# Perception of Oil and Gas Industry Greenwashing among Residents of Akwa Ibom State

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**Abstract**
This study examined residents' awareness and perceptions of corporate greenwashing in the oil and gas industry in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with particular focus on Seplat Energy and Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company (SEEPCO). Grounded in Social Judgement Theory and Framing Theory, the study adopted a survey research design. A sample of 400 respondents was drawn from oil-producing communities in the South Senatorial District using a multi-stage sampling technique, while 371 valid responses (93%) were analysed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation. Findings revealed a relatively high level of awareness of greenwashing, with 51% of respondents indicating a reasonable extent of awareness. However, this awareness was largely experiential, shaped by environmental realities and media exposure, with noticeable gaps in the ability to distinguish genuine sustainability efforts from deceptive claims. The study further found a strong negative perception of greenwashing practices, as respondents widely viewed corporate environmental communication as insincere, profit-driven, and characterised by selective disclosure and regulatory non-compliance. Factors influencing these perceptions included environmental awareness (84%), personal experience (78%), media influence (75%), and trust in institutions (62%). The study concludes that while awareness of greenwashing is considerable, it does not necessarily translate into evaluative competence, and that persistent inconsistencies between corporate claims and lived realities have eroded public trust. It recommends enhanced environmental education, improved corporate transparency, stricter regulatory enforcement, and strengthened media advocacy to promote accountability and sustainable environmental practices in the oil and gas sector.

**Keywords:** Perception , Oil and Gas, Industry Greenwashing and Residents

## Introduction

Concerns about environmental sustainability have become a global priority, prominently reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to balance socio-economic development with environmental protection (United Nations, 2025). Goals such as SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) underscore the urgency of mitigating climate change and preserving ecological systems. Despite this global commitment, efforts toward sustainability are increasingly undermined by complex challenges, including the growing prevalence of greenwashing. Coined by Jay Westerveld in 1986, greenwashing refers to the practice whereby organisations project an environmentally responsible image that is inconsistent with their actual operations (Quaye et al., 2024). This phenomenon has evolved alongside heightened environmental awareness and corporate attempts to align with public expectations without undertaking substantive environmental reforms.

The emergence of greenwashing is closely linked to increased environmental consciousness following major industrial and environmental disasters such as the Bhopal gas tragedy (1984), Chernobyl nuclear accident (1986), and Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989), which intensified calls for corporate accountability (Sharifbagheri, Salehnia, & Edalati, 2024). In response, many corporations adopted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks; however, some exploited these frameworks to gain reputational advantage without meaningful commitment. Scholars such as Yildirim (2023), Oyewole and Tijani (2021), and Fernandez-Feijoo et al. (2021) conceptualise greenwashing as the dissemination of misleading environmental claims, reflecting a disconnect between corporate communication and actual environmental performance. This inconsistency raises critical concerns about transparency, accountability, and the credibility of sustainability claims, as organisations often obscure their true environmental impact through selective disclosures and symbolic commitments.

Greenwashing manifests in several ways, including inadequate environmental reporting, lack of transparency, and superficial sustainability initiatives that are not sustained over time (De-Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Sharifbagheri et al., 2024). These practices not only undermine environmental governance but also suggest disregard for regulatory frameworks guiding corporate environmental responsibility. Within the global energy sector, particularly among oil and gas corporations, greenwashing has become increasingly pronounced. Companies such as Shell, TotalEnergies, and ExxonMobil have publicly advanced strong environmental commitments through sustainability reports and corporate communications. However, these claims are frequently contested. For instance, Shell's assertions of responsible environmental practices in Nigeria (Shell, 2024) contrast with persistent environmental degradation highlighted in reports such as UNEP's assessment of Ogoniland (2011) and Amnesty International (2017), which document ongoing pollution and its adverse effects on local livelihoods.

In Nigeria, and particularly within Akwa Ibom State, similar concerns have been raised regarding the environmental conduct of oil and gas companies. TotalEnergies' commitments to reducing methane emissions and ending gas flaring by 2030 (TotalEnergies, 2023) have been criticised for lacking corresponding operational changes, while Greenpeace (2024) questions the company's broader environmental record. Likewise, ExxonMobil (now Seplat Energy) and Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company (SEEPCO) have faced accusations of environmental degradation despite publicly emphasising sustainability and environmental stewardship in their reports (Seplat, 2023; SEEPCO, 2024). Critics, including environmental activists and affected communities, highlight persistent issues such as oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and water pollution in areas like Ibeno, Mbo, and Ikot Abasi. These contradictions reinforce concerns about selective disclosure, weak compliance with environmental laws, and the broader implications of corporate greenwashing for sustainable development in the region.

While these criticisms suggest a growing recognition of greenwashing practices, public perception of the phenomenon remains uncertain and potentially varied. Individuals interpret environmental issues differently based on their experiences, knowledge, and socio-cultural contexts, making it difficult to generalise levels of awareness and attitudes toward greenwashing. Understanding how residents of Akwa Ibom State perceive greenwashing in the oil and gas industry is therefore essential. Such empirical insight can inform policy, strengthen advocacy for corporate accountability, and support efforts toward environmental sustainability. Consequently, this study examines residents' awareness, understanding, and perception of greenwashing, as well as their views on corporate compliance with environmental laws and the implications of selective environmental communication in the oil and gas sector.

## Statement of the Problem

There is growing concern about the increasing prevalence of corporate greenwashing in Akwa Ibom State's oil and gas sector, particularly in a period when environmental sustainability has become a global priority. Major oil companies operating in the State often project environmentally responsible images that may not align with their actual practices, raising critical questions about corporate transparency and accountability. This disconnect is evident in cases such as Seplat Energy and Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company (SEEPCO), which publicly promote sustainability commitments through policy statements and reports, yet are associated with practices including pollution, habitat degradation, and poor waste management. For instance, ExxonMobil's (now Seplat Energy) alignment with net-zero goals contrasts with ongoing operations that contribute to ecological harm, while SEEPCO has been criticised for actions that undermine its stated compliance with environmental regulations. These patterns suggest a broader reliance on selective communication to construct favourable corporate images. Furthermore, informal interactions with residents in Akwa Ibom State reveal divergent understandings of greenwashing, with some perceiving it as deceptive and others as genuine environmental advocacy. This inconsistency underscores the need for empirical investigation into public perception, leading to the central question of how residents of Akwa Ibom State perceive corporate greenwashing in the oil and gas industry.

## Objectives of the Study

i. determine the extent of awareness of the concept of greenwashing among residents of Akwa Ibom State;
ii. examine Akwa Ibom State residents' perceptions of greenwashing practices in the oil and gas industry; and

iii. identify the factors influencing Akwa Ibom State residents' perception of greenwashing activities in the oil and gas industry.

## Conceptual Review

### Corporate Greenwashing

Corporate greenwashing has emerged as a growing concern in corporate sustainability, reflecting how firms exploit global environmental consciousness for reputational gain. It refers to the practice whereby organisations project an image of environmental responsibility while failing to implement substantive ecological measures (Montero-Navarro, Villanueva-Álvaro, García-Morales, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). Typically, greenwashing involves selective messaging, exaggerated claims, or symbolic gestures intended to distract stakeholders from environmentally harmful practices (Sharifbagheri, Salehnia, & Edalati, 2024). Firms may, for example, label products as "eco-friendly" despite relying on unsustainable processes, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and action that undermines public trust and genuine sustainability efforts.

A hallmark of greenwashing is the disconnection between corporate communications and operational performance (Daou, Sayegh, Atallah, Jabbour, Maalouf, & Sarkis, 2025). Companies frequently announce ambitious environmental targets, such as emission reduction or renewable investments, while continuing core practices that contradict these claims. This inconsistency fosters skepticism, erodes credibility, and raises ethical concerns about transparency and accountability (Chen & Kang, 2021). Lyon and Montgomery (2021) describe it as strategic deflection: highly visible but low-impact initiatives, like tree-planting campaigns or community development projects, are promoted to obscure ongoing environmentally destructive operations.

Marketing and public relations serve as principal channels for greenwashing. Organisations often emphasise niche sustainable products or minor improvements while the majority of their operations remain ecologically harmful (Sharifbagheri, Salehnia, & Edalati, 2024). Such selective visibility manipulates stakeholder perception, presenting an illusion of environmental commitment. Similarly, symbolic actions such as rebranding, sponsorships, or vague pledges are deployed to convey responsibility without introducing systemic change (Akturan, 2021; Santos, Coelho, & Marques, 2023).

Transparency and selective disclosure are central concerns in corporate greenwashing. Firms frequently highlight favourable environmental data while concealing adverse impacts, resulting in incomplete narratives that inhibit informed stakeholder decision-making (Khan, Bose, Mollik, & Harun, 2021). Additionally, stakeholder pressure, competition, and market advantage motivate organisations to adopt greenwashing strategies, seeking reputational benefit without substantive ecological reform (Fajrin, Tombi, Larasati, & Ventyrina, 2025; Tare & Deshmukh, 2023).

In essence, corporate greenwashing represents a performative rather than genuine commitment to sustainability. The divergence between claimed environmental ideals and operational realities underscores the need for critical scrutiny of corporate environmental communication. Greenwashing not only misleads stakeholders but also threatens the legitimacy of authentic sustainability initiatives, ethical corporate governance, and broader environmental progress (Nguyen, 2023; Chen & Kang, 2021).

### Perception

Perception is a cognitive process through which individuals interpret sensory input to form meaningful understanding, shaping how they experience and respond to the world (Rogers, 2017). Far from being passive, perception involves active organisation and interpretation of stimuli, influenced by memory, attention, and expectations. This explains why individuals can perceive the same event differently, highlighting perception's subjectivity and relevance in communication studies, where audience interpretation affects the reception of messages.

Scholars debate whether perception is cognitively independent or shaped by top-down processes. Auvray and Spence (2018) argue perception operates independently of higher cognition, whereas Lupyan (2019) contends that prior knowledge and expectations significantly shape outcomes. The interactive perspective, which this study adopts, recognises perception as an active, interpretative process shaped by both sensory input and cognitive frameworks. Gestalt principles further inform perception, suggesting that individuals organise information into coherent wholes; however, cultural and ecological contexts modulate these processes, highlighting the role of socio-cultural frameworks in shaping interpretation (Greenwood, 2020; Mann, 2020).

Perception is also socially structured. Social norms, institutional expectations, and collective meaning-making shape how events and messages are interpreted (Auvray & Spence, 2018; Sekuler & Blake, 2021). For instance, tight cultures with strong norms may foster stricter perceptual boundaries, whereas loose cultures exhibit more flexibility. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that perceptual interpretations vary with cultural orientation, as seemingly universal cues like eye contact or gestures may carry different meanings across societies (Raffagnino, 2019).

Perceived control further influences perception, affecting confidence and ambiguity management. Individuals with higher perceived control interpret stimuli with clarity, while those with reduced control may experience distorted or biased interpretations, increasing susceptibility to heuristics like threat perception (Rogers, 2017; Orfanos, 2021). Perceptual biases such as confirmation bias and availability heuristics can distort interpretations but may also serve adaptive decision-making functions (Oster, 2025; Hom, 2023). Recognising these biases is critical in communication design to reduce misinterpretation and enhance message clarity.

Perception is dynamic and malleable through learning and experience. Expertise in domains such as medicine, aviation, or music demonstrates that perceptual acuity improves with feedback and training, illustrating perceptual plasticity across the lifespan (Stewart & Kukucka, 2025). For this study, perception's adaptability underscores how audience interpretation of messages—such as corporate environmental claims—can be influenced by knowledge, experience, and socio-cultural context, making perception both a cognitive mechanism and a skill shaped by education, social exposure, and participatory engagement.

**Awareness of Corporate Greenwashing in Nigeria**

Corporate greenwashing represents the practice of presenting misleading or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of a company's operations, products, or policies, often intended to enhance public image while concealing actual environmental harm. In Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, citizens' awareness of greenwashing remains limited, especially in sectors such as oil and gas, where corporate sustainability claims frequently contradict operational realities (Singh and Khan, 2024). Companies may assert commitments to renewable energy or pollution reduction while continuing environmentally damaging practices, creating a disparity between projected and actual performance. Such discrepancies underline the critical need for increased public understanding of greenwashing, as awareness forms the foundation for holding organisations accountable for their environmental impact.

Efforts to improve awareness have emerged from regulatory and environmental institutions. For instance, the Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection Agency actively engages in educating citizens about greenwashing and promoting sustainable practices, thereby enhancing the ability of individuals to critically assess corporate environmental claims (Davis, 2018). Awareness enables residents to differentiate between genuinely sustainable practices and superficial marketing strategies, fostering informed consumer behaviour and community advocacy. Examples of corporate greenwashing in the region include oil companies claiming environmental stewardship while engaging in pollution, companies presenting investments in renewable energy while relying heavily on fossil fuels, businesses misrepresenting the eco-friendliness of their products, sponsorship of environmental initiatives that conceal harmful practices, and the use of green messaging to distract from broader environmental damage (Singh and Khan, 2024).

The persistence of low awareness in Nigeria is linked to multiple factors, including limited access to reliable information, weak media scrutiny, and insufficient engagement from regulatory authorities. As greenwashing often involves subtle messaging and complex corporate disclosures, citizens without adequate environmental literacy are less likely to detect deceptive practices. Increasing awareness, therefore, requires both educational interventions and improved transparency in corporate environmental reporting. Public sensitisation campaigns, media-led investigations, and institutional programmes are vital to bridging this knowledge gap.

Awareness of corporate greenwashing in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State remains nascent, particularly among the general populace. However, the work of environmental agencies and targeted educational efforts demonstrates the potential to empower citizens to recognise and challenge misleading corporate claims. Enhancing awareness is critical for promoting accountability, ensuring sustainable practices, and mitigating the negative social and environmental impacts of greenwashing in the region.

**Perception of Corporate Greenwashing in Nigeria**

The perception of corporate greenwashing in Nigeria reflects a growing concern about misleading environmental claims by organisations, which threatens trust, ethical standards, and genuine sustainability efforts. While public awareness is still developing, certain segments of the population—particularly educated and environmentally conscious individuals—demonstrate increasing scepticism toward corporate environmental messaging (Oyewole and Tijani, 2021). Misleading claims are often seen as attempts to enhance reputations or gain consumer approval without substantive ecological commitment, leading to a general perception that greenwashing is unethical and untrustworthy (Bernini and LaRosa, 2023).

The drivers of public perception are multifaceted. As environmental sustainability gains prominence in Nigeria, organisations face pressure to display green credentials, even when their practices fall short of proclaimed standards (Oyewole and Tijani, 2021; Akturan, 2021). Professionals in fields such as public relations and environmental management perceive greenwashing as a challenge to ethical practice and professional credibility, emphasising the need to guide organisations toward authentic environmental communication (Khan, Bose, Mollik, and Harun, 2021; Cox, 2018). Public relations practitioners play a critical role in mitigating greenwashing risks by aligning corporate environmental messaging with tangible practices, fostering transparency, and engaging stakeholders in dialogue (Fernandez-Feijoo et al., 2021; Gleeson and Shaw, 2021).

From the citizen's perspective, perception of greenwashing is predominantly negative. Individuals recognise the tension between corporate claims and observed practices, interpreting deceptive messaging as a breach of trust that undermines broader environmental initiatives (Oyewole and Tijani, 2021; Salimi, Tuscolano, Niininen, & Uusitalo, 2025). Negative perception manifests in scepticism toward environmental claims, diminished confidence in genuine initiatives, and a readiness to hold corporations accountable. Some view greenwashing as a regulatory compliance issue, highlighting gaps in enforcement and the need for clear legal standards (Manvi, Ashok, and Vinamra, 2019). Others interpret it as a short-term, opportunistic strategy that risks long-term reputational damage (Hom, 2023; Sekuler and Blake, 2021).

Perceptions are further shaped by organisational culture and societal expectations. Professionals emphasise transparency, internal collaboration, and ethical decision-making as critical to preventing greenwashing, while citizens contextualise corporate claims within historical and regional experiences, particularly in resource-rich areas like Akwa Ibom State (Lee and Raschke, 2023; Morton, 2020). Collectively, these insights indicate that perception of greenwashing is both an individual and collective phenomenon, influenced by knowledge, regulatory awareness, professional ethics, and local sociocultural factors.

The perception of corporate greenwashing in Nigeria is evolving alongside awareness, with critical implications for trust, corporate behaviour, and sustainability. Negative perceptions serve as both a warning and a corrective mechanism, highlighting the need for transparent communication, robust regulation, and stakeholder engagement to ensure that corporate environmental claims reflect genuine commitment rather than strategic deception.

**Review of Empirical Studies**

Empirical literature on greenwashing has largely examined its effects within organisational and consumer contexts, with limited attention to community-level perceptions in environmentally impacted regions. Ogunyemi (2022) investigated communication professionals' perceptions of greenwashing practices in the energy industry, with particular attention to their awareness, perceived prevalence, and strategies for promoting authentic sustainability. Using a descriptive survey design, the study targeted a population of 657 professionals, selecting 354 participants through simple random sampling. Data were collected via an online questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The findings revealed that respondents generally exhibited moderate to high awareness of greenwashing practices and perceived them as moderately prevalent, especially among large corporations. Notably, transparency, stakeholder engagement, and clear communication emerged as critical strategies to mitigate greenwashing and foster genuine sustainability efforts. The study concluded that enhancing awareness and adopting strategic communication practices are central to promoting authentic environmental initiatives. Recommendations emphasised the need for organisations to prioritise transparent sustainability reporting and for professionals to collaborate on establishing clear communication guidelines. While the study provides valuable insights into professional perceptions, it is limited to the energy sector and does not capture the perspectives of the general public or communities directly affected by industrial activities. This contextual gap is addressed in the current study, which focuses on the perceptions of residents in Akwa Ibom State, providing a more community-centred understanding of greenwashing.

Gupta and Singh (2024) explored the relationship between consumers' perceptions of greenwashing and their intentions to purchase green products, investigating the mediating role of consumer attitudes. Adopting a quantitative, descriptive approach, the study surveyed 383 FMCG consumers selected from a population of

31,345 through multistage sampling. Data were collected using online questionnaires and analysed with SPSS and Smart PLS to test the mediating model. Results indicated that negative perceptions of greenwashing partially mediated consumer attitudes, weakening favourable dispositions and reducing the likelihood of green product purchases. Misleading environmental claims were found to erode trust and diminish positive behavioural intentions. The study concluded that transparent communication and authentic green practices are crucial for sustaining consumer trust and promoting sustainable consumption. Recommendations included the need for policymakers to strengthen regulatory frameworks to penalise false environmental claims and for managers to prioritise genuine green initiatives. Although the study provides a robust conceptual model linking perception, attitude, and behavioural intention, it is limited to online FMCG consumers and does not consider socio-environmental exposure or lived experience in industrially impacted communities. The current study extends this theoretical framework to residents of Akwa Ibom State, exploring whether similar cognitive and affective pathways operate in communities where environmental harm from the oil and gas sector is tangible.

Manvi, Ashok, and Vinamra (2019) examined the factors driving greenwashing in companies and their effect on consumer perception and trust. Using a survey design, they sampled 355 consumers in Delhi, India, from a population exceeding seven million, employing convenience sampling. Data were collected through self-structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. The study revealed that false claims, lack of transparency, and non-eco-friendly practices were primary drivers of greenwashing, significantly undermining consumer trust and influencing purchasing behaviour. The authors concluded that greenwashing poses a serious threat to corporate credibility and sustainable business practices, emphasising that companies must adopt genuine eco-friendly practices and maintain transparency in reporting. Recommendations also highlighted the role of regulatory oversight in curbing misleading environmental claims. While informative, the study is generalised across the corporate sector in India and does not reflect the unique socio-environmental conditions of oil-producing regions. The current study addresses this gap by investigating residents' awareness and perceptions of greenwashing in Akwa Ibom State, examining the influence of academic attainment, selective disclosure, and regulatory non-compliance in the oil and gas industry, thereby situating greenwashing research within a context of tangible environmental impact.

Torelli, Balluchi, & Lazzini **(2020)** explored how greenwashing influences stakeholders' perceptions, particularly regarding trust, purchase intentions, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) evaluations. Guided by Signalling and Legitimacy Theory, the study adopted a quantitative survey design, sampling 400 stakeholders from a population exceeding four million through stratified random sampling. Data were analysed using structural equation modeling (SEM), allowing the researchers to assess how perceptions of greenwashing shaped attitudes across diverse stakeholder groups. Findings revealed that perceived greenwashing significantly erodes trust, reduces purchase intentions, and negatively affects CSR perceptions. The study concluded that authentic environmental communication is essential for maintaining credibility and positive stakeholder engagement. Recommendations emphasised the need for transparency, rigorous verification of environmental claims, and active stakeholder participation in sustainability initiatives. Despite providing valuable insights into stakeholder responses, the study largely overlooks the perspectives of local communities directly exposed to environmental degradation. The current research addresses this limitation by focusing on residents of Akwa Ibom State, assessing how oil industry greenwashing is perceived within communities that experience tangible ecological consequences, thereby extending the discussion from corporate–stakeholder dynamics to societal perception and lived experience.

Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2021) examined greenwashing recognition among stakeholders, introducing the concept of "vicarious greenwashing" to describe how responsibility for deceptive environmental claims extends to suppliers. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined surveys of 250 stakeholders with 20 in-depth interviews, employing random and purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives from business and supply chain professionals. Quantitative data were analysed via regression, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. The study found that greenwashing by parent companies can damage supplier reputations, undermine trust, and impair collaboration, highlighting the diffusion of ethical and reputational responsibility across networks. Recommendations emphasised the need for transparency, accountability, and monitoring systems throughout the supply chain to mitigate vicarious greenwashing. While the study contributes to understanding organisational and supplier dynamics, it does not address how affected communities perceive greenwashing. The current research fills this gap by examining how residents of Akwa Ibom State interpret and respond to oil sector greenwashing, shifting the focus from corporate actors to societal reception and providing insights grounded in tangible environmental harm.

Langston, Guo, and Adefila (2022) investigated stakeholder perceptions of greenwashing in the built environment, identifying key indicators and evaluating their potential impacts. The study employed a mixed-methods design, conducting 23 semi-structured interviews and collecting 131 survey responses, analysed through thematic and statistical methods. Findings highlighted exaggerated sustainability claims, lack of transparency, and insufficient supporting evidence as primary greenwashing indicators. Awareness varied among stakeholders, with industry professionals generally more knowledgeable than building occupants. The study concluded that greenwashing undermines trust in certifications and discourages genuine sustainability efforts, recommending transparent reporting, stakeholder engagement, and industry-wide standards. Although the research offers valuable insights into environmental communication within the built environment, it does not explore community-level perception in industrial contexts. The current study extends these insights to residents of Akwa Ibom State, examining their understanding of greenwashing, the influence of education, and responses to corporate environmental messaging within the oil and gas sector, thereby contextualising greenwashing research within socio-environmental realities.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Social Judgment Theory and Framing Theory, which together provide a robust lens for understanding how individuals interpret and evaluate corporate environmental communication. Social Judgment Theory, developed by Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland, explains how individuals assess persuasive messages based on pre-existing attitudes. The theory posits that people categorise information into latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and non-commitment, depending on their prior beliefs and level of ego-involvement. Messages that fall within an individual's latitude of acceptance are more likely to be assimilated, while those within the latitude of rejection may trigger resistance or counter-arguing. In the context of this study, residents' perceptions of greenwashing are shaped by their prior experiences, environmental awareness, and personal relevance of ecological issues. Individuals with high environmental concern are more likely to critically evaluate corporate claims, whereas those with lower involvement may be more receptive to such messages.

Framing Theory, as advanced by Entman, complements this perspective by explaining how the presentation of information influences interpretation. It emphasises that communicators selectively highlight certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby shaping how audiences define problems, assign responsibility, and evaluate solutions. In the case of oil and gas companies, environmental messages may be framed to emphasise sustainability initiatives while obscuring environmental harm. Such framing strategies influence how residents interpret corporate actions and assess their credibility. Together, these theories offer a complementary framework: Framing Theory explains how environmental messages are constructed, while Social Judgment Theory elucidates how such messages are received and evaluated. Their integration enabled a nuanced analysis of both message production and audience interpretation, providing a comprehensive basis for examining how greenwashing is communicated, perceived, and judged within the socio-environmental context of Akwa Ibom State.

**Methodology**

This study adopted a survey research design to examine residents' perceptions of greenwashing in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on oil-producing communities in the South Senatorial District. Although the state's projected population is 7.2 million, the study was delimited to selected oil-bearing Local Government Areas with a population of 1,044,209. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. A multi-stage sampling technique—comprising purposive, cluster, and probability-proportionate-to-size methods—was employed to select respondents across seven LGAs and their host communities. Data were collected using a structured, self-developed questionnaire containing 21 items, including Likert-scale and multiple-response questions. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of 0.75. Data collection involved direct administration with the aid of research assistants, ensuring respondents understood the concept of greenwashing through contextual explanations. Data analysis utilised frequencies, percentages, weighted means, and cross-tabulation, while hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation at a 0.05 significance level. Ethical considerations, including informed participation, anonymity, and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the study

**Findings**

The data presented and analysed in this section were obtained from the research instrument (the questionnaire). Of the 400 copies administered, only 371 were received and used in the analysis, reflecting a 93% return rate.

**Data presentation and Analysis**

Table 4.1: Extent of Awareness of Corporate Greenwashing among Respondents

| Response | Frequency | Percentages |
|---|---|---|
| Very Large Extent | 78 | 21 |
| Large Extent | 189 | 51 |
| Little Extent | 104 | 28 |
| Not At all | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.1 shows that more than half of the respondents (51%) were aware of corporate greenwashing to a large extent, indicating a relatively high level of awareness among the population.

Table 4.2: Binary Analysis of Respondents ' Understanding of Greenwashing (N = 371)

| Response | Yes | | No | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (Freq) | Perc | (Freq) | (%) | (Freq) | (%) |
| Marketing practices that falsely claim environmental benefits | 135 | *36* | 236 | *64* | 371 | 100 |
| Portraying products as eco-friendly without genuine practices | 172 | *46* | 199 | *54* | 371 | 100 |
| Deceptive strategies to appear environmentally responsible | 158 | *43* | 213 | *57* | 371 | 100 |
| False advertising exaggerating environmental efforts | 140 | *38* | 231 | *62* | 371 | 100 |
| Promoting misleading environmental claims for stakeholder trust | 198 | *53* | 173 | *47* | 371 | 100 |
| All of the above | 84 | *23* | 287 | *77* | 371 | 100 |
| Grand Total of "Yes" Responses | | | 919 | | | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.2 reveals multiple 'understandings' of greenwashing among respondents, with the majority recognising promoting misleading environmental claims for stakeholder trust (53%), portraying products as eco-friendly without genuine sustainable practices (46%), and deceptive strategies to appear environmentally responsible (43%).

**Table 4.3: Respondents' Identification of Non-Examples of Greenwashing in the Oil and Gas Sector**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| An oil company advertises investments in renewables while expanding fossil fuel extraction | 65 | 18 |
| A petroleum firm promotes "carbon-neutral" fuel without verification | 72 | 19 |
| An oil brand campaigns for an ocean clean-up while still polluting coastal areas | 78 | 21 |
| A gas company transitions to cleaner tech, cuts emissions, and gets certification (Not greenwashing) | 156 | 42 |
| Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.3 shows that the largest proportion of respondents (58%) correctly identified the genuine environmental effort by a gas company as not being an example of greenwashing, indicating a fair level of understanding of the concept among the participants.

**T
able 4.7: Awareness of Greenwashing by Academic Attainment**

| Academic Attainment | HA | MA | LA | UA | Total | Perc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basic Education | 4 | 3 | 8 | 15 | 30 | 8 |
| Secondary/High School Education | 10 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 40 | 11 |
| Diploma/NCE | 15 | 12 | 10 | 3 | 40 | 11 |
| Bachelor's Degree (B.Sc/HND) | 100 | 65 | 40 | 20 | 215 | 60 |
| Postgraduate (e.g., M.Sc., Ph.D.) | 25 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 36 | 10 |
| Total | 154 | 94 | 75 | 48 | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Key: **HA** = High awareness; **MA** = Moderate awareness; **LA** =Little Awareness; **UA** = Uncertain awareness (**Please Note:** "*Uncertain Awareness" refers to respondents who have been exposed to environmental or sustainability claims but could not determine whether such messages constitute greenwashing*).

Table 4.7 shows that respondents with higher academic attainment, especially those with a Bachelor's degree (60%), demonstrated greater awareness of greenwashing practices.

Table 4.4: Respondents ' Observations of Greenwashing Practices by Seplat

| Greenwashing Practice | Yes Freq | Yes % | No Freq | No % | Total Freq | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not providing clear or easy-to-understand information about environmental actions and impacts | 113 | *59* | 79 | *41* | 192 | 100 |
| Highlighting one positive environmental action while ignoring bigger environmental problems | 102 | *53* | 90 | *47* | 192 | 100 |
| Making claims about being environmentally friendly without proof from independent experts | 90 | *47* | 102 | *53* | 192 | 100 |
| Focusing on small environmental efforts but ignoring larger pollution or damage | 98 | *51* | 94 | *49* | 192 | 100 |
| Using vague words like "eco-friendly," "sustainable," or "environmentally responsible" without evidence | 83 | *43* | 109 | *57* | 192 | 100 |
| Using green logos, packaging, or images to give a false impression without real benefits | 73 | *38* | 119 | *62* | 192 | 100 |
| Grand Total of "Yes" Responses | | | 559 | | | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.4 indicates that respondents noticed multiple greenwashing practices by Seplat, with the most common being the lack of clear information about environmental actions (59%) and highlighting isolated positive actions while ignoring bigger problems (53%).

**Table 4.5: Respondents' Observations of Greenwashing Practices by Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company**

| Greenwashing Practice | Yes | | No | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Not providing clear or easy-to-understand information about environmental actions and impacts | 91 | *51* | 88 | *49* | 179 | 100 |
| Highlighting one positive environmental action while ignoring bigger environmental problems | 82 | *46* | 97 | *54* | 179 | 100 |
| Making claims about being environmentally friendly without proof from independent experts | 75 | *42* | 104 | *58* | 179 | 100 |
| Focusing on small environmental efforts but ignoring larger pollution or damage | 77 | *43* | 102 | *57* | 179 | 100 |
| Using vague words like "eco-friendly," "sustainable," or "environmentally responsible" without evidence | 68 | *38* | 111 | *62* | 179 | 100 |
| Using green logos, packaging, or images to give a false impression without real benefits | 63 | *35* | 116 | *65* | 179 | 100 |
| Grand Total of "Yes" Responses | | | 456 | | | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.5 shows that respondents have observed various greenwashing practices by Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company, with the most frequently noticed being the lack of clear information on environmental actions (51%) and highlighting one positive environmental action while ignoring bigger problems (46%). The total of 456 "Yes" responses demonstrated that respondents were aware of multiple deceptive environmental claims linked to the company.

Table 4.8: Oil Companies ' environmental claims are perceived with scepticism, with the belief that they prioritise profits over people and the environment .

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 75 | 20 | 4 | 300 |
| Agree | 234 | 63 | 3 | 702 |
| Disagree | 45 | 12 | 2 | 90 |
| Strongly Disagree | 17 | 5 | 1 | 17 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1109 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *2.9* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.8 shows a weighted mean of 2.9, indicating that most respondents perceived the two oil companies as prioritising profits over people and the environment in their claims.

Table 4.9: Perception of Greenwashing as Creating Frustration Due to Lack of Transparency/ Accountability

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 90 | 24 | 4 | 360 |
| Agree | 215 | 58 | 3 | 645 |
| Disagree | 45 | 12 | 2 | 90 |
| Strongly Disagree | 21 | 6 | 1 | 21 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,116 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.0* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.9 shows a weighted mean of 3.0, suggesting that respondents largely agreed with the perception that the companies caused frustration due to perceived lack of corporate transparency and accountability.

**Table 4.10: Perceived Disconnect Between Corporate Environmental Claims and Actual Community Impact**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 85 | 23 | 4 | 340 |
| Agree | 224 | 60 | 3 | 672 |
| Disagree | 45 | 12 | 2 | 90 |
| Strongly Disagree | 17 | 5 | 1 | 17 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,119 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.02* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.10, with a weighted mean of 3.02, indicates general agreement that the companies' greenwashing efforts appeared disconnected from the real environmental and health issues affecting respondents, as indicated by 60% of the respondents.

**Table 4.11: Perceived Breach of Corporate Sustainability Commitments**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 80 | 22 | 4 | 320 |
| Agree | 218 | 59 | 3 | 654 |
| Disagree | 50 | 13 | 2 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 23 | 6 | 1 | 23 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,097 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *2.9* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.11 shows a weighted mean of 2.9, suggesting that respondents generally agree that greenwashing undermines the companies' professed commitments to sustainability.

**Table 4.12: Perceived Credibility of Corporate Environmental Claims**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 30 | 8 | 4 | 120 |
| Agree | 100 | 27 | 3 | 300 |
| Disagree | 160 | 43 | 2 | 320 |
| Strongly Disagree | 81 | 22 | 1 | 81 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 821 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *2.2* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.12 reveals a weighted mean of 2.2, indicating that while 65% of the respondents did not perceive oil and gas environmental claims as genuine, the overall sentiments leaned towards scepticism.

**Table 4.13: Perception of Concealment of Environmental Impacts by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 120 | 32 | 4 | 480 |
| Agree | 160 | 43 | 3 | 480 |
| Disagree | 65 | 18 | 2 | 130 |
| Strongly Disagree | 26 | 7 | 1 | 26 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,116 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.0* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

In Table 4.13, with the weighted mean of 3.0 (and 75% of respondents) indicates a prevailing perception that oil and gas companies were deliberately concealing the full extent of their environmental impact.

**Table 4.14: Perception of the Insincerity of Selective Environmental Disclosures by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 110 | 30 | 4 | 440 |
| Agree | 150 | 40 | 3 | 450 |
| Disagree | 70 | 19 | 2 | 140 |
| Strongly Disagree | 41 | 11 | 1 | 41 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,071 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *2.8* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.14 shows a weighted mean of 2.8, indicating that most respondents (70%) perceived selective environmental disclosures by companies as lacking sincerity and true transparency.

Table 4.15: Perception of Selective Information Disclosure as a Means of Public Manipulation by Oil and Gas Companies

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 120 | 32 | 4 | 480 |
| Agree | 145 | 39 | 3 | 435 |
| Disagree | 65 | 18 | 2 | 130 |
| Strongly Disagree | 41 | 11 | 1 | 41 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,086 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *2.9* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.15 reveals a weighted mean of 2.9, suggesting that most respondents strongly believed the oil and gas industry selectively shared information to manipulate public perception and avoid accountability.

**Table 4.16: Perception of Intentional Denial of Community Environmental and Health Impact Information by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 130 | 35 | 4 | 520 |
| Agree | 145 | 39 | 3 | 435 |
| Disagree | 55 | 15 | 2 | 110 |
| Strongly Disagree | 41 | 11 | 1 | 41 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1106 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *32.9* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.16 shows a weighted mean of 2.9, indicating that the majority of the respondents believe oil and gas companies deliberately denied communities full disclosure of environmental and health impacts.

**Table 4.17: Perception of Profit-Driven Disregard for Environmental Regulations by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 150 | 40 | 4 | 600 |
| Agree | 140 | 38 | 3 | 420 |
| Disagree | 50 | 14 | 2 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 31 | 8 | 1 | 31 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,151 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.1* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.17 shows a weighted mean of 3.1, indicating that most of the respondents (78%) agreed that oil companies' disregard for environmental regulations was driven by profit motives over public and environmental welfare.

**Table 4.18: Perception of Irresponsible Regulatory Non-Compliance by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 161 | 44 | 4 | 640 |
| Agree | 134 | 36 | 3 | 405 |
| Disagree | 46 | 12 | 2 | 92 |
| Strongly Disagree | 30 | 8 | 1 | 30 |
| Total | 371 | 100% | – | 1167 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.1* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.18 shows a weighted mean of 3.1 (80% of respondents), which indicates a strong public agreement that non-compliance by oil companies was viewed as a deliberate and irresponsible neglect of environmental and health regulations.

**Table 4.19: Perceived Disregard for Community Welfare due to Environmental Non-Compliance by Oil and Gas Companies**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 155 | 42 | 4 | 620 |
| Agree | 140 | 38 | 3 | 420 |
| Disagree | 45 | 12 | 2 | 90 |
| Strongly Disagree | 31 | 8 | 1 | 31 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,161 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.1* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.19, with a weighted mean of 3.1, shows a strong public agreement that non-compliance with environmental standards reflected the oil industry's disregard for the welfare of host communities, as indicated by 80% of the respondents.

**Table 4.20: Perceived Influence of Oil and Gas Companies on Industry-Wide Environmental Negligence**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage | Weight | Weighted Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 120 | 32 | 4 | 480 |
| Agree | 215 | 58 | 3 | 645 |
| Disagree | 26 | 7 | 2 | 52 |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 3 | 1 | 10 |
| Total | 371 | 100 | 10 | 1,187 |
| *Weighted Mean Score* | | | *3.2* | |
| *Average Mean Score* | | | *2.5* | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.20 shows a weighted mean of 3.20, reflecting that the significant majority (90%) of the respondents agreed that the oil and gas industries' disregard for environmental laws influenced other companies to act similarly, worsening pollution and harm.

**Table 4.21: Factors Influencing Respondents' Perception of Greenwashing Activities in Akwa Ibom State**

| Factors | Yes Freq | Perc | No Freq | Perc | Total | Perc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Experiences | 290 | *78* | 81 | *22* | 371 | 100 |
| Trust in Institutions | 230 | *62* | 141 | *38* | 371 | 100 |
| Environmental Awareness | 310 | *84* | 61 | *16* | 371 | 100 |
| Media Influence | 280 | *75* | 91 | *25* | 371 | 100 |
| Community Engagement | 225 | *61* | 146 | *39* | 371 | 100 |
| Economic Dependence | 195 | *53* | 176 | *47* | 371 | 100 |
| Cultural Values | 160 | *43* | 211 | *57* | 371 | 100 |
| Grand Total of Respondents | | | 1,690 | | | |

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4.21 shows that respondents identified several factors that influenced their perception of the oil and gas greenwashing in Akwa Ibom State, with environmental awareness (84%) and personal experiences (78%) as the leading factors, while cultural values (43%) were less frequently cited.

## Discussion of Findings

**4.3.1 Research Question 1:** *What is the extent of awareness of the concept of greenwashing among Akwa Ibom State residents?*

The findings in Tables 4.1-4.3 and 4.5, which provided the insights for answering this research question, suggest that awareness of greenwashing among residents is not merely present but meaningfully shaped by lived environmental realities. The high level of awareness reflects a population that has moved beyond passive exposure to environmental messaging to a more critical engagement with corporate communication. In essence, awareness here is experiential rather than abstract, rooted in direct encounters with the environmental consequences of oil exploration and the perceived disconnect between corporate claims and community realities.

More importantly, the pattern of responses indicates that respondents do not perceive greenwashing as a single act but as a cluster of deceptive communication practices. This implies a relatively sophisticated cognitive framing of the concept, where individuals recognise exaggeration, selective disclosure, and symbolic environmentalism as interconnected strategies used to influence public perception. However, the difficulty some respondents experienced in distinguishing genuine environmental efforts from greenwashing reveals a gap between *recognition* and *evaluation*. In other words, while many can identify the language and signals of greenwashing, fewer possess the critical tools to validate authenticity.

This finding aligns with prior empirical studies that highlight how exposure and experience shape awareness of greenwashing. For instance, Gupta and Singh (2024) found that consumers exposed to misleading environmental claims developed stronger sensitivity to greenwashing practices. Similarly, Manvi, Ashok, and Vinamra (2019) observed that false claims and lack of transparency significantly influence how individuals recognise and interpret corporate environmental messaging. These studies suggest that awareness is often built through repeated encounters with deceptive practices.

Furthermore, Langston, Guo, and Adefila (2022) reported that awareness varies depending on stakeholders' level of exposure and familiarity with environmental communication, reinforcing the idea that informed groups demonstrate stronger recognition of greenwashing indicators. However, the gap between awareness and the ability to critically evaluate genuine sustainability claims reflects concerns raised by Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2021), who argue that although stakeholders may recognise greenwashing signals, they often struggle to assess their authenticity.

From a theoretical standpoint, Social Judgement Theory explains this outcome effectively. Residents interpret corporate environmental claims through the lens of prior experiences, leading to a tendency to question or reject messages that conflict with their realities. Similarly, Framing Theory provides insight into how repeated media and community narratives about environmental harm shape interpretive frameworks, enabling residents to decode and challenge corporate environmental claims. Together, these perspectives explain why awareness is high, yet uneven in depth, reflecting both experiential knowledge and limitations in evaluative capacity.

**Research Question 2: What are Akwa Ibom State residents' perceptions of greenwashing practices in the oil and gas industry?**

The findings on residents' perceptions of greenwashing practices in the oil and gas industry reveal a deeply rooted sense of distrust that goes beyond mere scepticism and reflects a broader crisis of corporate legitimacy. What emerges is not simply that residents question environmental claims, but that they interpret such claims as calculated attempts to project responsibility while prioritising profit. This perception suggests that green communication by oil companies is not being received as informative or corrective but as strategic image management. In practical terms, this indicates that corporate environmental messaging has lost persuasive power among residents, who now approach such communication with suspicion shaped by lived environmental realities.

Closely linked to this is the perception that greenwashing thrives on non-disclosure and selective transparency. Residents appear to interpret gaps, inconsistencies, and omissions in corporate communication not as accidental but as intentional. This reflects a communicative environment where silence, partial disclosure, and ambiguity are read as meaningful signals of concealment. The implication is that transparency is no longer judged by the presence of information alone, but by its completeness, consistency, and alignment with observable realities. Where these are lacking, corporate communication is perceived as insincere, thereby reinforcing the belief that companies are more interested in managing public perception than addressing environmental harm.

Furthermore, the perceived disconnect between corporate environmental claims and community experiences plays a critical role in shaping these attitudes. Residents do not evaluate green claims in isolation; rather, they measure them against tangible environmental conditions such as pollution, health concerns, and community wellbeing. When these lived experiences contradict corporate narratives, the result is a credibility gap that undermines trust. This gap transforms greenwashing from a communication issue into a lived social problem, where residents feel that their realities are being denied or misrepresented. Such perceptions intensify frustration and contribute to a sense of marginalisation, as communities perceive themselves as excluded from truthful environmental discourse.

In addition, perceptions of regulatory non-compliance and environmental negligence reinforce the broader narrative of insincerity and irresponsibility. Residents seem to interpret non-compliance not merely as institutional failure but as deliberate behaviour driven by economic interests. This suggests that greenwashing is not viewed in isolation but as part of a wider pattern of corporate conduct characterised by weak accountability and disregard for community welfare. The belief that such practices influence industry-wide behaviour further amplifies the problem, as it frames environmental negligence as systemic rather than incidental. Consequently, greenwashing is understood not only as misleading communication but as an extension of structural and ethical deficiencies within the industry.

These interpretations find strong support in existing empirical literature on greenwashing and stakeholder perception. Gupta and Singh (2024) observe that in environments where corporate actions are perceived to contradict sustainability claims, stakeholders develop a defensive orientation towards corporate communication, often interpreting such messages as strategically deceptive rather than informative. Similarly, Manvi, Ashok, and Vinamra (2019) argue that public scepticism intensifies when there is a visible mismatch between organisational messaging and lived realities, particularly in sectors with significant environmental footprints. The present findings resonate with this position, as residents' perceptions appear to be shaped not only by what companies say but by what communities experience, reinforcing the idea that credibility is grounded in observable consistency rather than rhetorical claims.

Further corroboration is found in the works of Langston, Guo, and Adefila (2022) and Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2021), who emphasise that perceived lack of transparency and selective disclosure are central drivers of greenwashing accusations. Langston et al. (2022) note that when organisations fail to provide complete and verifiable environmental information, stakeholders are more likely to attribute manipulative intent to corporate communication. In a similar vein, Pizzetti et al. (2021) demonstrate that perceived insincerity and opportunistic communication strategies significantly erode corporate trust and legitimacy. These insights align closely with the present findings, where non-disclosure, perceived manipulation, and regulatory non-compliance are interpreted as deliberate strategies rather than isolated lapses, thereby reinforcing residents' negative perceptions of the oil and gas industry.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings can be meaningfully situated within the framework of Media Effect Theory and the Health Belief Model. Media Effect Theory helps explain how repeated exposure to corporate messaging, especially when inconsistent with observable realities, shapes audience interpretations and attitudes over time. Rather than passively accepting messages, residents actively interpret and negotiate meaning based on prior experiences, leading to scepticism when discrepancies arise. The Health Belief Model further illuminates how perceived environmental and health risks influence attitudes towards corporate behaviour. When residents perceive high susceptibility to environmental harm and believe that companies are not acting in their best interest, they are more likely to reject corporate claims and view them as deceptive. Together, these theories underscore that perceptions of greenwashing are not merely reactions to communication content but are shaped by a complex interplay of experience, risk perception, and trust.

**Research Question 3: What are the factors influencing Akwa Ibom State residents' perception of greenwashing activities in the oil and gas industry?**

In examining the factors influencing Akwa Ibom State residents' perceptions of greenwashing in the oil and gas industry, the findings in Table 4.20 reveal that such perceptions are shaped by a combination of experiential, cognitive, institutional, and socio-economic dynamics. Environmental awareness and personal experiences emerged as the most influential drivers, indicating that individuals who are more knowledgeable about ecological issues and those who have directly encountered environmental degradation are more likely to question corporate environmental claims. This suggests that perception is grounded in lived realities rather than abstract messaging, reinforcing a critical stance towards sustainability narratives.

In addition, trust in institutions and media influence play significant roles in shaping perception. Where confidence in regulatory bodies is weak, residents are more inclined to interpret corporate communication as deceptive. Media exposure further amplifies this scepticism by shaping how environmental issues and corporate actions are framed and understood. Community engagement also contributes, although in a more complex way, as it may both enhance awareness and expose inconsistencies in corporate behaviour. Economic dependence introduces a layer of tension, as individuals who rely on the oil industry for livelihood may moderate their criticism despite recognising environmental concerns, while cultural values appear less influential in shaping perception.

These findings align with prior studies. Oyewole and Tijani (2021) highlight the importance of institutional trust in shaping responses to corporate environmental claims, while Idemudia (2014) emphasises the role of environmental knowledge and lived experience in fostering resistance to corporate rhetoric in the Niger Delta. Theoretically, Social Judgement Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) explains how entrenched attitudes, formed through experience, lead residents to reject inconsistent green claims. Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) further illustrates how media and personal experiences shape interpretation, reinforcing the view that perceptions of greenwashing are informed, critical, and contextually grounded.

## Conclusion

This study was primarily concerned with examining residents' awareness and perceptions of greenwashing practices by the two oil and gas companies in Akwa Ibom State. It concludes that although there is a considerable level of awareness of greenwashing, this awareness is shaped by education, personal experience, and media exposure. The findings imply a deep-rooted scepticism towards the environmental claims of oil corporations, particularly where these claims are unaccompanied by tangible improvements in environmental and health outcomes. The study also infers that the selective disclosure of environmental actions and deliberate regulatory non-compliance by oil companies have created a crisis of trust and transparency, reinforcing the need for institutional reform, corporate accountability, and strengthened public environmental literacy.

## Recommendations

i. Given the considerable level of awareness of greenwashing among Akwa Ibom residents, the Ministry of Environment and relevant NGOs should strengthen and streamline community-based environmental education through media campaigns, public engagement, and school programmes to translate awareness into active reporting, participation, and environmental accountability.

ii. In response to widespread perceptions of insincerity, selective disclosure, and regulatory non-compliance, oil companies and regulatory bodies such as NESREA and NUPRC should jointly prioritise transparency by adopting verifiable environmental communication, conducting regular audits, and implementing accessible public disclosure systems (e.g., digital dashboards) to enhance accountability and rebuild public trust.

iii. Considering that environmental awareness, media exposure, and personal experience strongly shape perception, civil society organisations and media institutions should intensify investigative journalism and community-centred storytelling to amplify local realities, strengthen public understanding, and sustain environmental advocacy.

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