tradition grounded in scriptures (Holy Bible). The theory evolves from Jewish and Christian traditions and concentrates on the persuasive purposes of influencing the minds and hearts of audience to believe in God, inspiring moral actions based on those beliefs, and inculcating a religious consciousness and identity in audience. The prominent ancestors of religious communication are homiletics, psychology, language and media theories. Homiletics derives from the Greek homilia meaning conversation or social intercourse Augustine and other medieval writers expanded upon classical rhetorical theory to explain the act of persuasive Christian preaching. This theory no doubt is in tandem with this study because religious

communication explains the message, processes and effects used by communicators to influence audience to adapt to beliefs and actions in line with scriptural precepts.

### III. METHOD OF STUDY

The survey research method was adopted from this study. This method was used because it is suitable for eliciting the response of commuters in motor parks concerning the objectives of this study. The researcher used questionnaire as an instrument of data collection. The area of study was Port Harcourt, while the population of this study are four hundred commuters in four selected motor parks ie Abali/mile one flyover, Waterline, Rumuokoro and Eleme junction in Port Harcourt respectively.

#### Sample and Sampling Techniques

Two sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. These were the purposive sampling procedure and simple random sampling. The researcher purposively chose the population of study because it allows for the deliberate selection of the elements that made up the sample (commuters); the simple random sampling was used to randomly select 400 respondents. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamane model was used as shown below:

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

n = Sample  
 N = Population size under study  
 I = Unit in value (always constants)  
 e = Estimated standard error margin of 0.05

$$n = \frac{23,112}{1 + 23,112 (0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{1 + 57.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{57.78}$$

n = 400  
 Therefore, n = 400  
 Thus, 400 commuters formed the sample size of this study.

### IV. PRESENTATIONS OF DATA

A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered for this study and all were properly answered and returned thus, representing 100% return rate.

Age Range	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18 – 24 yrs	132	33%
25 – 30 yrs	168	42%
35 yrs and above	100	25%
Total	400	100%

Table 1: Age Distribution and Respondents

Source: Field survey, 2023

As shown in the above table, 132 respondents (33%) were between the ages of 18 – 24 years. 168 respondents (42%) were between the ages of 25 – 30 years, while 100 respondents (25%) were between the ages of 35 and above.

Source	No of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	354	88.5%
No	46	11.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 2: Respondents view on Awareness of motor park evangelist.

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

As shown in the above table 354 respondents (88.5%) are aware of the motor park evangelist, while 46 respondents (11.5%) were not aware.

Responses	No. of Response	Percentage (%)
Excellent	12	3%
Good	126	31.5%
Fair	58	14.5%
Bad	204	51%
Total	400	100%

Table 3: Respondents opinion on motor park evangelist

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The table above shows that 12 respondents (3%) said motor parks evangelist are excellent, 126 respondents (31.5%) said good, 58 respondents (14.5%) said fair, while 204 respondents (51%) said bad.

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	225	56.3%
No	21	5.3%
Others	154	38.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 4: Responses of motor park evangelist constitute nuisance to commuters

Sources: Field survey, 2023.

The above table shows that 225 respondents (56.3%) said motor park evangelist constitute nuisance, 21 respondents (5.3%) said do

not constitute nuisance, while 154 respondents (38.5%) said they are growing the ministry of Salvation.

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	299	74.8%
Agree	20	5%
Strongly disagree	28	7%
Disagree	31	7.8%
Neutral	22	5.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 5: Responses on the church/ministry motor park evangelist represent.  
 Source: Field survey, 2023.

From the above table, 299 respondents (74.8%) strongly agree that motor park evangelist do not represent a known church, 20 respondents

(5%) agreed, 28 respondents (7%) strongly disagreed, 31 respondents (7.8%) disagreed, while 22 respondents (5.5%) were neutral.

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	297	74.3%
No	103	25.7%
Total	400	100%

Table 6: Responses on whether there are other factors responsible for motor park evangelist collection of money after preaching.

Source: Field survey, 2023.

From the above table, 297 respondents (74.3%) said there are other factors making motor park evangelist from collecting money, while 103 respondents (25.7%) said it is normal to sow seed into the life of a preacher or evangelist.

4. Data shows that motor parks evangelist do not represent any identifiable/known church in the committee of churches rather their activities are for selfish purpose.

#### 4.1 Summary of Findings

1. Majority of respondents are exposed to motor parks evangelists in Port Harcourt
2. Awareness levels of their activities are predominately noticed
3. It was also revealed that this motor parks evangelist are constituting nuisance to commuter's thereby invading their privacy while embarking on a journey

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the respondents are aware of the activities of these motor park evangelists in various parks in Port Harcourt. Accordingly, preaching and collecting money negates the gospel of soul-winning and is not in consonance with the scriptures. Hence, this move is perceived as using God's name to extort and exploit commuter's generosity and the integrity of religious matters is now questioned.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that in order to forestall the activities of this motor parks evangelist which has caused continuous embarrassment to the churches. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should come up with regulations to checkmate their practices and imposed sanctions when and where necessary. Again, the mission paradigm needs to be revisited in a bid to save the church and the Christian organization at large. So that those intending evangelists picking up the signal to take advantage and extort on the generosity from commuters on their radar will desist forthwith. Government should ban preaching on buses because it is a violation on the right of commuters who may want their quietness. Besides, it is an abuse of freedom of speech.

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