Digital Public Relations and Corporate Reputation Management Strategies of Oando, Seplat and Renaissance Africa Energy Companies in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined strategic communication and stakeholder stratification among selected oil and gas companies in Port Harcourt, with specific focus on Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy Plc. The study specifically sought to identify the strategic communication techniques employed in stakeholder engagement; examine how stakeholders are identified, prioritised and stratified; assess stakeholders' perceptions of the companies' communication practices; and determine the influence of strategic communication and stakeholder stratification on engagement outcomes. The study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory, Excellence Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted and complemented with qualitative interviews to obtain deeper insights into organisational communication practices. The population comprised 2,502,560 stakeholders across the selected Local Government Areas, from which a sample size of 384 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and in-depth interview

guide and analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation, while interview responses were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the selected companies employ diverse strategic communication techniques, including community meetings, consultation forums, face-to-face communication, press releases, social media platforms, operational briefings and grievance redress mechanisms. The study concludes that strategic communication and systematic stakeholder stratification are important for strengthening stakeholder relationships and sustaining organisational legitimacy in the oil and gas sector. It recommends that the selected companies strengthen digital communication and feedback systems, improve the timeliness and consistency of information, adopt more inclusive stakeholder classification frameworks.

Keywords: *Strategic communication, stakeholder stratification, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder identification, stakeholder prioritisation, Port Harcourt.*

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication has fundamentally transformed the ways organisations communicate with stakeholders and manage their public identities. Unlike traditional communication systems in which organisations largely controlled the timing, content and direction of corporate messages, digital platforms have created a more interactive, decentralised and participatory communication environment. Social media, corporate websites, blogs and online news platforms enable organisations to communicate directly with diverse publics while simultaneously allowing stakeholders to respond, share and generate alternative narratives about organisations. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) observe that social media has changed organisational communication by facilitating interactive and user-generated communication, while Kent and Taylor (2016) emphasise the importance of digital platforms in creating dialogic relationships between organisations and their publics. Consequently, digital public relations have become an important component of contemporary corporate communication, particularly because organisations must now manage communication in an environment where information travels rapidly and stakeholders expect opportunities for interaction and participation. The significance of digital public relations becomes particularly evident in industries whose activities attract considerable public attention and social scrutiny. Oil and gas companies operate within environments where corporate decisions have implications for environmental protection, employment, community development, energy security and national economic interests. In such contexts, digital platforms provide organisations with opportunities to communicate corporate activities, explain policies, disclose information and respond to stakeholder concerns. At the same time, these platforms can expose organisations to substantial reputational risks because negative information can be rapidly disseminated and amplified by networked publics. Coombs (2007) argues that effective communication is central to organisational reputation and crisis management, while Aula (2010) notes that the networked nature of contemporary communication makes reputation increasingly dependent on interactions occurring across multiple communication channels. Similarly, Etter et al. (2019) contend that social media has altered the dynamics of organisational reputation by giving stakeholders greater capacity to participate in and influence corporate communication. Digital public relations therefore represent both an opportunity for relationship building and a strategic requirement for managing reputational vulnerability.

Corporate reputation is closely associated with the cumulative perception's stakeholders develop about an organisation based on its behaviour, communication, performance and relationships. Fombrun and van Riel (1997) explain that corporate reputation represents a collective assessment of an organisation's attractiveness relative to other organisations, while Dowling (2006) associates' reputation with stakeholders' overall evaluation of an organisation's credibility and character. In the digital environment, reputation management has become more complicated because corporate reputation is no longer shaped exclusively by information released by the organisation itself. Stakeholders, journalists, activists, employees, consumers and community groups can independently produce and circulate information about corporate activities, thereby contributing to competing interpretations of organisational conduct. Aula (2010) therefore argues that organisations must manage reputation within a communication environment characterised by transparency, interconnectedness and uncertainty. For oil companies, this makes consistent messaging, timely responses, openness and sustained stakeholder interaction particularly important in protecting organisational credibility and public trust. The Nigerian oil and gas sector provide an important context for examining the relationship between digital public relations and corporate reputation. Nigeria's petroleum industry occupies a central position in the country's economy and has historically generated extensive political, social and environmental debates (Obi, 2010). The Niger Delta, which constitutes the major oil-producing region, has experienced persistent concerns relating to environmental degradation, oil spills, gas flaring, loss of livelihoods and perceived inequities in the distribution of oil-related benefits. Idemudia (2014) argues that corporate-community relationships in the Niger Delta are shaped by longstanding issues of trust, development and corporate social responsibility, while Prno and Slocombe (2012) identify stakeholder engagement as a critical factor in sustaining legitimacy in resource-dependent environments. These historical experiences influence how stakeholders interpret corporate communication and may contribute to scepticism toward organisational claims. The emergence of digital media has intensified these dynamics by providing communities, civil society organisations, journalists and other publics with additional channels through which corporate conduct can be scrutinised and debated. Castells (2009) notes that networked communication has created new forms of public participation and power, making organisations increasingly vulnerable to real-time public scrutiny and digitally amplified criticism. As a result, the digital public relations and corporate reputation management strategies of Oando, Seplat and Renaissance Africa Energy Companies warrant systematic investigation. The three companies operate within a petroleum environment where digital communication can influence stakeholder relationships, public perceptions and organisational legitimacy. Their digital platforms potentially provide mechanisms for disseminating corporate information, engaging stakeholders, responding to emerging issues and communicating organisational commitments to environmental and social responsibility. However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends not simply on the frequency of digital communication but also on the extent to which communication is credible, responsive, interactive and aligned with stakeholder expectations. Kent and Taylor (2002) argue that effective digital public relations should facilitate dialogue rather than merely reproduce one-way organisational publicity, while Coombs and Holladay (2012) emphasise the importance of communication, responsibility and stakeholder expectations in maintaining organisational legitimacy. Although existing studies have examined corporate communication, stakeholder relations and social responsibility within Nigeria's extractive sector, comparatively limited attention has been directed toward how specific oil companies integrate digital public relations with corporate reputation management. This study therefore examines the digital public relations and corporate reputation management strategies of Oando, Seplat and Renaissance Africa Energy Companies in Nigeria, with particular attention to how digital communication is employed to engage stakeholders, address public concerns and influence perceptions of corporate reputation.

Statement of the Problem

Port Harcourt has a diverse and digitally active stakeholder environment where government agencies, communities, media, civil society, environmental groups and young people increasingly use social media and online platforms to engage with oil companies. Although these platforms provide opportunities for direct communication, many companies still rely on one-way, corporate-centred approaches that may not adequately address stakeholders' different interests, expectations and influence. The interactive nature of digital media allows stakeholders to question, reinterpret and share corporate messages, while negative experiences and grievances can be rapidly amplified. Consequently, issues such as mistrust, limited transparency, delayed responses, inadequate feedback and perceptions of information control may create significant challenges for the corporate reputation of oil companies.

Despite the growing importance of digital public relations, there is limited empirical evidence on how oil companies in Port Harcourt use digital platforms to facilitate genuine stakeholder engagement and manage corporate reputation. Existing studies have largely focused on broader Niger Delta issues such as corporate-community relations, environmental concerns and social responsibility, with less attention to the specific digital practices of Oando, Seplat and Renaissance Africa Energy Companies. This creates a knowledge gap regarding how these companies engage stakeholders online, respond to concerns, manage digital narratives and project their corporate identities. The study therefore seeks to examine whether their digital public relations practices go beyond information dissemination to promote interaction, responsiveness, transparency, stakeholder confidence and effective corporate reputation management.

Objectives of the Study

The study specifically aims to:

1. assess stakeholders' perceptions of the communication practices of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy;
2. examine the level of stakeholder gratification derived from the engagement strategies of the selected oil companies; and

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How do stakeholders perceive the communication practices of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy in Port Harcourt?
2. To what extent do stakeholders derive gratification from the engagement strategies of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory explains organisations as operating within networks of relationships involving groups that can affect or be affected by organisational activities. Freeman (1984) established the theory by broadening organisational responsibility beyond shareholders to include communities, regulators, employees, investors, NGOs and other relevant publics. Donaldson and Preston (1995) further emphasised the legitimacy of stakeholders, while Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) identified power, legitimacy and urgency as key factors influencing stakeholder salience and managerial prioritisation. These principles are particularly relevant to the oil and gas sector, where companies interact with diverse stakeholders whose interests and levels of influence vary. Rowley's (1997) network perspective further shows that stakeholder influence can increase through relationships with other actors, while Suchman (1995) connects effective stakeholder engagement with organisational legitimacy.

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides a foundation for understanding stakeholder identification, prioritisation and stratification among oil and gas companies in Port

Harcourt. It suggests that organisations allocate communication attention according to stakeholder influence, operational relevance, regulatory importance and potential impact on organisational performance. However, Stakeholder Theory has been criticised for its managerial orientation and limited explanation of the specific communication processes through which stakeholders are engaged. It also provides insufficient attention to communication quality, interaction, symmetry and stakeholder satisfaction.

Excellence Theory

Excellence Theory provides a normative framework for understanding effective public relations and strategic communication. Developed by Grunig and colleagues, the theory argues that organisational effectiveness improves when communication is strategically managed, integrated into organisational decision-making and characterised by two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 2002). Rather than treating communication as a one-way process of information dissemination, the theory emphasises dialogue, mutual understanding, responsiveness and adjustment between organisations and their publics. These principles are particularly relevant to oil and gas companies operating in environments where mistrust, environmental concerns and community conflicts make continuous and meaningful stakeholder communication important.

The theory provides useful criteria for assessing the quality of stakeholder engagement, including openness, accessibility, responsiveness and opportunities for stakeholder participation. However, critics note that true communication symmetry may be difficult to achieve where organisations and stakeholders possess unequal economic, political and institutional power (Motion & Weaver, 2005). The theory also gives limited attention to how organisations determine which stakeholders deserve greater communication attention.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT) views audiences as active participants who selectively use communication to satisfy particular needs rather than as passive recipients of information. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) identified cognitive, affective, personal integrative and social needs as important motivations for communication use. Applied to stakeholder engagement, the theory suggests that stakeholders assess organisational communication according to the extent to which it provides useful information, recognition, transparency, participation and opportunities for interaction. Rubin (2009) extended the relevance of the theory beyond traditional mass media.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because different stakeholder groups may seek different forms of information and engagement from oil and gas companies. It therefore helps explain stakeholders' perceptions of communication practices and the extent to which engagement activities meet their informational, relational and participatory expectations. However, U&GT focuses primarily on individual motivations and gratification and gives limited attention to organisational strategy, institutional structures, stakeholder power and communication management. It therefore cannot adequately explain how companies identify, prioritise or stratify stakeholders.

Conceptual Review

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication has evolved into a central organising framework for explaining how institutions deploy communication resources to achieve intentional outcomes within complex social, political and economic environments. Scholars broadly agree that strategic communication represents the purposeful management of communication processes aligned with organisational goals, long-term missions and stakeholder expectations. Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič and Sriramesh (2007) describe strategic communication as the coordinated activities whereby organisations deliberately shape meaning, influence perceptions and guide behaviour through planned communication actions across multiple channels. This conceptualisation underscores its distinction from routine messaging, situating strategic communication within a results-oriented, managerial paradigm.

Strategic communication operates within a multidisciplinary space, engaging concepts derived from public relations, marketing communication, political communication and corporate communication. The convergence of these disciplinary traditions reflects the growing need for coherent messaging in increasingly fragmented media environments. Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005) explain that organisations face heightened stakeholder expectations and must therefore prioritise integrated communication efforts that create consistency, reduce ambiguity and support institutional credibility. Consequently, strategic communication transcends departmental boundaries and functions as an enterprise-wide capability.

Central to the operational relevance of strategic communication is its emphasis on planning and foresight. Cornelissen (2020) asserts that strategic communication involves analysing environmental conditions, understanding stakeholder landscapes, defining communication objectives, selecting appropriate strategies and evaluating outcomes. This systematic planning process is critical in industries marked by volatility, such as petroleum exploration and production. Strategic communication enables organisations to anticipate risks, manage crises and maintain constructive relationships with regulators, host communities and global audiences. The rise of digital and participatory media has further shaped strategic communication's theoretical and applied significance. According to Falkheimer and Heide (2014), the contemporary communication environment is characterised by polycentric information flows, dialogic expectations and accelerated message diffusion. Organisations must therefore design strategic communication systems that accommodate interactivity, audience empowerment and real-time feedback. This shift moves communication strategy away from top-down information dissemination toward dynamic, relational and adaptive processes. Strategic communication is also inherently linked to the concept of reputation. Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) define reputation as a collective representation of a firm's past actions and future prospects. Strategic communication reinforces reputation by providing consistent messaging, transparency and visible commitment to stakeholder concerns. When oil companies face operational disruptions, environmental risks, or community tensions, their ability to deploy coherent and credible messages becomes central to protecting corporate reputation and reducing reputational loss. A notable dimension of strategic communication is its stakeholder-centric orientation. Freeman (2010) maintains that stakeholders hold the potential to support or constrain organisational actions. Therefore, strategic communication aligns organisational goals with stakeholder interests to foster support and minimise conflict. By strategically engaging stakeholders, organisations reduce the risk of oppositional behaviour, litigation, community unrest and regulatory sanctions issues that are frequent within natural resource extraction contexts. Strategic communication is deeply intertwined with crisis preparedness and response. Coombs (2015) asserts that organisations that proactively design communication frameworks are better positioned to mitigate crisis fallout and maintain public trust. In the petroleum industry, crises often involve technical failures, operational accidents, environmental contamination, or socio-political disputes. Strategic communication provides the foundation for early-warning systems, risk communication and post-crisis image repair. Another critical element involves organisational identity. Hatch and Schultz (2008) argue that strategic communication maintains the alignment between organisational identity, culture and image. This alignment is essential for ensuring message consistency across stakeholder groups. Oil companies, particularly those operating in conflict-prone areas, must project distinct identities of responsibility and compliance if they seek sustained operational legitimacy.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining a descriptive survey with interviews to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data on strategic communication and stakeholder engagement among Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy. The study population comprised relevant company staff and residents of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt City and Eleme LGAs, with the projected population of the four LGAs estimated at approximately 2,502,560 for 2025; consequently, 384 respondents were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan table, while nine staff members were purposively selected for interviews. A multistage sampling technique was employed, involving purposive selection of the companies and relevant staff, stratification of host-community stakeholders, and proportionate selection of respondents. Data were collected through a structured four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The instruments underwent validity assessment by supervisors and communication research experts, while reliability testing using test-retest and Cronbach's Alpha produced an acceptable coefficient of 0.70. Data collection was conducted physically and electronically, with ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation observed. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and weighted mean scores, while qualitative interview data were analysed thematically through the explanation-building technique to provide deeper insights into strategic communication, stakeholder stratification, engagement practices and stakeholder gratification.

Presentation of Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire copies were duly retrieved and the responses obtained formed the basis for the analysis. The data of the 384 respondents are presented in Tables below.

Table 1: Stakeholder Perception of Communication Practices

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
1	Transparency is demonstrated.	148 (592)	122 (366)	80 (160)	34 (34)	384	1152	3.0	Agreed
2	Stakeholders trust information.	90 (360)	100 (300)	62 (124)	132 (132)	384	916	2.3	Disagreed
3	Concerns are listened to.	150 (600)	120 (360)	78 (156)	36 (36)	384	1152	3.0	Agreed
4	Respect is shown.	85 (340)	95 (285)	74 (148)	130 (130)	384	903	2.3	Disagreed
5	Complaints are addressed.	155 (620)	115 (345)	74 (148)	40 (40)	384	1153	3.0	Agreed
6	Communication is consistent.	88 (352)	104 (312)	60 (120)	132 (132)	384	916	2.3	Disagreed
7	Company is socially responsible.	150 (600)	120 (360)	78 (156)	36 (36)	384	1152	3.0	Agreed
8	Relationship is positive.	82 (328)	108 (324)	64 (128)	130 (130)	384	910	2.4	Disagreed
	Grand Mean	-	-	-	-	**3072**	**9094**	**2.55**	**Moderate**

Table 1 reveals a divided perception of communication practices among stakeholders. While transparency, responsiveness and corporate social responsibility were rated positively, key relational indicators such as trust, respect, consistency and relationship quality recorded low mean scores. This indicates that although some communication efforts are visible, they are not strong enough to build consistent stakeholder confidence. The grand mean of 2.5 reflects moderate perception, showing that communication effectiveness is inconsistent.

Table 2: Gratification Derived from Engagement Strategies

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
9	Stakeholders benefit from engagement programmes.	131 (524)	127 (381)	96 (192)	30 (30)	384	1127	2.9	Agreed
10	Engagement satisfies communication needs.	84 (336)	116 (348)	34 (68)	150 (150)	384	902	2.3	Disagreed
11	Stakeholders feel included in decision-making.	148 (592)	118 (354)	86 (172)	32 (32)	384	1150	2.9	Agreed
12	Community development improves satisfaction.	162 (648)	108 (324)	74 (148)	40 (40)	384	1160	3.0	Agreed
13	Engagement promotes mutual understanding.	79 (316)	121 (363)	38 (76)	146 (146)	384	901	2.3	Disagreed
14	Stakeholders are satisfied with interaction level.	154 (616)	113 (339)	85 (170)	32 (32)	384	1157	3.0	Agreed
15	Engagement strengthens trust.	90 (360)	109 (327)	38 (76)	147 (147)	384	910	2.3	Disagreed
16	and gratification is derived.	160 (640)	117 (351)	75 (150)	32 (32)	384	1173	3.0	Agreed
	Grand Mean	-	-	-	-	**3072**	**8880**	**2.4**	**Low (Disagreed)**

Table 2 indicates that gratification derived from engagement strategies is moderately positive. Respondents agreed that engagement programmes, inclusion in decision-making and community development initiatives enhance satisfaction. However, key relational dimensions such as communication satisfaction, mutual understanding and trust recorded mean values below 2.5, indicating disagreement. This suggests that while structural engagement outputs are present, emotional and relational satisfaction remains weak. The grand mean of 2.4 confirms a moderate level of gratification among stakeholders.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1: How do stakeholders perceive the communication practices of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy in Port Harcourt?

The findings from Table 1 and the interview responses revealed that stakeholders perceive the communication practices of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy as moderately effective, transparent and structured, although inconsistencies remain in areas relating to trust, responsiveness and communication consistency. The questionnaire findings showed that respondents agreed that transparency is demonstrated (Mean = 3.0), stakeholder concerns are listened to (Mean = 3.0), complaints are addressed (Mean = 3.0) and the companies demonstrate social responsibility (Mean = 3.0). However, respondents disagreed that stakeholders trust company information (Mean = 2.3), that communication is always respectful (Mean = 2.3) and that communication practices are consistent (Mean = 2.3). These findings suggest that although visible communication structures exist, relational confidence among stakeholders remains fragile. This aligns with Rawlins (2008), who argued that transparency alone does not automatically generate stakeholder trust unless communication is perceived as reliable and responsive. Similarly, Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) explained that trust develops through consistent demonstrations of competence, integrity and benevolence over time.

The interview findings further revealed that stakeholders generally appreciate the accessibility and professionalism of communication practices across the selected companies. Renaissance Africa Energy Company reportedly maintains structured consultations and dialogue sessions, while Oando Energy Resources combines traditional communication with digital engagement platforms. Seplat Energy was particularly recognised for the use of sustainability reports, digital platforms and formal stakeholder consultations that promote transparency and accountability. These findings support Cornelissen (2020), who argued that strategic corporate communication enhances organisational legitimacy and stakeholder understanding when it is systematic and professionally managed. The findings also align with Hallahan et al. (2007), who maintained that strategic communication contributes to relationship-building and organisational reputation. Similarly, Dike (2025) observed that strategic communication practices within Nigerian organisations increasingly focus on transparency, stakeholder interaction and institutional credibility.

Despite these positive perceptions, the findings revealed persistent concerns regarding communication consistency and responsiveness during crises or high-pressure operational situations. Respondents disagreed that communication is consistent (Mean = 2.3), while interview participants acknowledged delays in information dissemination during emergencies. This finding supports Coombs (2007), who argued that delayed crisis communication often weakens stakeholder confidence and organisational credibility. Coombs and Holladay (2012) similarly maintained that effective crisis communication requires speed, accuracy and continuous stakeholder updates to minimise uncertainty and mistrust. In the context of extractive industries, Heath and Johansen (2018) emphasised that communication failures during crises can significantly damage organisational legitimacy and stakeholder relationships. Therefore, the findings suggest that the selected companies still face challenges in sustaining timely and dependable communication during sensitive operational situations.

The findings additionally showed that stakeholders perceive the companies as socially responsible to some extent, particularly through visible CSR initiatives and engagement activities. Respondents agreed that the companies are socially responsible (Mean = 3.0), while interview participants highlighted sustainability reporting and CSR disclosures as important communication practices. This finding aligns with Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010), who argued that CSR communication strengthens stakeholder perceptions and organisational reputation when effectively communicated. Similarly, Porter and Kramer (2011) explained that strategic CSR contributes to both social value and corporate legitimacy. However, the findings also support Frynas (2005) and Akpan (2017), who criticised CSR practices within the Niger Delta for often failing to adequately address underlying community grievances and developmental concerns. Thus, although CSR communication may improve perceptions temporarily, it may not fully resolve longstanding trust deficits between oil companies and host communities.

The moderate stakeholder perception identified in the findings also reflects broader communication challenges within the Niger Delta oil sector. Historical experiences of environmental degradation, resource conflict and perceived exclusion continue to shape stakeholder attitudes toward oil companies. This finding aligns with Obi (2010), Omotola (2006) and Eregha and Omolaje (2020), who noted that distrust toward oil companies in the Niger Delta is rooted in decades of environmental and socio-economic dissatisfaction.

Idemudia (2014) similarly argued that corporate-community engagement within the oil sector often struggles to overcome historical grievances and legitimacy challenges. Consequently, even where communication systems are functional, stakeholder perceptions may remain cautious because of accumulated historical experiences. This explains why respondents positively rated transparency yet still expressed low trust in company information.

The findings also relate strongly to Excellence Theory, which emphasises the importance of two-way symmetrical communication in building mutual understanding and trust. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued that organisations achieve effective stakeholder relationships when communication becomes dialogic, participatory and responsive rather than purely informational. The interview findings suggest that the selected companies attempt to implement participatory communication through consultations, meetings and feedback systems. However, the low ratings regarding trust and consistency indicate that symmetrical communication has not been fully achieved. Kent and Taylor (2016) similarly maintained that dialogue-based communication requires not only information sharing but also organisational listening and mutual responsiveness. Thus, the findings demonstrate that although the companies possess structured communication systems, relational communication outcomes remain only moderately successful.

Research question 2: To what extent do stakeholders derive gratification from the engagement strategies of Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy?

The findings from Table 2 and the interview responses revealed that stakeholders derive only a moderate level of gratification from the engagement strategies employed by Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy. Although respondents agreed that engagement programmes provide benefits (Mean = 2.9), stakeholders are included in decision-making processes (Mean = 2.9), community development initiatives improve satisfaction (Mean = 3.0) and interaction levels are satisfactory (Mean = 3.0), they disagreed that engagement sufficiently satisfies communication needs (Mean = 2.3), promotes mutual understanding (Mean = 2.3), or strengthens trust (Mean = 2.3). The grand mean of 2.4 further confirms that gratification levels remain relatively low despite the presence of engagement structures. These findings suggest that stakeholders appreciate certain material and participatory benefits of engagement practices but remain dissatisfied with deeper relational outcomes such as trust, emotional connection and communication fulfilment. This finding aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory as propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), which explains that audiences actively evaluate communication based on the extent to which it satisfies their informational, social and psychological needs. Rubin (2009) similarly argued that communication effectiveness is measured not only by message delivery but also by the gratification and satisfaction derived by audiences.

The interview findings showed that the selected companies employ town hall meetings, consultation forums, CSR projects, grievance mechanisms and digital communication platforms to improve stakeholder participation and satisfaction. Respondents acknowledged that these engagement systems create opportunities for interaction and information exchange between the organisations and stakeholders. This finding supports Kent and Taylor (2002), who argued that dialogic communication enhances participation, relationship-building and stakeholder satisfaction when organisations create accessible platforms for interaction. Men and Tsai (2014) similarly maintained that participatory engagement systems positively influence stakeholder attitudes and perceptions toward organisations. Furthermore, Ledingham (2003) explained that effective relationship management depends largely on meaningful engagement that fosters understanding, involvement and relational satisfaction.

Thus, the presence of participatory communication structures within the selected companies contributes positively to certain dimensions of stakeholder gratification.

The findings also revealed that stakeholders derive gratification from visible community development projects and inclusion in some decision-making processes. Respondents agreed that community development initiatives improve satisfaction (Mean = 3.0), while interview participants identified CSR disclosures and sustainability programmes as important engagement tools. This finding aligns with Porter and Kramer (2011), who argued that organisations create shared value when corporate activities simultaneously address business objectives and societal expectations. Eweje (2006) similarly observed that community development initiatives within extractive industries often improve stakeholder perceptions and operational acceptance. However, Frynas (2005) and Akpan (2017) cautioned that CSR initiatives within the Niger Delta are frequently criticised for failing to address deeper structural grievances and developmental inequalities. Consequently, while stakeholders may appreciate certain developmental benefits, these initiatives alone may not guarantee long-term emotional satisfaction or trust.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings revealed weak gratification regarding communication satisfaction, mutual understanding and trust-building. Respondents disagreed that engagement satisfies communication needs (Mean = 2.3), promotes mutual understanding (Mean = 2.3), or strengthens trust (Mean = 2.3). These findings support Macnamara (2016), who argued that many organisational communication systems prioritise message dissemination rather than genuine listening and stakeholder-centred interaction. Greenwood and Van Buren (2010) similarly maintained that trust develops when stakeholders perceive fairness, responsiveness and authentic concern from organisations. In the Niger Delta context, Idemudia (2014) observed that corporate-community engagement often struggles to achieve genuine mutual understanding because of longstanding socio-economic tensions and historical distrust. Therefore, the findings suggest that although the selected companies provide engagement opportunities, stakeholders still perceive significant deficiencies in emotional connection and relational responsiveness.

The findings further reflect the broader realities of stakeholder engagement within resource-dependent environments characterised by conflict, environmental concerns and legitimacy struggles. Scholars such as Obi (2010), Omotola (2006) explained that historical grievances in the Niger Delta continue to shape stakeholder attitudes toward oil companies regardless of ongoing engagement initiatives. This means that gratification is influenced not only by present communication practices but also by accumulated historical experiences of neglect, environmental degradation and socio-economic exclusion. Moffat and Zhang (2014) similarly argued that stakeholder satisfaction and social licence depend heavily on long-term trust and relationship quality rather than short-term engagement activities. Consequently, stakeholders may acknowledge the existence of engagement programmes while still expressing dissatisfaction regarding deeper relational outcomes. This explains the contradiction between positive ratings for participation and low ratings for trust and communication satisfaction.

Summary of Findings

The study found that:

1. The findings showed that stakeholders generally perceive the communication practices of the companies as moderately transparent and organised; however, issues relating to trust, responsiveness, communication consistency and crisis communication remain areas of concern.
2. The study further revealed that stakeholders derive only moderate gratification from the

engagement strategies of the companies, as engagement programmes and community development initiatives provide some level of satisfaction but fail to sufficiently strengthen trust, mutual understanding and communication fulfilment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that strategic communication and stakeholder engagement have become central operational tools among Renaissance Africa Energy Company, Oando Energy Resources and Seplat Energy in Port Harcourt. The study established that the companies employ multiple communication techniques such as town hall meetings, stakeholder consultations, community forums, digital communication platforms, grievance redress systems and face-to-face interactions in engaging stakeholders. Both the questionnaire and interview findings revealed that these techniques have moderately improved stakeholder participation, communication access and operational relationships. However, weaknesses were identified in the areas of feedback responsiveness, communication consistency, timeliness of information dissemination and trust-building.

The study further concludes that stakeholder identification and prioritisation among the selected companies are largely influenced by operational relevance, influence, regulatory importance and proximity to company activities. Host communities, traditional rulers, government agencies, youth groups, civil society organisations, investors and contractors were identified as major stakeholder categories engaged by the organisations. The findings showed that stakeholder stratification systems such as power–interest matrices, influence-based categorisation and risk-oriented classification frameworks are used to structure communication and allocate engagement resources. Although these systems have enhanced communication targeting and operational efficiency, the study found inconsistencies in the inclusion of youth groups, government actors and marginal stakeholders within communication processes. This suggests that stakeholder engagement practices remain partially selective and require broader inclusiveness to strengthen legitimacy and stakeholder confidence.

Finally, the study concludes that strategic communication and stakeholder stratification significantly influence stakeholder engagement outcomes within the selected energy companies. The findings revealed that effective communication structures contribute to improved participation, reduced misinformation, enhanced cooperation and stronger organisational reputation. The study equally established that stakeholder stratification improves communication efficiency by ensuring that engagement efforts are directed toward relevant stakeholder groups according to their influence and operational importance. These conclusions align strongly with the assumptions of Stakeholder Theory, Excellence Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which collectively emphasise stakeholder inclusiveness, two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder satisfaction as foundations for sustainable organisational relationships. Overall, the study concludes that while the selected companies have made visible progress in stakeholder engagement practices, significant improvements are still required in responsiveness, trust-building, communication consistency and inclusive participation in order to strengthen sustainable engagement outcomes in the Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

From the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The organisations should adopt a more transparent and consistent communication policy across all operational levels, especially during crises and high-risk situations. This is important because the study identified inconsistencies and delays in communication during critical periods, which negatively affect stakeholder trust.

2. The companies should expand their stakeholder stratification models by combining power–interest mapping with socio-economic and community-impact indicators to ensure more equitable engagement coverage. This is required due to evidence that current stratification practices are partially selective and not fully inclusive.

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