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Community Relations Strategies and Brand Awareness of Oil Producing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The corporate standing of oil producing firms operating in Rivers State has been persistently eroded by decades of oil spillage, gas flaring, community conflict and contested corporate social responsibility practice. This study examined the relationship between community relations strategies and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, with community relations strategies operationalised through three proxies, namely environmental responsibility, social responsibility and community engagement, while brand awareness was treated as a single construct. Anchored on Stakeholder Theory, the study adopted a positivist, cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised all the oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, while the accessible population was restricted to 750 middle and top management staff of the 33 oil producing firms operating in Rivers State, that are registered with the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission. The Krejcie and Morgan table for sample size determination was utilised to get a sample of 254 participants, drawn by simple random sampling with the aid of a computer-generated table of random numbers. A systematic questionnaire served as the data collecting tool, and the hypotheses were evaluated at a significance level of 0.05 utilising Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling with SmartPLS 4.1.1.9. The findings indicated that environmental and social responsibility exhibit robust, affirmative, and significant correlations with brand awareness, but community participation demonstrated a feeble, positive, and non-significant association with brand awareness. The study concludes that brand awareness in the Rivers State upstream petroleum sector is driven principally by the visible and materially consequential dimensions of community relations rather than by dialogic engagement, and recommends the institutionalisation of independently verified environmental disclosure, the attributable branding of needs-assessed social investment, and the conversion of engagement fora from consultative rituals into communicated, decision-bearing governance mechanisms.

Keywords: Community Relations Strategies, Environmental Responsibility, Social Responsibility, Community Engagement, Brand Awareness.

Research Paper

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The oil and gas sector remains the fulcrum of the Nigerian economy, supplying the greater part of federal government revenue, the dominant share of foreign exchange earnings and the fiscal base upon which budgetary allocations across every sector of public life are constructed. The oil producing firms generate employment, local content opportunities, host community development funds and technology transfer, and their operations sustain a dense ecosystem of indigenous service contractors across the state. Yet, the contribution of the sector has been purchased at a considerable environmental and socio-economic cost. Oil spillage, gas flaring, habitat degradation and the contamination of farmland and fishing grounds have been the defining experience of host communities in the Niger Delta, and the corporate-community relationship in Nigeria's oil industry has been characterised from the outset by mistrust, unmet expectation and recurrent conflict (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Motilewa *et al.,* 2019; Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2024). Oil-producing companies in Nigeria are often seen as lacking in their environmental and ecological efforts towards their local people (Motilewa, Ibidunni, *et al.*, 2019). In this context of disputed legitimacy, the issue of brand recognition assumes strategic importance for these companies. Brand awareness denotes the capacity of stakeholders to remember or identify a brand and to access it from memory under different triggering circumstances (Aaker, 1991). Keller (2003) argues that a high degree of brand awareness and familiarity, together with strong brand associations held in memory, is the mechanism through which customer-based loyalty is created, while Yoo *et al*., (2000) demonstrate that awareness feeds loyalty because stakeholders who recognise and trust a brand are more disposed to remain with it and to recommend it to others. The antecedents of brand awareness have been theorised along two principal lines. The marketing communications tradition holds that awareness is manufactured through paid, owned and earned media channels which establish quality and credibility and reduce perceived risk during evaluation (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). A second and more recent tradition locates the antecedents of awareness in the firm's social and environmental conduct. It follows that the community relations behaviour of oil producing firms is not peripheral to their brand equity; it is constitutive of it. Community relations strategies denote the structured, deliberate and sustained set of interactions through which a firm relates to the communities in which it operates, encompassing initiatives designed to benefit the community, to address social problems and to contribute to sustainable development (Zandvliet & Anderson, 2009; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This study operationalises community relations strategies through three proxies. Environmental responsibility denotes the organisation-wide recognition of the legitimacy and importance of the biophysical environment in the formulation of organisational strategy and the integration of environmental concerns into the strategic planning process (Banerjee, 2002), expressed in the actions taken to protect or responsibly use the environment for environmental and social benefit (Bennett *et al*., 2018). In the Rivers State context it is expressed through spill remediation, flare and emissions reduction, waste minimisation and recycling, environmental disclosure and the screening of suppliers. Social responsibility refers to the discretionary tier of corporate responsibility (Carroll, 1999), comprising the voluntary commitment of corporate resources, whether money, time or in-kind goods, to organised efforts intended for a defined beneficial community purpose, and encompassing corporate giving, corporate volunteering and corporate foundations (Godfrey, 2005; Gautier & Pache, 2015). Community engagement refers to the antecedents and practices through which firms work collaboratively with and through communities to address the issues affecting their well-being (Bowen *et al*., 2010), expressed through consultation fora, grievance channels, participatory decision-making and the integration of community representatives into governance structures. Therefore, this research investigates the correlation between community engagement tactics and brand recognition of oil-producing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is the challenge of weak and unstable brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State. Although these firms are among the largest economic actors in the state, the evidence indicates that many of them are neither spontaneously recalled nor positively recognised by the very publics whose acceptance determines their operating continuity, and that the brand knowledge which does circulate in their host communities is dominated by associations with pollution, dispossession and unfulfilled promises rather than with the corporate values the firms seek to project (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Motilewa, Ibidunni, *et al*., 2019). This constitutes a problem of the first order, because brand awareness is the antecedent condition of brand reputation, stakeholder satisfaction and, ultimately, of the social licence to operate. The manifestations of the problem are visible and documented. Host communities in Rivers State are frequently unable to name the operator of the facility in their locality or to distinguish between the operator, its contractors and its joint venture partners, a confusion sharpened by the recent wave of divestment and corporate renaming across the onshore portfolio (NUPRC, 2026). Recall of these firms is prompted overwhelmingly by adverse events rather than by their interventions, so that the brand is retrieved from memory in the register of grievance. As such, community protests, occupation of flow stations, litigation and sabotage recur, and the firms' own social investment interventions frequently go unattributed, unremembered or actively contested. The origins of the issue might be linked to inadequacies in the community engagement tactics employed by the companies. Initially, the practice of environmental responsibility has been erratic: oil and gas companies in Nigeria are commonly viewed as lacking in their environmental and ecological efforts towards their local communities, despite evidence indicating that dedication to ecological preservation enhances corporate reputation (Motilewa, Ibidunni, *et al*., 2019). Secondly, initiatives for social responsibility have been inconsistently allocated and only somewhat efficacious. Third, community engagement has frequently been reduced to a ceremonial or transactional exercise, a pattern consistent with the finding of Kemp and Owen (2013) that community relations functions in extractive firms are routinely under-resourced, structurally marginal and disconnected from operational decision making. Fourth, firms have chronically under-communicated whatever positive conduct they do undertake, and the returns to responsible conduct are not realised where stakeholders remain unaware of it (Du *et al*., 2010). The effects are severe and cumulative. Weak and adversely valenced brand awareness translates into reputational damage, elevated security and community-relations costs, protracted litigation, project delays and the impairment of asset value, a dynamic already manifest in the divestment of onshore assets by international operators from the Niger Delta.

Academics have proposed many remedies. Motilewa, Ibidunni, *et al*., (2019) advocate for oil and gas companies to enhance efforts aimed at safeguarding the environment of host communities, since this dedication fosters stakeholder trust in the business reputation. Motilewa, Worlu, and colleagues (2018) emphasise community development projects as a means to improve company reputation. Ajibua and Aiyedogbon (2025) promote the simultaneous endeavour of safeguarding the environment, fostering community advancement, and enhancing economic empowerment as the foundation for sustainable industry. Asante Boadi *et al*., (2019) advocate for enhancing stakeholder engagement characteristics, especially the calibre of information disseminated, respectful interactions, the provision of a platform for expression, and the exhibition of empathy, as a pathway to fostering community trust and embracing corporate social responsibility. Notwithstanding this body of work, significant gaps remain. The overwhelming preponderance of the extant literature terminates at corporate image, reputation, trust, sustainability or financial performance as the criterion variable; brand awareness, which is analytically prior to each of these and is the cognitive foundation on which they rest, has been largely neglected as a dependent variable in the extractive context. The foundation of the current research is hence fourfold. It prioritises brand awareness over corporate image as the dependent variable; it contextualises the investigation within the upstream petroleum industry of Rivers State; it categorises community relations strategies into three theoretically separate proxies and analyses them concurrently; and it utilises Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling, which is resilient to non-normal data, appropriate for intricate models, and adept at evaluating both measurement and structural validity (Hair *et al*., 2019).

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between community relations strategies and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to:

i. Ascertain the relationship between environmental responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
ii. Determine the association between social responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
iii. Investigate the relationship between community engagement and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

In the light of the foregoing objectives, the study raised the following research questions:

i. What is the relationship between environmental responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
ii. What is the association between social responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
iii. What is the relationship between community engagement and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

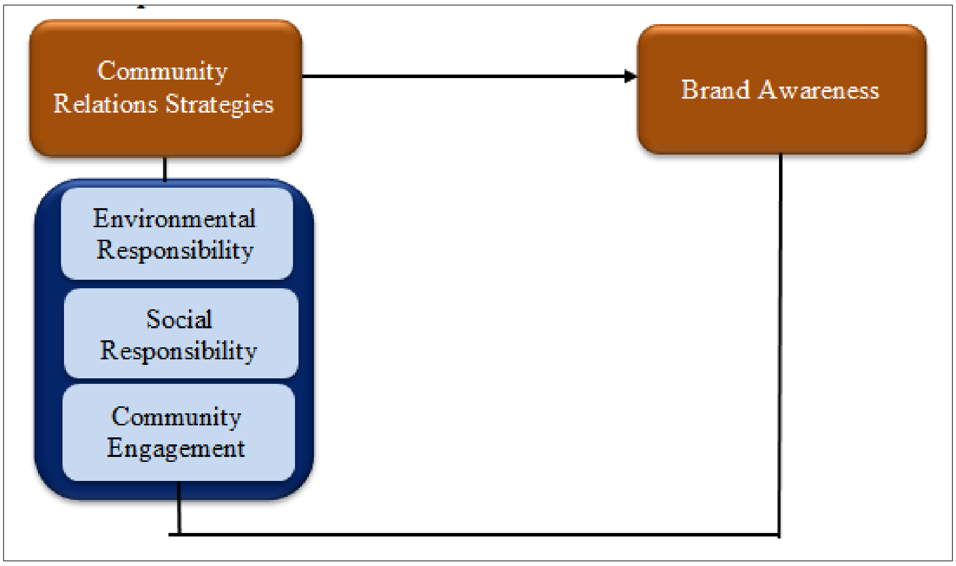

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Community Relations Strategies and Brand Awareness of Oil Producing Firms in Rivers State

Source: *Adapted by the Researchers from Ohanyere (2026); dimensions of community relations strategies adapted from Ayuso et al. (2012), Bowen et al. (2010) and Scantlebury (2003); the indicator of brand awareness adapted from Aaker (1991) and Junqi et al. (2021).*

2.1.1 Community Relations Strategies (CRS):

Etymologically, community derives from the Latin communitas, denoting fellowship and the condition of things held in common, while strategy descends from the Greek strategia, the art of the general, signifying the deliberate marshalling of resources towards an end. Community relations strategies therefore denote the deliberate marshalling of corporate resources towards the cultivation of fellowship with the publics among whom the firm operates. In meaning, community relations strategies comprise the structured interactions and initiatives through which a company benefits its host community, addresses social issues and contributes to sustainable development, resting upon trust, transparency and collaboration (Zandvliet & Anderson, 2009; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Kemp and Owen (2013) demonstrate that community relations functions are frequently core to business yet not treated as core business, being under-resourced and excluded from operational decision making, while a dissenting strand contends that community relations is often instrumentalised, the rhetoric of involvement masking the mobilisation of the community to further corporate ends. The strengths of the construct lie in its integrative reach, binding ethics, communication, environmental management and social investment into a single strategic function, and in its demonstrated capacity to enhance corporate image in the Nigerian oil and gas sector (Motilewa, Worlu, *et al*., 2018). Its weaknesses lie in definitional elasticity, in the difficulty of treating the community as a coherent unit of analysis, and in the vulnerability of community programmes to elite capture (Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2024). The implication for practice is that community relations must be constituted as a governed, resourced and communicated strategy rather than a residual expenditure.

2.1.2 Environmental Responsibility (ER):

The term environment originates from the Old French word environner, meaning to encircle, whereas responsibility comes from the Latin respondere, signifying to reply or to commit in reciprocation; so, environmental responsibility refers to the company's accountability for its surroundings. Environmental responsibility is intricately connected to corporate environmentalism, which Banerjee (2002, p. 181) describes as the comprehensive acknowledgement of the biophysical environment's significance in shaping organisational strategy and incorporating environmental considerations into strategic planning, as well as to environmental stewardship, which refers to the initiatives undertaken by individuals or collectives to safeguard or judiciously utilise the environment for ecological and societal advantages (Bennett *et al*., 2018). The advantages of the concept include its quantifiability, its regulatory significance, and its direct alignment with the most pressing concerns of Niger Delta people. Its vulnerabilities include its proneness to greenwashing, the extended delay between environmental investments and visible ecological restoration, and the challenge of linking recovery to any specific entity in an area with various, overlapping, and historical pollution. The suggestion is that environmental assertions need to be independently substantiated to have credibility.

2.1.3 Social Responsibility (SR):

Philanthropy, the historical root of the construct, derives from the Greek philanthropia, the love of mankind, while responsibility, as noted, derives from respondere. Social responsibility thus denotes the firm's answerable regard for the human community in which it is embedded. In meaning, social responsibility in its discretionary expression is the voluntary business giving of money, time or in-kind goods to organisations and causes whose purpose is to benefit the welfare of the community, and comprises corporate giving, corporate volunteering and corporate foundations (Gautier & Pache, 2015). The scholarly argument is sharply contested. The classical position holds that the firm exists solely to maximise economic efficiency and that philanthropy diverts resources from business operations and reduces shareholder wealth. Against this, Godfrey (2005) argues that social responsibility generates moral capital that functions as reputational insurance against negative events, while Porter and Kramer (2011) reconceive it as shared value creation in which social and economic returns are jointly produced. Its shortcomings stem from its susceptibility to elite appropriation, its possibility of being perceived as recompense or a replacement for ecological restoration, and the reliance it could engender. The suggestion is that social responsibility yields reputational benefits just when it is clear, necessity-driven, and well conveyed.

2.1.4 Community Engagement (CE):

Engagement derives from the Old French engagier, to bind by pledge, and connotes a reciprocal binding rather than a unilateral transfer. In meaning, community engagement is the set of practices through which firms work collaboratively with and through communities to address the issues affecting their well-being, and is treated in the literature as the relational subset of corporate social responsibility, aligning corporate objectives with societal needs so as to create shared value (Bowen *et al*., 2010; Porter & Kramer, 2011). It is operationalised through consultation fora, stakeholder feedback mechanisms, grievance channels, participatory decision making and the integration of community representatives into corporate governance structures. Scholarly argument turns on whether engagement is substantive or symbolic. Advocates assert that participation fosters trust, ensures the social license to operate, and diminishes costs associated with conflict; Asante Boadi *et al*., (2019) illustrate that the calibre of information disseminated, courteous interactions, the provision of a platform for expression, and the exhibition of empathy are all positively correlated with community trust, which, along with perceived environmental stewardship, facilitates the transition from involvement to the endorsement of corporate social responsibility. Critics argue that involvement often serves as a mere ceremonial consultation devoid of actual decision-making authority, and that the community is rallied to validate pre-existing policies. The suggestion is that involvement, characterised by dialogue and primarily private interactions, could foster deeper relationships with a limited group of participants, yet fail to create the widespread public significance essential for brand recognition.

2.1.5 Brand Awareness (BA):

Brand derives from the Old Norse brandr, meaning to burn, referring to the mark burned into livestock to signify ownership and origin, while awareness derives from the Old English gewær, meaning watchful or cognisant. Brand awareness is thus the cognisance of the mark. In meaning, brand awareness is the ability of stakeholders to recall or recognise a brand and to retrieve it from memory under differing conditions of prompting (Aaker, 1991), and it is one dimension of brand equity alongside perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty, and is analytically foundational to the others. Scholarly argument concerns both its antecedents and its consequences. On consequences, Keller (2003) and Yoo *et al*., (2000) establish that awareness underwrites loyalty, perceived quality and recommendation, and that stakeholders favour organisations that have invested in the brand over those that have not. On antecedents, the marketing tradition privileges advertising and communication channels (Aaker, 1991), whereas Khan *et al*., (2023) demonstrate that corporate social responsibility is itself a significant antecedent of corporate brand awareness, and Hasudungan and Saragih (2023) show that perceived economic, environmental and social responsibility dimensions operate jointly with brand awareness in shaping relationship intention. A dissenting position holds that awareness is necessary but not sufficient, since notoriety is also a form of awareness; a firm may be highly recalled and negatively valued, a caution of particular weight in the Niger Delta. The strengths of the construct are its measurability, its theoretical priority within brand equity and its practical tractability. Its weaknesses are its valence-neutrality and the difficulty of disentangling awareness from reputation in survey settings. The implication is that firms must manage not only the quantum but the content of the awareness they generate.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984).

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory:

Stakeholder Theory was propounded by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 in Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. In meaning, the theory holds that the purpose of the firm extends beyond the maximisation of shareholder wealth to the identification, understanding and active management of the interests of all groups who affect or are affected by the organisation's activities, including employees, suppliers, government agencies, host communities and shareholders (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Critics have questioned the definitional ambiguity of the stakeholder concept and the operational impracticability of maximising value for all stakeholders simultaneously, since competing claims may generate irresolvable trade-offs. Its strengths lie in its integrative reach, bridging ethics and strategy, and in its empirical grounding in real organisational contexts. Its weaknesses include the difficulty of operationalisation, the risk of stakeholder capture and the absence of guidance on resolving inter-stakeholder conflict. Its relevance to the present study is foundational: community relations strategies are, in their entirety, an operationalisation of stakeholder management, and the theory predicts that firms which systematically address the environmental, social and participatory claims of their host communities will be favourably known by them, thereby linking community relations directly to brand awareness.

2.3 Empirical Review

Motilewa *et al*., (2019) investigated the impact of environmental conservation on the corporate reputation of oil and gas companies in Nigeria. The research employed a mixed-methods approach. The demographic consisted of employees and stakeholder factions from specific oil and gas companies in Nigeria; for the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire was disseminated to a sample of 350 employees from the chosen firms, whereas for the qualitative component, 30 respondents from various stakeholder groups were interviewed. The data was examination using regression analysis and thematic analysis. The results indicated that a company's dedication to environmental conservation, demonstrated by a policy of refraining from using materials sourced from the illicit exploitation of natural resources, a pledge to minimise waste and promote recycling, and pollution management, enhances investor trust, fortifies ties with governmental bodies and local communities. The current research parallels the previous study in terms of sector, nation, and its examination of environmental behaviour as a factor influencing stakeholder perception, yet it diverges in three key aspects: it utilises brand awareness instead of corporate image as the benchmark; it applies Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling rather than standard regression, facilitating the concurrent evaluation of several interrelated predictors and the validation of measurements; and it confines its scope to Rivers State. Moreover, Asante *et al*., (2019) examined the relationships among the characteristics of stakeholder involvement, trust, perceived environmental stewardship, and the endorsement of corporate social responsibility. The research employed a quantitative survey methodology in Ghana. The demographic consisted of the indigenous residents of mining areas, from whom survey data were gathered from a sample of 604 participants, and the data were examined by structural equation modelling utilising IBM SPSS AMOS version 22. The results indicated that the calibre of information disseminated, courteous interactions, the empowerment of local residents, and the exhibition of empathy towards them are all positively correlated with trust, and that trust, along with perceived environmental stewardship, partially mediates the connections between stakeholder engagement attributes and the endorsement of corporate social responsibility. The current research diverges by focusing on the management personnel of operating companies instead of community members. Similarly, Khan and colleagues (2023) examined the relationship between corporate social responsibility and company brand recognition in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The research employed a quantitative survey methodology. The demographic consisted of clients residing in Saudi Arabia, from whom a sample of 548 participants was selected, and the data were examined using Pearson's correlation, simple regression, and structural equation modelling. The results indicated a favourable view among consumers about the corporate social responsibility initiatives undertaken by businesses, and the structural equation model demonstrated a positive correlation between corporate social responsibility and corporate brand awareness. The disparity is specifically the extractive use of the Niger Delta that this study elucidates. In a similar vein, Hasudungan and Saragih (2023) examined the moderating influence of perceived aspects of corporate social responsibility on the effect of brand awareness on customer relationship intentions. The research employed a quantitative survey methodology utilising a hierarchical component model framework. The demographic consisted of purchasers of ecolabel brands in a Southeast Asian area, from which a sample of 325 participants was extracted, and the data were examined using a two-phase disjoint methodology of Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling. The results indicated that brand awareness, along with the perceived economic, environmental, and social aspects of corporate social responsibility. The current research presents its PLS-SEM methodology and concurrently addresses the dimensions of environmental and social responsibility alongside brand awareness, yet diverges by considering brand awareness as the outcome rather than the antecedent. Ajibua and Aiyedogbon (2025) examined the influence of corporate social responsibility on the sustainability of Nigeria's oil and gas sector through three aspects: environmental conservation efforts, community enhancement programs, and economic empowerment strategies. The research employed a survey methodology. The cohort consisted of 385 participants sourced from diverse factions within the Nigerian oil and gas sector, from which a random sample of 196 respondents was chosen; primary data were gathered via a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using SPSS version 26, utilising descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that all three facets of corporate social responsibility exhibit statistically significant and favourable correlations with industrial sustainability. The current research differs in that its focus is on brand awareness instead of industry sustainability, its participants are the middle and upper management of the operating companies, and its analytical method is PLS-SEM. Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2024) investigated the impact of corporate social responsibility on gender and food security within Nigeria's oil-producing regions, specifically focusing on the Global Memorandum of Understanding framework utilised by international oil corporations. The research employed a cross-sectional survey methodology. The demographic consisted of residents from the rural sectors of the Niger Delta region, from which a sample of 800 female participants was extracted, and the data were examined using a combination of propensity score matching and logit modelling. The results indicated that the corporate social responsibility initiatives of multinational oil corporations, implemented via the Global Memorandum of Understanding, have aided in empowering women to fulfil their responsibilities in food and nutritional security. The current research parallels diverges in its unit of analysis by sourcing respondents from the management of the firms instead of community inhabitants; in its criterion by utilising brand awareness instead of food security; and in its analytical method by applying PLS-SEM rather than propensity score matching.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

On the strength of the conceptual, theoretical and empirical reviews, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between environmental responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant association between social responsibility and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between community engagement and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The research employed a cross-sectional survey methodology, grounded on a positivist ideology that asserts social processes can be seen, quantified, and subjected to statistical generalisation. The intended demographic included all oil-producing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The accessible population consisted solely of 750 middle and upper management personnel selected from the 33 oil-producing companies functioning in the South-South region, all of which are registered with the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC, 2026), with most having their operational headquarters, production facilities, or corporate offices located in Rivers State. Middle and upper management personnel, including Logistics Managers, Health, Safety and Environment Managers, Operations Managers, Administrative Managers, Community Relations Managers, and Human Resource Managers, were recognised as the most appropriate respondents for the survey, as these individuals develop, implement, and assess their organisations' community relations strategies and are directly engaged with stakeholder feedback regarding the corporate brand's reputation. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was employed to ascertain a sample size of 254 participants from the available population of 750. The straightforward random sampling method was utilised, employing a computer-generated random number table, thereby granting each element of the available population an equal and independent chance of being selected. A systematic questionnaire served as the tool for data acquisition. The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed by specialists in management and marketing, and a reliability threshold of 0.7 was set, in accordance with Hair *et al*., (2014). Out of the 254 distributed instruments, 233 were collected, yielding a retrieval rate of 91.73 percent, with 210 being sufficiently completed and usable, which corresponds to a usable questionnaire rate of 82.68 percent of those distributed and 90.13 percent of those collected. This return rate significantly exceeds the standard benchmark for survey research inside organisational contexts, making it suitable for inferential analysis. The hypotheses were evaluated at a significance level of 0.05 using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling with SmartPLS 4.1.1.9.

4.1 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Environmental Responsibility (ER)

Item	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
ER1	Our firm provides strategic initiatives to reduce waste and promote recycling in host communities.	210	3.90	0.982	-1.286	1.783
ER2	Our firm upholds high standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in its environmental operations.	210	3.63	1.024	-0.879	0.457
ER3	Our firm implements initiatives to minimise its ecological footprint, reduce emissions and conserve natural resources.	210	3.53	1.008	-0.900	0.400
ER4	Our firm frequently provides training to employees on environmental best practices.	210	3.61	1.017	-0.812	0.211
ER5	Our firm prioritises suppliers and partners who share its commitment to environmental responsibility and ethical sourcing.	210	2.82	1.082	0.173	-0.635
ER6	Our firm regularly measures, reports and independently verifies its environmental impact in host communities.	210	2.89	1.139	0.168	-0.868

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Social Responsibility (SR)

Item	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
SR1	Our firm regularly donates relief materials to host communities during disasters and emergencies.	210	3.60	0.881	-0.816	0.819
SR2	Our firm embarks on poverty alleviation and livelihood empowerment programmes in its host communities.	210	3.54	0.923	-0.808	0.785

SR3	Our firm offers scholarship funds to students from underprivileged host community backgrounds.	210	3.25	0.917	-0.410	0.018
SR4	Our firm funds healthcare interventions and medical outreach in its host communities.	210	3.10	0.939	-0.367	0.129
SR5	Our firm sponsors local events such as sports tournaments, cultural festivals and community fairs.	210	3.32	0.911	-0.485	0.066
SR6	Our firm encourages and organises employees to render volunteer community service in host communities.	210	3.54	0.923	-0.808	0.785

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Community Engagement (CE)

Item	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
CE1	Our firm actively seeks input and feedback from host communities to inform its decision-making processes.	210	3.34	1.033	-0.374	-0.229
CE2	Our firm regularly communicates with host communities to keep them informed about its initiatives and progress.	210	3.48	1.081	-0.592	-0.276
CE3	Our firm participates in forums, workshops and focus groups with host communities to collaborate on solutions.	210	3.90	0.904	-1.212	2.027
CE4	Our firm conducts periodic surveys to gauge community perceptions, satisfaction levels and expectations.	210	3.84	0.943	-0.995	1.185
CE5	Our firm provides channels through which host communities may raise concerns, and responds promptly and transparently.	210	3.56	1.062	-0.877	0.353
CE6	Our firm integrates host community representatives into its governance structure and decision-making processes.	210	3.34	1.033	-0.374	-0.229

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Brand Awareness (BA)

Item	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
BA1	Our stakeholders are familiar with our brand name and recognise it when they see it.	210	2.95	1.125	-0.120	-0.825
BA2	Our stakeholders readily think of our brand name when considering firms in our category.	210	2.80	1.066	0.121	-0.587
BA3	Our stakeholders can easily recall our brand name when prompted with our industry category.	210	3.48	1.013	-0.646	0.083
BA4	Our stakeholders are aware of the presence of our brand in the market and in the host communities.	210	3.28	1.017	-0.604	-0.272
BA5	Our stakeholders have frequently seen and heard about our brand through various communication channels.	210	3.18	0.986	-0.310	-0.299
BA6	Our brand is associated by stakeholders with distinct and identifiable qualities or characteristics.	210	3.33	1.004	-0.479	-0.209

Source: *SPSS Research Output (2026)*

As revealed in Tables 1 to 4, the descriptive statistics disclose a moderate and markedly uneven pattern of community relations practice and a weak profile of brand awareness among oil producing firms in Rivers State (N = 210). Environmental responsibility presents the most polarised profile, with means ranging from 2.82 to 3.90: waste reduction and recycling initiatives (ER1, Mean = 3.90) and employee environmental training (ER4, Mean = 3.61) are comparatively well practised, whereas the screening of suppliers for environmental commitment (ER5, Mean = 2.82) and the independent measurement and verification of environmental impact (ER6, Mean = 2.89) are critically underdeveloped, and the platykurtic distributions of these two items indicate wide inconsistency across firms. Community engagement recorded the strongest overall mean profile (3.34 to 3.90), driven by participation in forums and workshops (CE3, Mean = 3.90) and periodic perception surveys (CE4, Mean = 3.84), although the integration of community representatives into governance structures (CE6, Mean = 3.34) remains comparatively weak, a pattern which suggests that engagement in the sector is consultative in form but not participatory in substance. Social responsibility recorded moderate means (3.10 to 3.60), with disaster relief (SR1, Mean = 3.60) and employee volunteering (SR6, Mean = 3.54) stronger than healthcare funding (SR4, Mean = 3.10) and scholarships

(SR3, Mean = 3.25). Brand awareness recorded the lowest aggregate means in the entire study (2.80 to 3.48), with unaided recall of the brand within the industry category (BA2, Mean = 2.80) and brand familiarity and recognition (BA1, Mean = 2.95) emerging as the most acute deficiencies, while prompted recall (BA3, Mean = 3.48) was comparatively the strongest. The negative kurtosis values across most brand awareness items confirm broadly dispersed and mixed responses. The overall pattern is diagnostic: firms are more confident of being recognised when prompted than of being spontaneously recalled, which is the empirical signature of a weakly established brand node in stakeholder memory.

4.1.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated in order to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs prior to the estimation of structural relationships. Following Hair *et al*., (2014), Henseler *et al*., (2009) and Fornell and Larcker (1981), the study assessed indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The diagrammatic representation of the measurement model is presented in Figure 2.

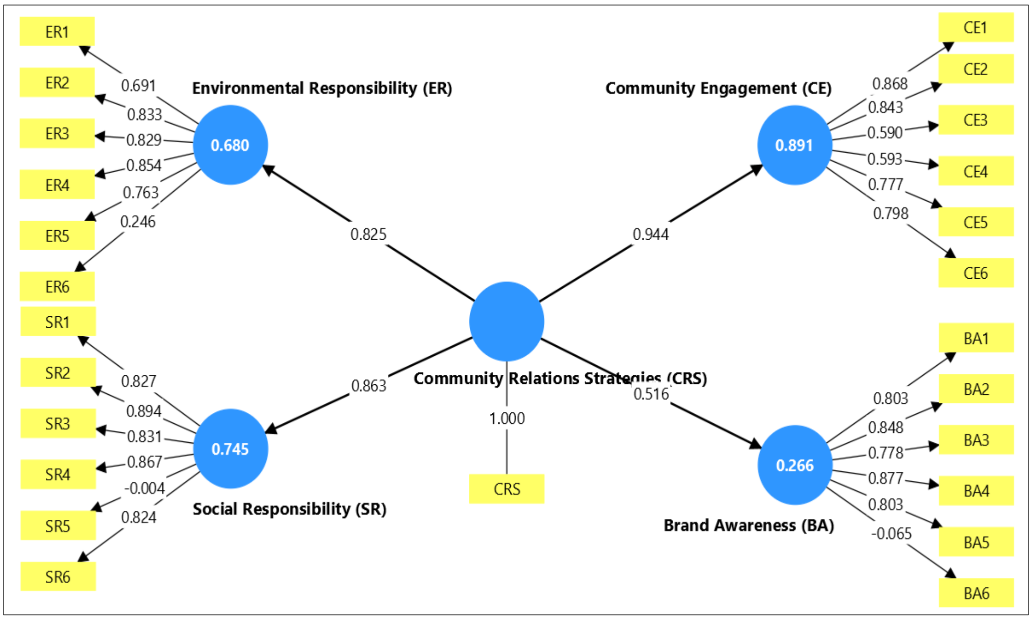

Figure 2: Measurement (Outer) Model

Source: *SmartPLS 4.1.1.9 Output of Research Data, 2026. Where: CRS = Community Relations Strategies; ER = Environmental Responsibility; SR = Social Responsibility; CE = Community Engagement; BA = Brand Awareness.*

Table 5: Result Summary for the Reflective Measurement Model

Construct	Indicator	Loading (λ)	Indicator Reliability (λ²)	AVE	rho_c	Cronbach's α
Thresholds		>0.70	>0.50	>0.50	>0.70	0.70 - 0.90
Environmental Responsibility	ER1	0.713	0.508	0.635	0.897	0.856
	ER2	0.831	0.691			
	ER3	0.813	0.661			
	ER4	0.861	0.741			
	ER5	0.758	0.575			
	ER6	deleted	deleted			
Social Responsibility	SR1	0.840	0.706	0.719	0.927	0.904
	SR2	0.908	0.824			
	SR3	0.821	0.674			
	SR4	0.861	0.741			
	SR5	deleted	deleted			
	SR6	0.806	0.650			
Community Engagement	CE1	0.883	0.780	0.565	0.884	0.845
	CE2	0.863	0.745			

	CE3	0.610	0.372			
	CE4	0.594	0.353			
	CE5	0.746	0.557			
	CE6	0.765	0.585			
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.580	0.336	0.523	0.864	0.858
	BA2	0.664	0.441			
	BA3	0.789	0.623			
	BA4	0.519	0.269			
	BA5	0.860	0.740			
	BA6	0.854	0.729			

Source*: SmartPLS 4.1.1.9 Output of Research Data, 2026*

Figure 2 and Table 5 illustrate that the reflective measurement model was evaluated for convergent validity and internal consistency reliability among the four constructs. In terms of environmental accountability, five out of six indicators remained after the exclusion of ER6 due to insufficient loading, with the remaining indicators exhibiting outer loadings between 0.713 (ER1) and 0.861 (ER4), all surpassing the 0.70 benchmark, alongside reliability values ranging from 0.508 to 0.741, an average variance extracted of 0.635, composite reliability of 0.897, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.856, thereby affirming satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency. In terms of social responsibility, SR5 was removed, and the other five indicators exhibited loadings ranging from 0.806 (SR6) to 0.908 (SR2), with an average variance extracted of 0.719, composite reliability of 0.927, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.904, demonstrating robust convergent validity and outstanding reliability. In terms of community engagement, all six indicators were preserved; nevertheless, CE3 (0.610) and CE4 (0.594) slightly dipped beneath the 0.70 loading benchmark, while the average variance extracted of 0.565, composite reliability of 0.884, and Cronbach's alpha of 0.845 still met the established criteria, indicating moderate yet acceptable convergent validity and commendable reliability. For brand awareness, all six indicators were preserved, although BA1 (0.580) and BA4 (0.519) did not meet the 0.70 loading standard, and their reliability values of 0.336 and 0.269 were below the 0.50 threshold; nonetheless, the construct-level average variance extracted of 0.523, composite reliability of 0.864, and Cronbach's alpha of 0.858 achieved the minimum requirements, signifying acceptable yet relatively weaker convergent validity and adequate internal consistency, in line with the estab Overall, the reflecting measurement model exhibited adequate psychometric characteristics across all four domains, making it suitable for structural evaluation.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity of the Constructs (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	BA	CE	ER	SR
BA	**0.806**			
CE	0.748	**0.796**		
ER	0.753	0.744	**0.797**	
SR	0.723	0.752	0.636	**0.848**

Source*: SmartPLS 4.1.1.9 Output of Research Data, 2026. Diagonal values are the square roots of the AVE; off-diagonal values are inter-construct correlations.*

Discriminant validity was assessed by means of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of the average variance extracted of each construct, represented by the diagonal values of the matrix, should exceed its correlations with every other construct in the model. As presented in Table 6, the diagonal value for brand awareness was 0.806, which exceeded its correlations with community engagement (0.748), environmental responsibility (0.753) and social responsibility (0.723); the diagonal value for community engagement was 0.796, exceeding its correlations with brand awareness (0.748), environmental responsibility (0.744) and social responsibility (0.752); the diagonal value for environmental responsibility was 0.797, exceeding its correlations with brand awareness (0.753), community engagement (0.744) and social responsibility (0.636); and the diagonal value for social responsibility was 0.848, exceeding its correlations with brand awareness (0.723), community engagement (0.752) and environmental responsibility (0.636). Although the correlation between community engagement and social responsibility (0.752) approaches the community engagement diagonal (0.796), it remains within acceptable limits. Collectively, the results confirm that all four constructs satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criterion, thereby establishing adequate discriminant validity and demonstrating that each latent variable in the model is empirically distinct.

4.1.3 Structural Model and Test of Hypotheses

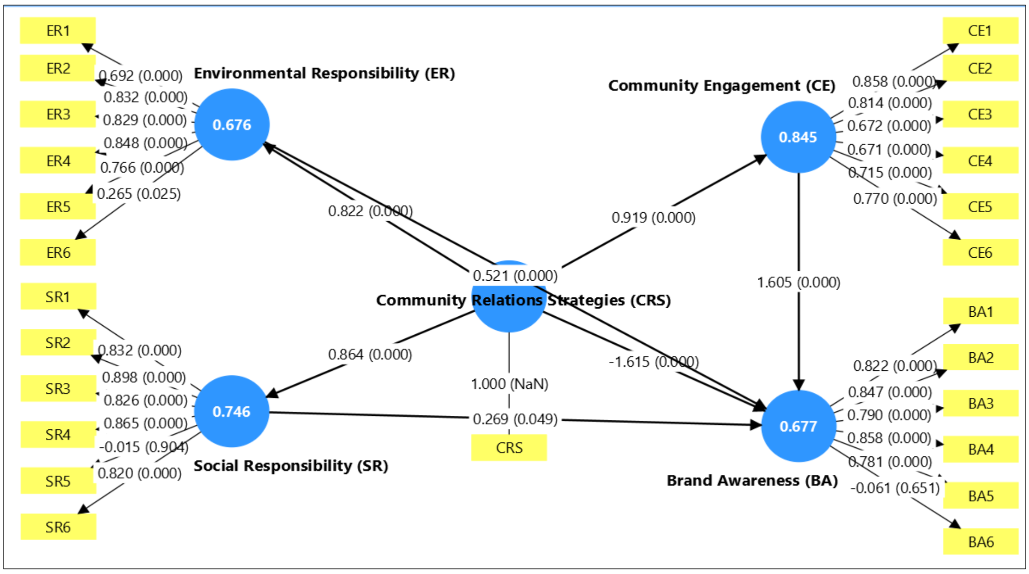

Figure 3: Structural (Inner) Model showing the beta values and p-values

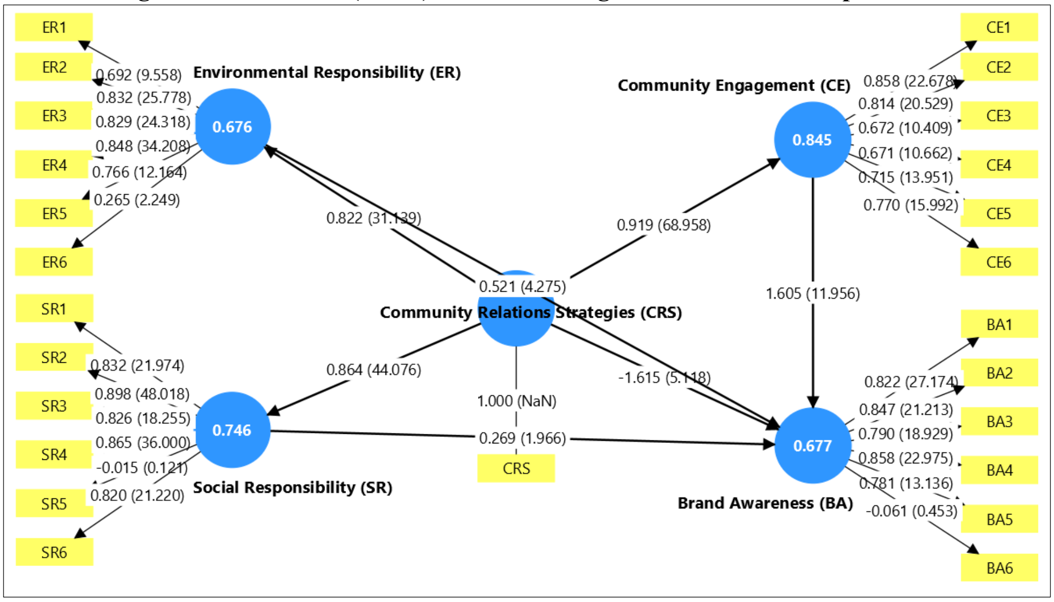

Figure 4: Structural (Inner) Model showing the beta values and t-values
Source: *SmartPLS 4.1.1.9 Output of Research Data, 2026*

Table 7: Results of Hypotheses Testing (Total Effects Matrix)

Hypothesised Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P-Value	Decision on Null Hypothesis
ER -> BA	0.626	0.084	3.906	0.000	Rejected
SR -> BA	0.542	0.101	5.377	0.000	Rejected
CE -> BA	0.049	0.156	0.312	0.755	Not Rejected

Source: *SmartPLS 4.1.1.9 Output of Research Data, 2026. R^2 for Brand Awareness = 0.691. Where: ER = Environmental Responsibility; SR = Social Responsibility; CE = Community Engagement; BA = Brand Awareness.*

Table 7 and Figures 3 and 4 illustrate that two null hypotheses were dismissed while one remained accepted. The coefficient of determination for brand awareness was measured at 0.691, suggesting that the three proxies of community relations strategies collectively explain around 69.1 percent of the variance in brand awareness among oil-producing companies in Rivers State, a degree of predictive precision deemed significant according to Hair *et al*., (2019), thereby affirming that community relations strategies are, in unison, a formidable factor influencing brand awareness in this industry.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.2.1 Environmental Responsibility and Brand Awareness:

The null hypothesis H01 posits that there exists no substantial correlation between environmental responsibility and brand recognition among oil-producing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The analysis shown in Figures 3 and 4 and Table 7 indicates that environmental responsibility exhibits a robust, affirmative, and significant correlation with brand awareness, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The PLS-SEM findings revealed a path coefficient of 0.626, a standard deviation of 0.084, a t-value of 3.906, and a p-value of 0.000, all conforming to the decision criterion at the 0.05 significance level, with environmental responsibility identified as the most potent individual predictor of brand awareness in the model. This discovery was anticipated and has no element of astonishment; in fact, it would have been unexpected if environmental accountability had not been acknowledged, considering the prominence of environmental concerns in the area. The discovery aligns closely with the findings of Motilewa, Ibidunni, *et al*., (2019), who demonstrated in the same industry and nation that a company's dedication to environmental conservation through waste reduction, recycling, and pollution management enhances investor trust and fortifies its connections with governmental bodies and local communities; with Ajibua and Aiyedogbon (2025), who identified a statistically significant and positive correlation between environmental protection efforts a This aligns with Flammer (2021), whose findings suggest that a genuine dedication to environmental issues is acknowledged by financial markets, implying that environmental performance holds significance for outside stakeholders. The discovery robustly endorses Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), since the environmental actions of the corporation represent its reaction to the paramount demands of its nearest stakeholder, the host community, whose positive recognition serves as the incentive for that reaction.

4.2.2 Social Responsibility and Brand Awareness:

The null hypothesis H02 posits that there exists no substantial correlation between social responsibility and brand awareness among oil-producing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The results illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 and Table 7 indicate that social responsibility exhibits a robust, affirmative, and significant correlation with brand awareness, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The PLS-SEM findings revealed a path coefficient of 0.542, a standard deviation of 0.101, a t-value of 5.377, and a p-value of 0.000, thereby meeting the decision criterion at the 0.05 significant level. The implication of this finding is that scholarships, healthcare interventions, poverty alleviation and livelihood programmes, disaster relief, sponsorship of community events and employee volunteering are among the principal mechanisms by which the corporate brand is inscribed in community memory. This finding was expected, and no element of surprise attaches to it. It agrees with the evidence of Motilewa, Worlu, *et al*., (2018), who found that community development initiatives are related to enhanced corporate image; with Ajibua and Aiyedogbon (2025), who found that community development programmes and economic empowerment practices bear statistically significant and positive relationships with industry sustainability; and with Khan *et al*., (2023), whose structural model established that corporate social responsibility is positively associated with corporate brand awareness. It stands in productive tension, however, with Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2023, 2024) and Uduji *et al*., (2026), who found in the Niger Delta that although the corporate social responsibility interventions of the multinational oil companies exert significant effects. Theoretically, the finding strongly supports Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which predicts that attention to the substantive welfare claims of a salient stakeholder is repaid in legitimacy and standing.

4.2.3 Community Engagement and Brand Awareness:

The null hypothesis H03 posits that there exists no substantial correlation between community participation and brand awareness of oil-producing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The results shown in Figures 3 and 4 and Table 7 demonstrate that community participation has a modest, positive, and statistically insignificant correlation with brand awareness, leading to the retention of the null hypothesis. The PLS-SEM findings revealed a path coefficient of 0.049, a standard deviation of 0.156, a t-value of 0.312, and a p-value of 0.755, all of which do not meet the decision criterion at the 0.05 significance level. This may be due to the fact that engagement in the Rivers State upstream sector is characteristically dialogic and private. This finding was surprising and is counter-intuitive, given the centrality accorded to engagement in the corporate community relations literature and in the practice guidance of the extractive industries, and it constitutes perhaps the most original contribution of this study. The finding stands in direct tension with the empirical evidence of Asante Boadi *et al*., (2019), who found that the attributes of stakeholder engagement, namely the quality of information shared, respectful treatment, voice and empathy, are positively related to trust, which in turn conditions the acceptance of corporate social responsibility. Theoretically, the finding presents a nuanced challenge. Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) would predict that participatory engagement enhances legitimacy and standing, and the result suggests that the engagement mechanisms deployed in Rivers State are too shallow, too privately conducted and too poorly communicated to discharge this theoretical function.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between community relations strategies and brand awareness of oil producing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, with community relations strategies operationalised through environmental responsibility, social responsibility and community engagement. The findings establish that community relations strategies jointly account for approximately 69.1 per cent of the variance in brand awareness, and that this explanatory power is concentrated in the material and publicly verifiable dimensions of community relations rather than in its dialogic dimension. Environmental responsibility and social responsibility each bear strong, positive and significant relationships with brand awareness, whereas community engagement, notwithstanding its prominence in policy prescription and its relatively high reported incidence among the firms surveyed, bears no significant independent relationship with it. The study therefore concludes that, in the Rivers State upstream petroleum sector, brands are made known by what firms visibly do to and for their host communities, and not by what they are heard to say to them. Community relations strategy is a significant and consequential antecedent of brand awareness, but its brand-building effect is realised through remediation and investment that are seen, verified and communicated, and is dissipated where engagement is reduced to consultative ritual conducted privately with gatekeepers and left uncommunicated to the wider public.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The executive management and health, safety and environment directorates of oil producing firms operating in Rivers State should institutionalise an independently verified and publicly reported environmental responsibility programme across all their assets, in order to convert the strongest available driver of brand awareness into a durable and favourably valenced brand asset among host communities, regulators and investors. This should be done by establishing an Environmental Performance Disclosure Framework under which annual, independently audited reports covering spill volumes, remediation status, flare-down progress, waste and recycling metrics and supplier environmental screening outcomes are published, presented at community town halls in the local languages of the host communities and lodged with the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission.
2. The community relations and corporate affairs departments of oil producing firms in Rivers State, acting in concert with their host community development trusts constituted under the Petroleum Industry Act, should redesign their social investment as a transparent, needs-assessed and explicitly attributable portfolio of programmes, in order to secure for the firm the brand recall that its social expenditure is demonstrably capable of generating but is presently forfeiting through poor attribution and uneven distribution. This should be done by conducting participatory needs assessments in each host community before the commitment of funds.
3. The boards and senior management of oil producing firms in Rivers State should go beyond seeking to use linear community engagement as a means of achieving brand awareness. They should reconstitute community engagement from a consultative ritual into a substantive, decision-bearing and publicly communicated governance mechanism, in order to convert a practice that is currently well attended but brand-inert into an effective instrument of stakeholder cognition.

5.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This study positions brand awareness, rather than corporate image, reputation or sustainability, as the criterion variable in an empirical examination of community relations strategies in the Nigerian upstream petroleum sector. Also, it disaggregates community relations strategies into three theoretically distinct proxies and models them simultaneously through Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling, thereby establishing the relative path magnitudes of the environmental, social and engagement dimensions and demonstrating that they are not interchangeable in their effects.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

Three limitations attend this study, each of which opens a line of further enquiry. First, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which captures the relationship between community relations strategies and brand awareness at a single point in time and cannot therefore establish temporal causality or track the accumulation of brand knowledge as community relations practice matures. Future research should replicate the structural model using a longitudinal panel design that follows the same firms across several operating cycles, thereby enabling observation of how improvements in specific community relations dimensions translate into brand-cognitive gains over time.

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