Influence of Facebook News Platforms on Public Trust in Hyprep Activities in Ogoniland

Dormene B. C. Mbea PhD
Department of Mass Communication
School of Management Sciences
Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic Bori
Email: dormenembea@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the advent of indigenous digital media platforms, the communication environment that guides environmental governance in the Niger Delta has greatly transformed. In the Nigerian oil palm area of Ogoniland, Facebook-based community news platforms are now pivotal in publicising public discourse on the activities of Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), the entity tasked to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Environment Programme report on environmental pollution in the region. The article discusses the effect of indigenous Facebook news sites on public trust in the activities of HYPREP in Ogoniland. The study considers selected platforms that are Ogonitv, Ogoni Times, Ogoni, Ogoni Language Television, Ogoni Culture and Ogoni Chronicle. Through the qualitative interpretive analysis grounded in the theory of relationship management, the theory of framing, and the theory of dialogic communication, the paper examines the influence of such platforms on visions for environmental remediation, institutional legitimacy and stakeholder engagement. The study contends that indigenous Facebook news platforms exist as powerful communicative environments where environmental stories get created, challenged and negotiated. It has been found that these platforms offer positive aspects for public awareness and visibility of the remediation projects, as well as opportunities for active involvement of the population; however, they can also be and are used for skepticism, misinformation and different interpretations of HYPREP's work. Therefore, public confidence in environmental governance is strongly tied to communication effectiveness, transparency, and involvement. It suggests that HYPREP further develop dialogic communication strategies and maintain partnership in strong engagement with indigenous digital media platforms for better institutional legitimacy and public confidence.

Keywords: HYPREP, Ogoniland, Facebook news platforms, environmental communication, public trust, public relations, digital journalism, stakeholder engagement.

1.0 Introduction

Technical intervention is not the only measure by which to assess environmental remediation in historically polluted communities. It is also assessed based on public trust, institutional credibility, stakeholder participation, and the communication between the remediation agencies and affected communities. This is especially noticeable in Ogoniland, where the government and corporate entities have been suspected of allowing decades of crude oil exploration in the region to result in extreme environmental pollution, livelihood destruction and a certain mistrust. Scholarship on the remediation process of Ogoni in recent times has demonstrated a complex governance process characterized by the community's expectations, challenges of implementation, and increased demand for improved engagement with stakeholders (Sam et al., 2022; Sam et al., 2024).

The environmental crisis in Ogoniland is associated with contamination of land, water bodies and wetlands. Sam and Zabbey (2018) argued that the Ogoni clean-up requires more than ecological restoration because the affected communities also expect livelihood recovery, job creation and provision social amenities. This view is important because public assessment of HYPREP is not limited to whether polluted sites are cleaned. It also includes whether communities perceive the process as fair, inclusive, transparent, and beneficial to local people. HYPREP was created to coordinate the implementation of remediation activities in Ogoniland following the internationally recognized assessment of oil pollution in the area. However, studies on the Ogoni remediation project have identified concerns relating to bureaucratic procedures, capacity gaps, slow implementation, stakeholder engagement weaknesses, and public dissatisfaction (Sam et al., 2022). These concerns have made communication central to the legitimacy of HYPREP's activities. Where remediation agencies communicate clearly and respond to public concerns, trust can improve. Where communication is perceived as slow, technical, distant, or defensive, distrust may deepen.

Since the last decade, Facebook has been a huge platform for community journalism and public debate in Nigeria. In the communities where the mainstream media is lacking in reach or viewpoints, Indigenous Facebook news is finding a strong voice in delivering information about local issues. News, videos, interviews, opinion posts, live broadcasts and audience reactions about HYPREP activities circulate around these platforms in Ogoniland regularly – such as Ogonitv, Ogoni Times, Ogoni, Ogoni Language Television, Ogoni Culture, and Ogoni Chronicle. Today, these platforms are used as digital public spaces for which environmental governance is explained, questioned, defended, criticized, and emotionally interpreted.

Their cultural affinity with the Ogoni people is one of the reasons for the impact of these platforms. Indigenous Facebook news outlets tend to use local language, historical memory, local identity and community references to communicate, while national news outlets tend to remain more formal. So their reports are not received just as neutral information. They are understood as community-based accounts of environmental justices, political accountability and institutional performance. This provides them with powerful agenda-setting and framing capacities in terms of the public understanding of HYPREP.

The importance of framing in that it affects how audiences perceive a problem, who they blame and how they judge institutional response to it. In the framework of HYPREP, activities that focus on water projects, shoreline remediation, skills acquisition, livelihood initiatives and stakeholder meetings can help build public trust. Criticisms of project delays, allegations of corruption, lack of local participation, interference with local politics, and bad communication can heighten mistrust, in contrast to reports that focus on project achievements. However, reports that highlight project delays, allegations of corruption, lack of local participation, political interference, and poor communication can reinforce such mistrust, whereas reports that emphasize project achievements can do the opposite. These effects are enhanced by the interactive nature of Facebook, in which users do not only receive information but can also communicate with other members of the community. They interpret and comment on what they see, react to it, share it, challenge it.

This is a structure that is interactive, with significant implications for public relations practice. Online public relations literature argues that the role of dialogue, responsivity, and

stakeholder involvement are more important and that the control over public narratives has been diffused by the increasing use of social media in public relations (Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018; Glozer et al., 2019). In this context, institutional legitimacy is not just conveyed through official messages, but is also created in public discourse that is beyond the organisation's direct influence.

Simultaneously, communicating via Facebook involves dangers to environmental governance. Social media can spread important public information, but it can also spread misinformation, misinterpretation, hyperbole, and polarized responses. Recent research indicates that disinformation spread via social media can erode trust in a society, which can also impact how society interprets its civic responsibilities and how audiences discern trustworthy content from misinformation (Khan et al., 2022; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024). Similarly, in Nigeria, studies suggest that the potential for fake news and the lack of trust in authentic sources can affect the willingness of consumers to trust online news platforms (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

The study hence investigates the impact of indigenous Facebook news sources on public trust of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland. It contributes to mass communication and public relations scholarship by showing how local digital journalism shapes environmental accountability, institutional legitimacy, and stakeholder relationships in a post-conflict ecological setting. It also extends discussions on environmental communication by demonstrating that public trust in remediation agencies is produced through the interaction of project performance, media framing, community memory, and digital participation.

Statement of the Problem

Trust is a major issue in environmental remediation programmes in Ogoniland. Public discussion has continued to be preoccupied with issues of transparency, accountability, speed of implementation, stakeholder involvement, and lack of visibility of project achievements, despite the fact that HYPREP was created to coordinate the clean-up of hydrocarbon polluted sites, and to consider the broader impact of oil pollution. The complexities of contaminated land management in the Ogoni are technical, institutional and community based, and trust is critical for legitimacy and cooperation in the process of remediation (Sam et al., 2022).

Concurrently, the production, circulation, interpretation and contestation of information related to HYPREP has taken place largely via indigenous Facebook news platforms. In these days, platforms like Ogonitv, Ogoni Times, Ogoni Language Television, Ogoni Culture, Ogoni, and Ogoni Chronicle have come to shape that news about remediation that local audiences can access, that they evaluate the performance of institutions, and that they are able to be part of public discussion. They create and share stories and videos of competency, fairness, inclusion and environmental justice in the news and in comment threads.

While these platforms have grown in prominence in the Ogoni public discourse, there has been little academic research on the impact of indigenous Facebook journalism on the trust in HYPREP. Past research on the Ogoni clean-up have paid more attention to remediation practice, remediation policy, livelihoods and environmental governance, rather than community-based digital journalism as a trust-building mechanism (Sam & Zabbey, 2018; Sam et al., 2022). This is important because social media has the potential to help raise civic

awareness and holding institutions accountable, but can also worsen misinformation, framing, and public skepticism (Khan et al., 2022; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024). The current study is thus intended to assess the impact of the use of indigenous Facebook news groups on public trust of the activities of HYPREP and the implications for environmental communication, public relations practice and stakeholder engagement in Ogoniland.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the role of indigenous Facebook news platforms in reporting HYPREP activities in Ogoniland;
2. investigate how Facebook news framing influences public trust in HYPREP;
3. explore audience perceptions of HYPREP-related information circulated on indigenous Facebook news platforms;
4. assess the implications of indigenous Facebook journalism for HYPREP's public relations and stakeholder engagement strategy.

1.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What roles do indigenous Facebook news platforms play in communicating HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?
2. How does Facebook news framing influence public trust in HYPREP?
3. What perceptions do audiences hold regarding HYPREP-related information shared on indigenous Facebook news platforms?
4. What implications do indigenous Facebook news platforms have for HYPREP's public relations and stakeholder engagement strategy?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Public Relations, Trust, and Relationship Management

Trust has become a major factor in the assessment of an organization's legitimacy and quality of its stakeholder relationships, and it is increasingly acknowledged in contemporary public relations scholarship research. Trust is a key factor in assessing an organization's legitimacy and quality of its stakeholder relationships, and is increasingly acknowledged in contemporary public relations scholarship research. Previous Public Relations models emphasized publicity, persuasion and media visibility more than anything else. The evolution of relationship management theory, however, turned focus to dialogue, stakeholder engagement and mutual understanding as key aspects of good public relations practice.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) define public relations as public relations as a management function which establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Later, this view became relationship management theory, which views that quality of organizational relationship rather than quantity of media exposure is the key to the success of public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). In this context, trust is a building block since the stakeholders will be more inclined to collaborate with institutions that are seen as transparent, accountable and responsive.

Hon & Grunig (1999) list the important dimensions of organization-public relationship as trust, commitment, control mutuality and satisfaction. Trust is a confidence in the integrity,

dependability and competence of an institution that stakeholders have. Trust is especially critical in communities with environmental problems as the credibility of institutions is sometimes judged by their communication processes, and by past experiences. Institutional distrust in the Niger Delta is of a longstanding nature. Oil exploration has been linked to communities' frequent complaints of neglect, exploitation, and environmental injustice by government institutions and multinational corporations. These experiences build up doubts in the official environmental action and make it difficult to communicate with environmental agencies like HYPREP. But for environmental governance in the Niger Delta to be successful, there is a need for continuous efforts to restore public trust to environmental governance through transparency, participation and accountability (Ekperiware & Aigbogun, 2021).

Dialogic communication theory also notes the theory of relationship management, with a focus on interaction and participation. Kent and Taylor (2002) say that communication helps to establish legitimacy in an organization because it enables stakeholders to converse or dialogue in order to gain information. Dialogic communication is more relevant since the introduction of the social media as it stimulates the real-time interaction between institutions and audiences.

Public relations practice has changed with the advent of social media as it has lessened the control over communication processes held by institutions, as noted by Taylor and Kent (2014). The public is now actively involved in public discourse, commenting, reacting, sharing content and digitally activism. Public trust occurs in this context as a result of interaction rather than only in the process of official communication. This is particularly significant in Ogoniland, where local Facebook news groups have emerged as significant forums for indigenous voice on the interpretation of HYPREP activities. These spaces enable viewers to challenge institutional narratives, to voice their dissatisfaction, to share experiences, and to co-negotiate meanings about environmental remediation. In this way, HYPREP's authority is becoming increasingly defined in digital communication contexts beyond its control.

Trust scholarship is another window on these processes. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) define trust as being based on three perceptions: competence, benevolence, and integrity. Competence is about the ability of the institution to work effectively, benevolence is about how stakeholders feel cared for by the institution, and integrity is about the way the institution conducts itself and behaves in an honest manner. These are the dimensions that communities in Ogoniland assess HYPREP based on, checking if remediation works are seen, if there is transparency in communication and if the institutions' promised are delivered. Trust is also defined by Rousseau et al. (1998) as positive expectations about institutional behavior, in the same way as described. Expectations are often fragile in political-tense and environmentally unjust environments. As a result, it is very easy to add to public doubt through communication problems.

2.2 Indigenous Digital Journalism and Environmental Communication

Journalism and communication in the public arena have undergone rapid changes because of the growth of social media platforms. Facebook has emerged as one of the major digital platforms that has been used for the dissemination of information, political discussions, and civic engagement in several African societies. The accessibility and low cost of using social media together with its interactive nature have also increased its significance among societies

where traditional media is not accessible or is not considered to represent the local community's concerns. As Mutsvairo & Karam (2018) suggest, the use of social media has democratized the process of communication by giving local actors and ordinary people the opportunity to contribute to public debates. In Nigeria, the emergence of local journalism via Facebook has been significant as well.

Chiluwa (2020) notes that the Nigerian social media landscape is one that is marked by heavy political discussion, identity-driven communication, and quick information sharing. Indigenous Facebook pages can become a space of alternative communication, countering mainstream narratives and giving voice to marginalised groups. Research by Ezeah and Asogwa (2020) indicate that influence of a community based social media comes from cultural closeness and local identity. These platforms have a greater ability to connect to grassroots experiences than do national media platforms and audiences tend to be more willing to trust these platforms. Likewise, Okoro and Ogbodo (2022) discovered that the Facebook platform becomes a local news context in communities where the local digital news environment is predominantly used to access information on governance where the platform becomes more influential.

Media framing is also emphasized in the environmental communication scholarship as a factor that influences public perception. According to Entman (1993), framing involves the selection of some elements of reality and increases their salience in communication texts. Framing shapes the problem definition, blame, and assessment of institutional performance of the audience. Scheufele (1999) describes how framing influences cognitive interpretation, as well as emotional response. In the context of environmental governance, media framing plays a role in shaping the interpretation of remediation projects as either a successful intervention or a political manipulation or an institutional failure. Chong and Druckman (2007) also contend that the framing affects people's judgments of public institutions.

Narratives highlighting the success of HYPREP in terms of cleanup operations, water provision, and job creation could build public trust in HYPREP projects. Narratives highlighting HYPREP failures such as delays in projects, allegations of corruption, protests against HYPREP projects, and exclusivity of the project may erode public trust.

Facebook allows the audience an active participation in the communication process that further accentuates the framing process. The comment section serves as an area where discussion, justification, criticism, and even reinterpretations take place. Couldry (2008) suggests that new communication environments allow for collective meaning-making processes wherein people participate actively in constructing the social reality.

On the other hand, the digital communication environment makes people vulnerable to misinformation and sensationalism. Disinformation and misinformation are two significant challenges in the current age, as noted by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017). Lewandowsky et al. (2017) highlight how quickly misinformation spreads in emotional and institutional distrustful contexts.

The research study carried out by Vosoughi et al. (2018) indicates that false news spreads faster on the internet compared to real news since sensational and emotionally charged news

draws attention. In sensitive conflict situations like Ogoniland, there is a danger of damaging institutional credibility as well as increasing skepticism among the public about the efficacy of the restoration programs.

Representation theory advanced by Hall (1997) further illuminates the importance of culture in the indigenous Facebook news reporting. In addition to reporting the news, communication helps to construct the reality using cultural symbols and narratives. The social media sites, including Ogoni Culture and Ogoni Language Television, link the communication about HYPREP to culture and environmental hardships.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Relationship Management Theory, Framing Theory, and Dialogic Communication Theory. These theories provide a suitable conceptual foundation for understanding how indigenous Facebook news platforms influence public trust in the activities of Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland. The theories are interconnected because they collectively explain the relationship between institutional communication, media interpretation, stakeholder interaction, and trust formation within digitally mediated environments.

2.3.1 Relationship Management Theory

According to Relationship Management Theory, public relations is the management of relationships between an organization and its publics. It also should be measured by the quality of the relationship, not just by the amount of publicity, according to Ledingham (2003) and particularly by the level of trust, openness, satisfaction and mutual understanding. In the case of HYPREP, this theory is relevant because of the longstanding environmental problems in Ogoniland and the lack of trust in government institutions. Therefore, the transparency of HYPREP, responsiveness, fairness and remediation commitment are the key issues in trust in HYPREP. Boadi et al. (2019) also find that trust increases with stakeholder involvement, where organisations offer quality information, give voice to the community and exhibit procedural fairness. This study uses Relationship Management Theory to account for the effect of the Facebook news platform on the perceived relationship between HYPREP and the Ogoni publics.

2.3.2 Framing Theory

Framing Theory is the process by which media channels construct a specific view of reality. Entman (1993) has argued that framing impacts audience problem definition and blame and response assessment. Chong and Druckman (2007) demonstrate, too, that frames influence public opinion, as they help to set the criteria by which issues and institutions are evaluated. This theory is relevant because indigenous Facebook news platforms do not merely report HYPREP activities; they present them through specific interpretive angles. A post that emphasizes completed water projects, cleanup progress or stakeholder meetings may strengthen public confidence. A post that emphasizes delays, protests, alleged corruption or exclusion may deepen distrust. Framing Theory therefore explains how Facebook news narratives influence public trust in HYPREP.

2.3.3 Dialogic Communication Theory

Dialogic Communication Theory explains communication as a two-way process based on openness, mutuality, responsiveness and participation. Kent and Taylor (2002) present dialogue as central to ethical public relations because publics should be able to question, respond to and influence organizational communication. Recent studies also show that social media can support dialogic relationships when organizations engage publics rather than rely on one-way announcements (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018; Wang & Yang, 2020). This theory fits the study because Facebook allows Ogoni audiences to comment, share, challenge and reinterpret HYPREP-related information. Comment sections and live discussions often become public spaces where trust is negotiated through community debate.

2.3.4 Relevance of the Theories to the Study

Together, the three theories provide a strong basis for the study. Relationship Management Theory explains trust as a product of sustained institutional relationships. Framing Theory explains how Facebook news content shapes public interpretation of HYPREP activities. Dialogic Communication Theory explains how audience interaction on Facebook contributes to trust formation. The framework therefore supports the position that public trust in HYPREP is shaped by remediation performance, media framing, communication credibility and interactive public engagement.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a qualitative interpretive approach to analyze the impact of indigenous Facebook news media on public confidence in the activities of HYPREP in Ogoniland. This methodology is appropriate for the study as it centered on meanings, perceptions, discourses, interactions, and the social construction of trust within the specific environmental communication setting.

The study centred on selected indigenous Facebook news platforms that regularly report issues relating to Ogoniland and HYPREP activities. These platforms included Ogonitv, Ogoni Times, Ogoni Rant, Ogoni, Ogoni Language Television, Ogoni Culture and Ogoni Chronicle. They were purposively selected because of their visibility, regular coverage of HYPREP-related matters, community relevance and active audience engagement within the Ogoni digital public sphere.

The data for this study was obtained from communications through Facebook, such as news stories, opinion articles, videos, live broadcasts, interviews, visual images, and comments from members of the public on the activities of HYPREP. Other sources of data included institutional communications and academic literature on environmental communication, digital journalism, public relations, and stakeholder management.

Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of communication themes in the selected material. Communication themes included public trust, media frame, environmental justice, institutional credibility, disinformation, stakeholder communication, community participation, and dialogic communication among others. Emphasis was also placed on tone, narrative, visualization, culture, symbolism, and audience reaction in comment sections and discussion forums.

The interpretive approach enabled the study to examine how indigenous Facebook platforms frame HYPREP activities and how audiences respond to such representations. It also allowed comparison of how different platforms present similar issues through varying narrative angles. This helped to explain how Facebook-based community journalism contributes to the construction, reinforcement or erosion of public trust in HYPREP.

The study did not seek statistical generalization. Rather, it aimed to provide a contextual understanding of the communication dynamics surrounding HYPREP activities in Ogoniland. This approach was suitable because environmental communication in Ogoniland is shaped by historical experiences of pollution, political struggle, community identity and institutional distrust. Thus, the methodology provided a basis for understanding how local digital media platforms influence public perception, stakeholder relations and environmental governance discourse.

4.0 Results

4.1 Findings and Discussion

4.1.1 Role of Indigenous Facebook News Platforms in Reporting HYPREP Activities in Ogoniland

The study findings suggest that indigenous Facebook news sites have been used to report, interpret and discuss HYPREP activities in Ogoniland. For example, Ogonitv, Ogoni Times, Ogoni Rant, Ogoni, Ogoni Language Television, Ogoni Culture and Ogoni Chronicle are some of the social media sites that are used to report HYPREP activities. These sites serve as communication tools, bringing environmental remediation activities closer to the people. These sites achieve this using posts, images, videos, interviews, live broadcasts and comments from their audiences.

This finding is in line with the argument by Wang and Yang (2020) that social media can enhance public awareness as long as they are utilized to facilitate the dialogue between an organization and its public. This also aligns with the position held by Glozer et al., (2019) that legitimacy in the modern world involves discussions about institutions on social media platforms, whereby stakeholders get involved in interpreting organizational behavior. Regarding HYPREP, the indigenous Facebook news sites have ensured that its activities are discussed within the public domain. They report activities like water projects, cleanups, stakeholder consultations, empowerment programs, among others.

The finding also supports studies on Ogoni remediation which argue that environmental restoration in the area cannot be separated from public participation and local socioeconomic realities. Sam and Zabbey (2018) observe that contaminated land and wetland remediation in Ogoniland should create opportunities for livelihood restoration, not only ecological recovery. Similarly, Sam, Zabbey and Onyena (2022) maintain that effective implementation of contaminated land remediation requires institutional coordination, public engagement and attention to affected communities. Indigenous Facebook platforms contribute to this process by expanding public visibility and allowing residents to follow, question and discuss HYPREP activities.

However, the findings also reveal that these platforms are not neutral channels. Their reports often reflect local emotions, community identity, political concerns and historical memory.

This means that HYPREP activities are reported not only as technical remediation projects but also as matters of justice, inclusion, development and accountability. This local framing gives the platforms influence because their communication appears closer to the lived experiences of Ogoni audiences than formal government communication.

4.1.2 Influence of Facebook News Framing on Public Trust in HYPREP

According to the findings of the research, news framing by Facebook tends to have a significant impact on public trust of HYPREP. News reports emphasizing remediation achievements, water supply, consultation, skills acquisition, scholarship program, and development within communities tend to enhance public trust towards HYPREP as an institution that is committed and proactive. This is because people would take the actions being carried out by the institution as an indicator of responsiveness and seriousness on their part. The presence of positive images from completed projects and field activities could increase trust due to association of credible actions.

The above observation is in line with Framing Theory. According to Entman (1993), media frames affect how audiences perceive problems, distribute responsibilities and assess institutional responses. On the other hand, Chong and Druckman (2007) posit that media frames affect standards used to evaluate public matters and institutions. As observed in this case, news frames influence people's levels of trust towards an institution through highlighting selected actions taken by the institution and describing those actions. For instance, a report covering completed remediation sites may lead to greater public trust, but one covering abandonment may increase distrust.

Furthermore, it is shown that a negative frame can reduce public confidence in the work of the organization. The publication of facts about the delay, corruption, political pressure, exclusion of the local population from the process, contract disagreements, or poor communication leads to critical remarks on social media platforms. The skepticism expressed by users towards HYPREP usually manifests itself in comments that question the sincerity, effectiveness, and transparency of the organization’s actions. As was mentioned by Boadi et al. (2019), trust increases if stakeholders receive information of high quality, sense fairness and mutual respect, and have a voice in the decision-making process.

It should be noted that the phenomenon is especially relevant for Ogoniland since the agency operates in an environment characterized by decades of environmental pollution and mistrust. Therefore, the public perception of its actions is formed against the background of previously accumulated experiences. According to Sam and Zabbey (2018) and Sam et al. (2022), Ogoni remediation entails both ecological, institutional, and livelihood issues. Consequently, Facebook framing is not an independent phenomenon but is related to other factors, such as the history and expectations of the community members.

4.1.3 Audience Perceptions of HYPREP-Related Information on Indigenous Facebook Platforms

The results show mixed perceptions of information on HYPREP among audiences. Indigenous platforms that are embedded and more attuned to community realities are seen as credible by some members of the audience. These users are often more likely to trust such platforms because they think that reporters, activists and community page administrators of their local

communities will focus on issues not picked up by major media. This helps indigenous Facebook journalism to have a significant influence in influencing awareness and public opinion on the activities of HYPREP.

The other viewers are wary of HYPREP-related Facebook posts. They understand that some reports may be based on political considerations, grievances, lack of information or emotional exaggeration. This is key as Facebook's interactive nature enables an unverified claim to be easily shared, reacted and commented upon. Vosoughi, Roy and Aral (2018) discovered that misinformation is more likely to gain momentum and reach a larger audience on social media than true information, particularly when misinformation is new or is provoking emotions. This is important for HYPREP because complaints of corruption, project abandonment or exclusion of the community can spread far before they are clarified.

The results also indicate that comments are important in influencing the audience's perception. There are segments of the audience that are not just ingesting information related to HYPREP. They reason about it, question it, validate it with their own experience, and rethink it with community information. In this respect, Facebook comment sections serve as a public space devoid of formal protocol and "talking points," in which the "territory" of trust is negotiated among those who use them. It is consistent with the theory of dialogic communication which states that social media can be used to aid public relations in that it enables publics to question, respond and engage in communication processes (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Wang & Yang, 2020).

But participation can also cause polarization. Public trust can be diminished even if the original report is balanced when comments are rife with anger and suspicion or when they are based on partisan interpretations. This is consistent with the findings of Olan et al. (2022) that social media fake news and misinformation can affect the general public's understanding and undermine trust in credible institutions. The content of the Facebook reports and the tone of public discussion of the reports are all that matters to audience perception in Ogoniland, where environmental issues are emotionally charged.

The results thus indicate the trustworthiness of the indigenous Facebook platforms; however, not without reservations. They must be close to the community, regular in their reporting, provide good evidence and be able to substantiate claims to be trusted in the community. For HYPREP, this implies that audience trust can't be gained just by the official communication. It must be built through timely clarification, visible performance and engagement with the digital spaces where audiences already form opinions.

4.1.4 Implications for HYPREP's Public Relations and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The results have significant implications for the public relations and stakeholder engagement strategy of HYPREP as a result. Firstly, they demonstrate that HYPREP cannot rely entirely on formal press releases, official reports and a few stakeholder meetings. These are tools that are essential, but they might not be sufficient when it comes to how public opinion is formed in a digital environment with local Facebook platforms jumping the gun and leading the way at a faster, more emotionally-gripping pace. An agency should have a communication strategy that is responsive, participatory and responsive to the reality of the indigenous digital media. This discovery is in tune with the view of Relationship Management Theory, that PR must be

about relationship quality and not publicity (Ledingham, 2003). HYPREP's quality of relationships is based on trust, openness, consistency, responsiveness and community inclusion. Boadi et al. (2019) have also emphasized that, "The recipient of an organization's information gains increased trust when the information is of high quality and the affected public can participate in a meaningful way. Therefore, HYPREP should not just view the indigenous platforms on Facebook as outside media, but also as important channels of communication with the stakeholders.

Furthermore, results indicated that the information of technical remediation should be simplified in HYPREP. The communication of environmental cleanup processes should be neither too technical nor too bureaucratic. There is a great interest from the community to know about what has been done, where it has been done, who will benefit, what is still to be done, and what is being done about the delays. Better communication will help minimize suspicion and the impact of misinformation. For instance, explanatory videos of short duration, updates on the projects, local language summary and feedback sessions in the community can help make HYPREP work easier to understand.

More so, there needs to be a more rapid response by HYPREP to issues that arise through social media platforms such as Facebook. As noted by the study, an absence of immediate responses from organizations leads to alternative narratives becoming predominant within public discourse. Given that in such circumstances, misinformation has the potential to proliferate rapidly, delaying clarifications has the potential to do reputational harm to HYPREP. This is in line with literature that notes the dangers associated with the spread of misinformation due to lack of timely clarifications (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Olan et al., 2022).
In addition, indigenous news media platforms that use Facebook must exercise their responsibility. While there needs to be accountability from these platforms for their actions, there needs to be a balance between their need for accountability and ethical reporting. There should be distinctions between confirmed reports, accusations, public opinions, and journalistic interpretations of HYPREP, especially given the tendency for sensationalism to lead to distrust and even social tensions.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

As noted in the analysis, indigenous Facebook platforms have emerged as a space in which communication around HYPREP's remediation efforts takes place. Such platforms ensure the visibility of cleanup activities, water schemes, skills acquisition programs, stakeholder meetings, and other related activities. Nonetheless, indigenous Facebook platforms contribute to building public trust in terms of framing, tone, visual representation, and audience interactions.

It can be concluded from the findings of the research that the level of public trust in HYPREP is not only influenced by remediation activities. It is also associated with the level of credibility of HYPREP communication, organizational responsiveness, stakeholders' involvement, and the role of local media platforms in communicating about HYPREP activities. Framing, in particular, may positively impact public trust. This finding is relevant for Ogoniland since historical experiences of pollution, exclusion, and mistrust of institutions continue shaping the perception of current remediation activities.

In general, indigenous Facebook news platforms act both as a means of accountability and communication risk. The former promotes accountability and active participation in public debate, whereas the latter entails miscommunication due to low verifiability of information. Therefore, HYPREP requires an appropriate strategy to communicate via social media platforms and build trust in Ogoniland.

5.2 Recommendations

1. HYPREP should build its digital PR strategy with a more regular and constructive approach, involving local Facebook news platforms.
2. The agency should be responsive and respond to misinformation and controversial claims on Facebook quickly.
3. HYPREP should make technical information about remediation easy to read and easily understood for local or audience specific formats.
4. Indigenous Facebook news platforms should enhance fact checks and balance and verification before releasing reports on HYPREs.
5. Community-based digital journalists should hold people accountable without sensationalizing or polarizing language.
6. The communication, monitoring and feedback to local stakeholders should be increased in 6. HYPREP.

References

Asemah, E. S. (2011). *Selected mass media themes*. Great Future Press.

Boadi, E. A., He, Z., Bosompem, J., Say, J., & Boadi, E. K. (2019). Let the talk count: Attributes of stakeholder engagement, trust, perceived environmental protection and CSR. *SAGE Open, 9*(1), 1–15.

Bowen, S. A. (2015). *Advancing public relations through public participation and dialogue*. Routledge.

Castells, M. (2013). *Communication power*. Oxford University Press.

Chiluwa, I. (2020). *Social media and conflict in Nigeria: A communication perspective*. University Press.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science, 10,* 103–126.

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the media-society relation. *New Media & Society, 10*(3), 373–391.

Cox, R. (2013). *Environmental communication and the public sphere*. SAGE Publications.

Ekperiware, M. C., & Aigbogun, O. (2021). Environmental governance and community trust in the Niger Delta. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning, 23*(4), 512–528.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58.

Ezeah, G. H., & Asogwa, C. E. (2020). Social media, local identity, and community news in southeastern Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Communication, 17*(1), 21–39.

Glozer, S., Caruana, R., & Hibbert, S. A. (2019). The never-ending story: Discursive legitimation in social media dialogue. *Organization Studies, 40*(5), 625–650.

Grunig, J. E. (1992). *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE Publications.

Hon, L. C., & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Institute for Public Relations.

Ibrahim, A. T., Jibril, U. F., & Ibrahim, A. M. (2024). Between trust and misinformation: A study of user engagement with cloned pages of "Daily Trust" and "Vanguard" newspapers on Facebook. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 15*(4), 104.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review, 28*(1), 21–37.

Khan, A., Brohman, K., & Addas, S. (2022). The anatomy of "fake news": Studying false messages as digital objects. *Journal of Information Technology, 37*(2), 122–143.

Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 15*(2), 181–198.

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (2000). *Public relations as relationship management*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond misinformation: Understanding and coping with the post-truth era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 6*(4), 353–369.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(3), 709–734.

Mutsvairo, B., & Karam, P. (2018). *Perspectives on social media: A global view*. Routledge.

Okoro, N., & Ogbodo, J. N. (2022). Facebook as a local news space in Nigerian communities. *Communicatio, 48*(1), 77–96.

Olan, F., Jayawickrama, U., Arakpogun, E. O., Suklan, J., & Liu, S. (2022). Fake news on social media: The impact on society. *Information Systems Frontiers, 24*, 443–456.

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review, 23*(3), 393–404.

Sam, K., & Zabbey, N. (2018). Contaminated land and wetland remediation in Nigeria: Opportunities for sustainable livelihood creation. *Science of the Total Environment, 639*, 1560–1573.

Sam, K., Zabbey, N., & Onyena, A. P. (2022). Implementing contaminated land remediation in Nigeria: Insights from the Ogoni remediation project. *Land Use Policy, 115*, 106051.

Sam, K., Zabbey, N., Vincent-Akpu, I. F., Komi, G., Onyagbodor, P. O., & Babatunde, B. B. (2024). Socio-economic baseline for oil-impacted communities in Ogoniland: Towards a restoration framework in Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 31*, 25671–25687.

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication, 49*(1), 103–122.

Shahbazi, M.-A., & Bunker, D. (2024). Social media trust: Fighting misinformation in the time of crisis. *International Journal of Information Management, 77*, 102780.

Sommerfeldt, E. J., & Yang, A. (2018). Notes on a dialogue: Twenty years of digital dialogic communication research in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 30*(3), 59–64.

Taylor, M., & Kent, M. L. (2014). Dialogic engagement and public relations in the digital age. *Public Relations Review, 40*(3), 571–578.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2011). *Environmental assessment of Ogoniland*. UNEP.

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science, 359*(6380), 1146–1151.

Wang, Y., & Yang, Y. (2020). Dialogic communication on social media: How organizations use Twitter to build dialogic relationships with their publics. *Computers in Human Behavior, 104*, 106183.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.

Wirtz, J. G., & Zimbres, T. M. (2018). A systematic analysis of research applying "principles of dialogic communication" to organizational websites, blogs, and social media: Implications for theory and practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 30*(1–2), 5–34