




Assessing the phenomenon of market evangelism in Nigeria and its impact on traders' ethics



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Market evangelism has emerged as a transformative force in Nigeria, integrating faith and commerce to reshape traders' behaviour and ethics. It has significantly transformed Nigeria's business landscape, shaping a brighter future for traders, communities and the nation, while demonstrating its potential as a catalyst for positive change. However, this approach overlooks the necessity for sustainable behavioural change. This study examines the impact of market evangelism on pervasive unethical business practices that hinder Nigeria's economic development, utilising a historical approach and both primary and secondary sources. The findings indicate that market evangelism plays a key role in fostering integrity and ethics among traders, with far-reaching implications for economic and social growth. Therefore, it recommends intensified market evangelism efforts by churches and organisations, faith-work integration by business leaders and support from policymakers for ethical business initiatives.

Contribution: Market evangelism encourages integrity and ethics among traders, which has far-reaching implications for economic and social growth. However, its crucial contextual elements, such as social networks, economic conditions and cultural norms, determine how market evangelism influences traders' ethics and behaviour.

Keywords: market evangelism; ethics; integrity; economic development; commerce; Nigeria.

Introduction

Market evangelism has gained significant attention in Nigeria, transforming the business landscape by integrating faith and commerce to shape traders' behaviour and ethics. It is defined as the integration of Christian faith and business practices, promoting ethical conduct, integrity and social responsibility among traders and entrepreneurs. The ultimate goal of market evangelism is to transform the marketplace into a platform for spreading Christian values and principles. However, contemporary market evangelism in Nigeria faces several challenges. Pastors and evangelists preach in markets, distribute religious materials and organise prayer sessions, but this approach often overlooks the need for sustainable behavioural change. Contextualised teaching is lacking and fails to address specific business ethics challenges. To address these issues, this study employs a mixed-methods research design. Surveys and in-depth interviews will gather data from traders, entrepreneurs, market leaders, pastors and business owners (see Table 1). The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of market evangelism on the behavioural patterns and ethical standards of traders in Nigeria. This includes examining the current state of market evangelism, investigating its effects on traders' ethical decision-making, analysing its relationship with business integrity, identifying challenges that hinder effective market evangelism and developing recommendations to enhance its impact. This research seeks to provide valuable insights into market evangelism's potential to foster positive change in Nigeria's business landscape.

To address these issues, a historical approach was adopted that critically draws on primary and secondary sources, supplemented by oral materials gathered from some of the traders, evangelists and priests involved in market evangelism.

An overview of Nigerian market evangelism's past

From the outset of Christianity in Nigeria, it was intertwined with trade and market evangelism. Following the abolition of the slave trade and the formation of the Society for the Extinction of the

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TABLE 1: Socio-demographic information of participants.

Serial number	Participant pseudonym	Age	Profession	Location	Interviewer	Date
1	Anene Okike	33	Evangelist	Onitsha	Ebuka Omeke	12/11/2023
2	Iheanacho	55	Trader	Nsukka	Ebuka Omeke	08/11/2023
3	Okafor Ejiofor	45	Pastor	Onitsha	Ebuka Omeke	08/11/2023
4	Osinachi	40	Trader	Umuahia	Ebuka Omeke	02/11/2023
5	Anthony Igweagu	84	A priest	Anambra State	Ebuka Omeke	07/11/2023
6	Nwankwo Chioma	44	Trader	Nsukka	Ebuka Omeke	11/01/2024
7	Okoye Theresa	47	Trader	Nkanu	Ebuka Omeke	31/02/2024
8	Akabueze	50	Trader	Imo	Ebuka Omeke	31/02/2024
9	Odo	45	Teacher	Ebonyi	Ebuka Omeke	12/03/2024
10	Nwaeke	65	Evangelist	UNN	George Asadu	04/04/2025

Slave Trade and the Civilisation of Africa, missionaries were sent from Europe to Africa to introduce legitimate trade with the people. When, in 1841, the Queen of England sponsored the Niger Expedition, it was clear that the British government was not interested in trade alone; as professing Christians, they felt obligated to spread brotherly love, peace and goodwill among all nations and men. Their further interactions with Africans would be guided by Christian principles (Dike 1957). Therefore, Christianity has always been associated with trade and market evangelism since it first arrived in the Niger, from where it spread to most parts of Eastern Nigeria. In fact, according to Kalu (1978), 'Buxton's slogan was "the Bible and the plough" must regenerate Africa' (p. 18).

Eche (2021) views commerce (trade) as the vehicle through which Christianity was introduced to the people of Eastern Nigeria. This practice became somewhat contagious for the early converts, who subsequently spread the gospel to the hinterlands using the same approach. Cultural activities often impeded economic transactions, prompting traders to invite villagers to church and encourage them to abandon their traditional worship in favour of Christianity, which helped secure the traders' commercial interests. Those who responded were treated as brothers and sisters and received preferential treatment when purchasing goods.

As churches acquired land and constructed buildings for Christian worship, church activities were regularly held within these structures. This practice continued until after the civil war, when a new Christian movement emerged in Igboland, bringing evangelism into the market squares. Asadu (2015) explains how this transformation occurred:

[T]his wind of spiritual re-awakening took another decisive turn when, in 1973, Brother Iwundu, and evangelist from the present-day Imo State, came to Nkwor market in Ibagwa-Aka to stage a crusade. (p. 160)

Ibagwa-Aka is located in present-day Enugu State. For four days, a large crowd attended a crusade organised by the Scripture Union (SU). Following the missionary campaign, several people began attending SU fellowship.

In 1995, Rev. Fr. Issele initiated his evangelical outreach in locations such as Onitsha Main Market, Head Bridge, *Ochanja*

and *Ngbuka* markets in Anambra State. The methodology employed in market evangelism included praise and worship, preaching to traders about their mission and location, and offering confession and Communion. This approach transformed the spiritual landscape of Nigerian markets, fostering a culture of prayer and community engagement. However, it neglects the necessity for sustainable behavioural change. Contextualised teaching is lacking and fails to address specific challenges related to business ethics.

Nigerian traders' perceptions of market evangelism

Traders in Nigeria generally view market evangelism as a unique and welcome approach to sharing the Christian message. They see it as a source of spiritual encouragement and motivation, appreciating the community engagement and social connections fostered by evangelists' involvement in market activities (Obinna, 2012). However, some traders are cautious and question the evangelists' motives, while a few remain unmoved, focusing solely on their business. Additionally, some traders consider evangelism disruptive to market activities (Afolayan, 2019). A minority feel that evangelists disregard local customs and traditions, but many express respect for the courage and conviction of market evangelists. They value the evangelists' willingness to engage with traders and desire sensitivity to market norms and customs (Ogbonnaya, 2018). Traders expect practical assistance and support, and effective market evangelism relies on building trust and rapport with them (Gberebie, 2017). Evangelists who demonstrate genuine interest, empathy and understanding of traders' challenges foster positive relationships. Overall, traders in Nigeria generally view market evangelism as a valuable, community-focused initiative. By understanding traders' perceptions, evangelists can refine their approach, fostering deeper connections and more effective outreach.

The driving force behind evangelism marketing in Nigeria

In Nigeria's vibrant markets, a powerful movement was underway. Market evangelism emerged from a convergence of factors, transforming the lives of traders, customers and communities. At its core, market evangelism addressed

the deep-seated spiritual needs of Nigerians, many of whom sought comfort, guidance and solace amid economic hardship, insecurity and cultural upheaval (Ikelegbe, 2005). Evangelists responded by sharing the Gospel and offering hope during these struggles. Poverty, unemployment and financial instability had taken a toll on the nation, and market evangelism served as a beacon of light, empowering entrepreneurs and traders with biblical principles of honesty, integrity and hard work. Traditional churches, often focused on Sunday services, frequently lacked the resources to address the unique needs of traders. Market evangelism complemented church outreach by providing a targeted approach to support entrepreneurs and traders spiritually and professionally. It addressed daily concerns such as honesty and integrity, fostering personal connections and offering actionable advice. In a time when insecurity and crime were rampant, evangelism brought comfort, protection and reassurance.

Markets, integral to Nigerian culture and daily life, served as ideal platforms for outreach. Their accessible and diverse audiences attracted evangelists who shared their messages with people from all walks of life. Community engagement flourished, fostering unity, social cohesion and cooperation among traders and customers. Successful market evangelism in other locations inspired replication, while interfaith competition encouraged different faiths to share their messages and attract followers. Personal testimonies sparked passion as individuals shared their experiences and inspired others.

Church initiatives played a significant role, with various churches and denominations organising market evangelism programmes (Ogunewu, 1985). Social injustices, such as exploitation and inequality, were confronted through evangelism, which offered spiritual solutions for health challenges and wellness. Although fear of the unknown gripped many, evangelism provided comfort and reassurance. Nigeria's multi-faith environment ignited evangelistic efforts, as markets accommodated diverse beliefs. Even government inaction created space for evangelism to flourish. As Nigerians sought answers, market evangelism stood ready, offering hope, transformation and a brighter future. These motivating factors converged, propelling market evangelism in Nigeria. Consequently, lives were transformed, communities were empowered, and the nation was forever changed. Market evangelism became an integral part of Nigeria's fabric, weaving together faith, commerce and culture.

Impact of market evangelism on the traders' behaviour and ethics

Market evangelism has a profound impact on traders' behaviour and ethics. In the bustling markets, a quiet revolution was unfolding. Traders, once driven solely by profit, were undergoing a profound transformation (Idowu 2010). Market evangelism was spreading like wildfire, igniting hearts and minds. For Emeka, a seasoned trader,

his encounter with market evangelists marked a turning point. He began to see his business as a sacred calling rather than just a means to make ends meet. Honesty and transparency became his guiding principles, earning him respect and loyalty from customers. As Emeka's business flourished, so did his commitment to social responsibility. He started supporting local initiatives, providing jobs for young people and advocating for fair labour practices. His market stall became a beacon of hope, inspiring others to follow suit.

The impact of market evangelism was palpable. Traders were adopting biblical principles, integrating faith with business. However, challenges remained. Cultural and religious differences often created tension, and market competition tested traders' resolve. Yet, meaningful relationships between evangelists and traders helped bridge these gaps. Evangelist Chika recalled, 'Building trust takes time, but it's worth it. When traders see the Gospel lived out, they begin to understand its power'. As traders' lives transformed, the marketplace changed. Community development initiatives sprouted and environmental awareness grew.

Respect for human rights and dignity became a cornerstone of business practices. The ripple effects spread beyond the market. Families benefited from fair labour practices and communities thrived. The once-narrow focus on profit gave way to a broader vision of service and stewardship. Market evangelism sparked a movement that would continue to inspire generations of traders to come. The marketplace, once a symbol of materialism, transformed into a hub of integrity, compassion and hope.

A phenomenological analysis of the reason for market evangelism in Nigeria

Market preachers are driven by a profound purpose: to spread the Gospel and transform lives. Their multifaceted mission encompasses several key aims. First and foremost, they strive for evangelism, sharing the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ with those who have yet to hear it. Effective evangelism requires building genuine relationships, communicating in relatable terms and sharing personal testimonies (Eze 2022). Beyond evangelism, market preachers prioritise discipleship, guiding new believers in their spiritual journey. Through mentorship, Bible studies and accountability groups, they foster spiritual growth and maturity. Market preachers also engage in community outreach, addressing practical needs through partnerships with local organisations. By serving others, they build credibility and demonstrate the love of Christ (Metuh 1996). Furthermore, they provide spiritual support, offering prayer, counselling and emotional guidance. Active listening and wise counsel are essential in helping individuals navigate life's challenges. Market preachers are also agents of social transformation, tackling pressing issues and inspiring positive change. Integrating social action with evangelism and discipleship is vital. In addition, they promote church growth, creating spiritual homes for new believers and supporting community

transformation. Personal development is another key focus area. Market preachers teach essential life skills, moral values and coping mechanisms, empowering individuals to thrive. Finally, they foster interfaith dialogue, promoting understanding and respect among diverse faith groups. Through these interconnected aims, market preachers embody the heart of Christ, bringing hope, transformation and redemption to the marketplace.

Challenges the market preachers encounter in Nigeria

Market evangelism preachers face numerous challenges that test their resolve, passion and effectiveness (Uzochukwu 2015). Internally, they struggle with spiritual fatigue, limited resources and personal doubts that can erode their confidence and zeal. These internal struggles can hinder their ability to connect with others and share the Gospel. Externally, they encounter hostility, indifference and competition that can discourage even the most dedicated preacher. Cultural and linguistic barriers pose significant challenges, requiring adaptability, sensitivity and a deep understanding of local contexts. Building trust with people is crucial yet difficult. Overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions demands a consistent demonstration of love, respect and genuine interest. Navigating complex relationships adds another layer of complexity, requiring emotional intelligence, empathy and effective communication. Organisational challenges, such as securing permits from government agencies or local authorities and accessing equipment, such as sound systems, generators or mobile stages, can hinder outreach efforts. Managing resources and adapting to changing circumstances demand strategic planning, flexibility and resilience. Spiritually, market evangelism preachers face opposition, discouragement and the constant challenge of maintaining their spiritual passion. Balancing law and grace requires theological clarity, ensuring their message is both compassionate and uncompromising. Culturally, understanding local needs, adapting to diverse contexts and avoiding cultural insensitivity are essential. Partnering with local leaders facilitates effective outreach, leveraging their expertise and networks to maximise impact.

Market evangelism in Nigeria: An empirical perspective

This document is a homily, a heartfelt sermon delivered on 27 September 1995, during an evangelisation outreach event at Onitsha Main Market. The purpose of this homily was twofold: to celebrate the joint efforts of the Trinitarians School of Evangelisation and the Emmaus School of Evangelisation, and to pay tribute to the courageous Catholic missionaries who arrived in Onitsha 110 years earlier. The homily highlighted the significance of the evangelisation efforts in Onitsha Main Market, acknowledging the bravery and contributions of the Catholic missionaries who paved the way. It recalled the warm reception and cooperation the missionaries received from the local community, which ultimately led to the flourishing of Christianity in the region. Today, approximately 95% of Anambra State's population

identifies as Christian, which is a testament to the enduring legacy of those early missionaries. The homily also described the outreach programme's events, including prayers and a Holy Mass at the Onitsha main market. The tone of the homily was celebratory, reflective and inspirational, emphasising the importance of evangelisation and the contributions of Catholic missionaries. The intended audience was the participants in the outreach programme, including students and staff of the Trinitarians School of Evangelisation and the Emmaus School of Evangelisation, as well as local community members (Adiegwe 1995).

Iweka Onitsha Market Evangelism

The Iweka Road Onitsha Market Evangelism started in 1997 as a non-denominational fellowship. Brother Victor Ebirim was the first leader, followed by Brother Ikeagwu and then John Mbamalu. The fellowship is divided into six units, each led by its own leader and representatives. These units are coordinated by organisers known as 'excos'. Meetings are held every Tuesday morning from 8:00 to 10:00. Additionally, there's a monthly meeting during the first week of the month dedicated to evangelism preparation, accompanied by fasting and prayer. Elections are held every 4 years and guest speakers from various denominations are invited to preach and pray. The fellowship supports itself through offerings, seeds of faith and prophetic offerings. Evangelism is conducted openly, utilising musical instruments to share the Gospel. Tracts are distributed, prayer requests are accepted, and prophetic prayers and benedictions are offered. Attendees are also invited to surrender their lives to Christ. The fellowship meets at No. 77 Venero South Onitsha. Its key features include interdenominational cooperation, community engagement, and spiritual growth and development. This market evangelism has fostered spiritual growth, promoted unity and provided a platform for community outreach. However, it faces challenges such as maintaining consistency, addressing diverse spiritual needs and managing resources. To overcome these challenges, the fellowship should continue interdenominational collaboration, develop strategic outreach programmes and enhance leadership training. According to Okafor Ejiofor, the Iweka Road Onitsha Market Evangelism serves as a model for effective community engagement and spiritual growth.

Nkwo Nnewi Market

Nkwo Nnewi Market's prayer and preaching sessions began in 2012, according to Anene (personal communication, 12 November 2023). A general prayer is held on the first Monday of every month. The market is divided into three sections: (1) machine parts and motor parts; (2) food and kitchenware; and (3) clothing. Prayers were initiated because of insecurity, witchcraft, sudden deaths, ill health and wicked practices among traders (Achebe 1986:1). The market's diverse faiths, including Christianity and African traditional religion, have led to various practices. Christians hold oral prayers with songs, while practitioners of traditional religion perform sacrifices. This diversity risks creating religious, economic and psychological conflicts. However, the Christian majority

organised prayer sessions to address fears of damnation, regression and attacks from unknown enemies. This development promotes interfaith coexistence and spiritual growth. Madu (2004) notes that the market's multifaith environment gave credence to unorthodox practices. The tyranny of the majority gave Christians the upper hand in organising prayer sessions for market traders. The prayer sessions aim to address perennial fears and promote spiritual growth among traders.

Ogige Nsukka Market

Ogige Market in Nsukka embodies the rich cultural heritage and social affinity of the Igbo people, fostering a sense of community and inclusiveness. In 2002, the market chairman, Ezeugwu, initiated market prayer and evangelism, inspired by the experiences of Nsukka traders in Aba and Onitsha markets (Iheanacho, 2022). Prayer sessions are held during the first week of every month from 7:30 to 12:00. Initially, ministers from various Christian denominations, including Catholic and Anglican, took turns leading the prayers. Later, Reverend Father Obayi from the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka was nominated to continue the prayer activities. The objectives of the market prayer and evangelism are to promote traders' progress, protect them from wicked individuals and occult practices, and foster unity among traders. Ogige Market's prayer sessions have become an integral part of the community, nurturing spiritual growth and social cohesion.

Umuahia Market (Ogumabiri Umuahia)

According to Iheanacho (2022), Umuahia Market, also known as *Ogumabiri*, was once the thriving economic hub of Umuahia metropolis and its surrounding communities. Prior to the administration of former Governor Theodore Orji (2007–2015), the market served as a model of modern commerce, expanding to accommodate a growing number of traders and customers. However, the government's decision to relocate the market forced some traders to conduct business in an open area known as 'Ishi Gate.' Before the relocation of Ogumabiri Market, Ishi Gate functioned as an adjunct market, accommodating overflow from Ogumabiri Market. It was situated along the railway line, with shops located in that area. Despite this challenge, traders and businesspeople continued to gather at Ishi Gate for prayer and praise. The market's layout resembles that found in Enugu, Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi and Nsukka. On designated prayer days, traders assemble in the open space with drums and public address systems. The lead preacher delivers a homily addressing market-related issues and broader concerns affecting the audience. This spiritual gathering has a profound impact, strengthening traders' faith in God's providence and providing an opportunity for them to renounce witchcraft and other harmful practices within the business environment.

Time and days of prayer

Prayer time is scheduled for every Monday of the second week of each month, from 9:00 to 13:00. Each denomination is allowed to preach in the prayer during their turn.

Ogbete Market in Enugu Metropolis

Enugu has several large markets, including Ogbete Market, Aria Market, Abakpa Market and New Heaven Market. Our focus is on Ogbete Market. Historically, Catholics in Ogbete Market initiated the 'Angelus' prayer at 12:00. This sparked an interest in public prayer among businessmen and women. During O.C. Peters' tenure as market chairman, traders suggested incorporating prayers into market meetings because of fear of the unknown and suspected occult practices (Madu 2004). Under Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, the market authority approved this move for prayers. Initially, the prayers were conducted market-wide, but they are now held separately by each market line or zone. Time Management in Market Evangelism: The Bible says, 'There is a time for everything' (Ec 3:1–8). Time frames regulate human activities. Maduegbuna (2005) notes that 'Time is related to targets'. In market evangelism, time is not strictly defined. The preacher determines when the prayers conclude. Different sections of the market organise their prayer sessions, with some using drums, microphones, or public address systems. This can lead to noise pollution and extended prayer times, disrupting business. The Nigerian proverb 'time is money' emphasises the importance of time management. Maduegbuna warns that time is perishable, irretrievable and inelastic. Mismanaging time leads to frustration and disappointment.

The problem with market evangelism

Although market evangelism is a crucial mechanism for disseminating spiritual messages and promoting moral values among traders in Nigeria, its efficacy is hindered by significant issues. There is a lack of contextualised teaching that addresses specific corporate ethics challenges, making the true impact of market evangelism on traders' daily lives and business operations ambiguous, despite its goal of fostering positive change. During an oral interview, Nwaeke observed that the behaviour of Nigerian traders after market evangelism, both within and outside the market square, does not indicate that the values promoted by market evangelism have been truly internalised. It is uncertain whether their behaviours and ethics are undergoing meaningful transformations.

Furthermore, the current approach to market evangelism may be inadequate for promoting sustainable behavioural change among traders. The methodologies used to disseminate the message may not be tailored to the unique needs and challenges of traders, resulting in superficial or temporary changes. This raises concerns about the long-term implications of market evangelism, such as whether traders experience lasting transformations or merely exhibit transient compliance. This investigation aims to address these pressing issues by examining the impact of market evangelism on traders' behavioural patterns and ethical standards, as well as assessing the effectiveness of the current approach in fostering sustainable change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study 'Assessing the phenomenon of market evangelism in Nigeria and its impact on traders' behaviour and ethics'. The following recommendations are made:

- There should be a developed, contextualised evangelism approach to convey biblical teachings on ethics and conduct in a way that traders can best understand. Christian values such as love, honesty, equity and peace should be emphasised.
- To internalise morality, diligence, honesty and fairness in business practices, traders should be encouraged to incorporate faith into their work. This approach will help them see themselves not just as business moguls working solely for personal gain, but as individuals called to serve God and humanity through their business endeavours.
- There should be a follow-up team specifically established to continue fellowship and consistently encourage traders even after conventional business hours, which are Mondays of the week. This will help sustain the traders' faith in God and keep them steadfast in their godly service to customers and society at large.
- It will enable them to demonstrate Christian values such as love, honesty, equity and peace in business practices.
- Sustaining moral values among traders in Nigeria can be achieved by organising them into groups for easier identification and accessibility for further individual contact. This approach will facilitate regular checks and assistance for needy traders who may be troubled and struggling with their faith.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of market evangelism on traders' behaviour and ethics in Nigeria. The results indicate that market evangelism has transformed traders' lives by fostering a culture of integrity, honesty and fairness. Traders now conduct business with enhanced honesty and transparency, which cultivates deeper customer relationships and reduces conflicts. The study highlights the far-reaching implications of market evangelism, influencing various stakeholders and contributing to Nigeria's economic and social development. By integrating faith and work, traders are shaping a brighter future for themselves and their communities. Ultimately, market evangelism serves as a testament to the transformative power of faith, inspiring positive change and leaving a lasting legacy in Nigeria's markets.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The authors collaborated to produce this study. G.C.A. conceptualised the project, V.C.O. conducted the oral interview and H.C.A. supervised the overall process.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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