



## **Influence of Social Media Propaganda on Public Perception of Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project Activities in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Bibiana Uguoma Ineji & <sup>2</sup>Precious Barivure Kpenu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, University of Cross River State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Ihechukwu Madubuike Institute of Technology, Isuochi, Abia State, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6436-2758>

<sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3048-8081>

\*Corresponding Author: [bibianaineji@gmail.com](mailto:bibianaineji@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Decades of oil exploration and recurrent oil spills in Ogoniland, Rivers State, necessitated the establishment of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for environmental clean-up and restoration. Despite these efforts, concerns have emerged regarding the portrayal of HYPREP's activities on social media and the extent to which such reports influence public perception. This study investigated the influence of social media propaganda on public perception of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Objective:** The study sought to examine how host communities perceive alleged propaganda in social media reports on HYPREP activities in Ogoniland and to determine whether exposure to social media reports is associated with host communities' perceptions of propaganda regarding the implementation of the clean-up programme. The study was anchored on the Conspiracy Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

**Method:** The study adopted a survey research design using questionnaires and interviews as the primary instruments for data collection. Data were collected from 380 respondents drawn from Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The data were analysed using the Chi-square statistical technique.

**Results:** The findings revealed that many members of the host communities believe that social media propaganda has been employed in the portrayal of HYPREP's clean-up activities through the perceived exaggeration of project achievements. The study further established a statistically significant relationship between exposure to social media reports and host community members' perceptions of propaganda surrounding HYPREP's remediation activities.

**Unique Contribution:** The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on environmental communication by demonstrating how social media narratives shape public perceptions of environmental remediation programmes. It underscores the need for effective collaboration among communication professionals, environmental experts, HYPREP, host communities, and government agencies to promote credible and transparent communication.



**Conclusion:** The study concludes that credibility, transparency, and factual accuracy should remain central to communication concerning environmental remediation activities. Disseminating truthful and verifiable information is essential for strengthening public confidence in HYPREP's clean-up programme.

**Key Recommendation:** The government should revisit the implementation framework contained in the UNEP Report and engage competent environmental experts to strengthen the effectiveness, transparency, and credibility of remediation activities in the affected communities. Furthermore, relevant supervisory agencies should monitor HYPREP's social media communication to ensure that published information accurately reflects the actual progress of the clean-up exercise.

**Keywords:** Clean-up Activities, Communication, HYPREP, Propaganda, Remediation, Social Media.

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new media technologies has transformed contemporary communication by providing diverse, interactive, and instantaneous channels for the dissemination and exchange of information. Among these technologies, social media have become particularly influential because of their participatory nature, immediacy of feedback, and widespread accessibility. These characteristics have facilitated their integration into virtually every aspect of modern life, including politics, governance, environmental communication, and public engagement.

According to Restrictions (2020), social media have democratized communication by creating virtual communities where individuals with shared interests, aspirations, and goals can freely exchange ideas without many of the limitations associated with conventional media. Similarly, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argue that platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and other social networking sites are participatory, interactive, and cost-effective, making them valuable instruments for political communication, advocacy, and public engagement.

Ekweme and Folarin (2017) contend that the twenty-first century is characterized by rapid advances in information technology, prompting political actors and organizations to increasingly rely on social media rather than conventional media to pursue their communication objectives. The accessibility of these platforms has enabled virtually anyone to generate, disseminate, and consume information. While this has expanded opportunities for democratic participation and civic engagement, it has also facilitated the widespread dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda by individuals and organizations pursuing political, economic, or institutional interests.

This position is reinforced by Adeniyi (2017, p. 3), who describes the contemporary information environment as "the age of instant information, disinformation and post-truth," where facts, fiction, misinformation, and "alternative facts" frequently coexist. He further observes that every



individual has become an information producer, reporter, editor, publisher, communicator, and distributor capable of influencing public opinion through digital platforms.

Consequently, social media provide political actors, institutions, and propagandists with unprecedented opportunities to shape public opinion and influence public discourse. Adeniyi (2017) further argues that social media have significantly increased citizens' capacity to debate public issues and influence decisions affecting their lives. However, these opportunities have also expanded the use of propaganda as a strategic communication tool.

Palmer and Perkins (2007), cited in Alegu et al. (2020), liken propaganda to advertising and marketing, arguing that successful propagandists, like marketers, carefully study their audience and tailor their messages to suit audience expectations. They further contend that propagandists deliberately analyse the fears, aspirations, beliefs, prejudices, and weaknesses of their target audience in order to develop persuasive messages capable of influencing attitudes and behaviour.

Similarly, Hasan (2014) explains that propaganda increasingly overlaps with concepts such as indoctrination, where ideological beliefs are reinforced through repetition rather than objective verification, and mass persuasion, which relies on strategic communication techniques to shape public opinion. Propagandists therefore seek to stimulate desired responses by exploiting audience emotions, values, and patterns of reasoning. This often involves selective presentation of facts, exaggeration, emotional appeals, and strategic framing of information. Consequently, social media have become attractive platforms for propaganda because of their speed, extensive reach, and relatively limited gatekeeping mechanisms.

Propaganda is not restricted to governments or media organizations. It may be employed by individuals, corporations, advocacy groups, public institutions, and other stakeholders seeking to influence public perception. The Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), established to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the remediation of oil-polluted communities in Ogoniland, is one such institution whose activities are frequently communicated through social media and other digital platforms.

HYPREP was established to restore the degraded environment of Ogoniland through soil remediation, groundwater restoration, shoreline rehabilitation, and mangrove regeneration. However, concerns have continued to be expressed by members of the host communities regarding the pace and effectiveness of the clean-up programme. Many residents contend that the progress reported on social media does not accurately reflect conditions on the ground.

Contrary to online reports suggesting that the remediation programme is approaching completion, many affected communities continue to experience inadequate access to potable water, degraded agricultural land, and polluted ecosystems. The implementation of the clean-up programme has also attracted criticisms relating to transparency, inconsistencies in remediation reports, and disparities in the identification and treatment of contaminated sites. While some



polluted locations have reportedly undergone remediation, others with similar levels of contamination remain unattended.

Consequently, a noticeable disparity exists between the optimistic narratives circulating on social media and the experiences of many residents of the affected communities. Whereas online audiences are often presented with reports indicating substantial progress in the clean-up exercise, many members of the host communities perceive these reports as exaggerated or misleading because several remediation milestones have yet to be achieved.

Osimen and Adeyefa (2023) similarly observe that the rapid expansion of social media has significantly increased opportunities for propaganda due to the openness and accessibility of digital platforms. They argue that propaganda is frequently associated with hidden agendas, selective presentation of facts, misinformation, and emotional manipulation intended to influence public opinion. Hasan (2014) further maintains that propaganda often relies more on rhetorical persuasion than objective evidence, making it capable of shaping public perceptions irrespective of factual realities.

Against this background, this study investigates the influence of social media propaganda on public perception of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on how host communities interpret social media reports relating to the ongoing environmental remediation programme.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) commenced the implementation of the Ogoni environmental clean-up programme on 2 June 2016 with the mandate of restoring ecosystems degraded by decades of oil exploration and pollution. The project was established to remediate contaminated land and water resources, thereby enabling the people of Ogoniland to regain their traditional means of livelihood. The remediation programme covers the four Ogoni Local Government Areas of Khana, Gokana, Tai, and Eleme, encompassing several affected communities.

In Khana Local Government Area, the project covers communities such as Kpean, Buan, Kwawa, and Nwiiya-Akara. In Gokana Local Government Area, remediation activities extend to Bodo, K-Dere, B-Dere, Mogho, Kpor, Bera, Bomu, and Lewe. In Tai Local Government Area, Korokoro, Gio, Botem, and Kporgor are among the benefiting communities, while Alode, Aleto, Ogale, Akpajo, and Ebubu constitute the major communities covered in Eleme Local Government Area.

Despite nearly a decade of implementation, concerns persist regarding the pace and effectiveness of the remediation programme. While HYPREP's activities are frequently portrayed positively on social media, many residents of the host communities believe that progress has fallen short of



expectations. The perceived slow pace of implementation has often been attributed to administrative challenges, including frequent changes in project leadership and coordination.

HYPREP has consistently engaged community leaders, traditional rulers, and other stakeholders, and these engagements are regularly publicized on its social media platforms. Nevertheless, many members of the host communities contend that these online reports present a more optimistic picture than the realities experienced in the affected communities. They argue that the level of environmental restoration portrayed on social media does not accurately reflect the actual progress of remediation activities on the ground.

Although social media reports generally emphasize the achievements of HYPREP, concerns remain regarding the transparency, effectiveness, and credibility of the remediation programme. This raises important questions regarding the relationship between social media narratives and the perceptions of members of the host communities. Specifically, to what extent do social media reports influence public perceptions of HYPREP's activities? Are the allegations of propaganda supported by the experiences of residents in the affected communities?

Despite growing scholarly interest in environmental communication and digital media, limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining how social media propaganda influences public perceptions of HYPREP's remediation activities in Ogoniland. This knowledge gap provides the justification for the present study, which investigates the influence of social media propaganda on public perception of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the influence of social media propaganda on public perception of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland.

The specific objectives were to:

1. examine how members of the host communities perceive alleged propaganda in social media reports relating to HYPREP activities in Ogoniland;
2. determine the relationship between exposure to social media reports and host communities' perceptions of propaganda regarding HYPREP activities in Ogoniland;
3. ascertain how social media propaganda is perceived to have been employed in promoting HYPREP activities in Ogoniland; and
4. identify the forms of propaganda perceived by host communities to have been used in social media reports on HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. How do members of the host communities perceive alleged propaganda in social media reports relating to HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?
- ii. What relationship exists between exposure to social media reports and host communities' perceptions of propaganda regarding HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?
- iii. How is social media propaganda perceived to have been employed in promoting HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?
- iv. What forms of propaganda are perceived to have been used in social media reports on HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

### Hypothesis One

There is no statistically significant relationship between exposure to social media reports and host communities' perceptions of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no statistically significant relationship between the use of propaganda and public perceptions of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media and Propaganda

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the way individuals and organizations communicate, interact, consume information, and participate in public discourse. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp have created unprecedented opportunities for the rapid dissemination of information and the exchange of ideas across geographical boundaries.

Although social media offer numerous advantages, including increased public participation, citizen engagement, and access to information, they have also facilitated the widespread dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda. The unrestricted nature of these platforms allows false or misleading information to spread rapidly, particularly when users



share content without verifying its authenticity. Once misinformation becomes viral, correcting false narratives becomes extremely difficult because of users' reliance on likes, shares, comments, and algorithm-driven visibility.

Consequently, social media have become powerful instruments for influencing political, social, and public discourse. According to Saaida (2023), propagandists increasingly utilize platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) to micro-target specific demographic groups and construct narratives that resonate with particular audiences. By exploiting users' interests, emotions, and existing beliefs, propagandists are able to shape public opinion and influence attitudes toward political, social, and institutional issues.

The influence of social media is further reinforced by their multimedia capabilities, which enable the dissemination of highly engaging text, images, audio, and video content capable of attracting widespread public attention. These characteristics make social media particularly effective tools for the dissemination of propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation to unsuspecting audiences. Consequently, distinguishing factual information from manipulated or misleading content has become an increasing challenge for both media practitioners and the general public.

Furthermore, the use of social media for propaganda presents significant challenges for democratic participation and public engagement. Saaida (2023) argues that social media algorithms generate personalized information feeds based on users' online behaviour, thereby limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforcing existing beliefs. Similarly, manipulated media content, fake news, and propaganda may confuse audiences, distort public understanding, and impair individuals' ability to make informed decisions on issues of public concern.

### Social Media, Propaganda and HYPREP Activities in Ogoniland

The growing influence of social media on public opinion has encouraged governments, public institutions, and other stakeholders to increasingly utilize platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) to communicate their activities and influence public perceptions.

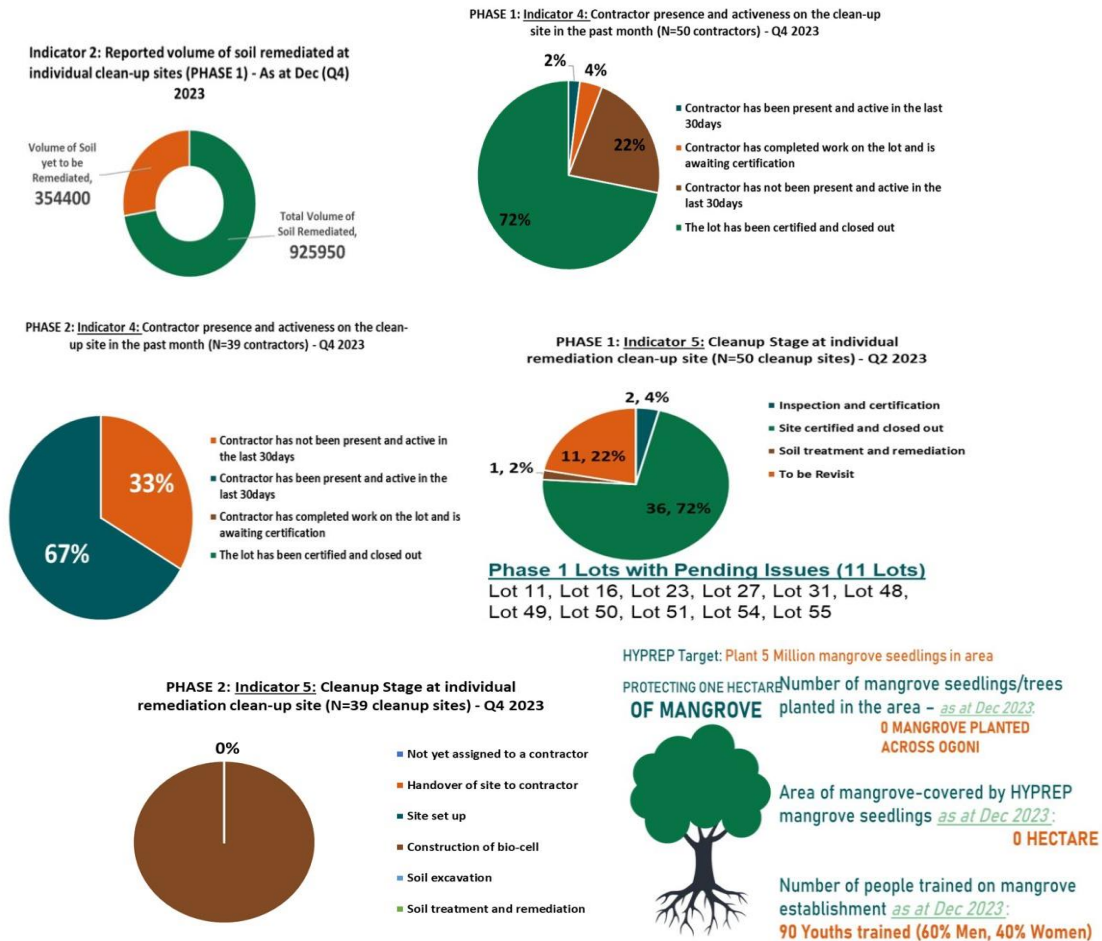
Social media have transformed public discourse by providing citizens with opportunities for self-expression, community engagement, and immediate feedback on issues affecting their lives. However, these same platforms have also become channels through which misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda may spread, thereby influencing public opinion in both positive and negative ways.

For example, **Vanguard** reported on **20 August 2023** that the people of Ogoni rated HYPREP's ongoing clean-up activities at **70 per cent**. Similarly, **The Guardian** reported on **17 April 2023** that the Federal Government had reached the final phase of shoreline remediation aimed at restoring degraded mangrove ecosystems in Ogoniland.



However, observations from some host communities appear to contradict these reports. For instance, residents of Kegbara Dere reportedly maintained that shoreline remediation had not commenced at the time those reports were published, while Bomu community had only recorded pilot mangrove planting rather than full-scale restoration. Such discrepancies between official reports and community experiences have generated concerns regarding the credibility of information disseminated through social media.

Similarly, independent environmental monitoring organizations, including the **Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN)** and the **Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)**, published independent assessments of HYPREP's implementation progress as of December 2023. These assessments provided alternative perspectives on the pace and extent of remediation activities, thereby contributing to ongoing public debate regarding the actual progress of the Ogoni clean-up programme.



The above report (chart) shows the contradictory state of The Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project. It is no wonder that different groups in Ogoni have continued to express concerns over the claims of HYPREP concerning the clean-up exercise in Ogoni. The president



of Ogoni peace development initiative, Maxwell Nwikonee while reviewing the activities of HYPREP said lack of transparency is responsible for the slow pace of project execution by HYPREP. Implying that, the possibility of misinforming supposed passive online audience might be right, having them believe that the clean-up has reached an advance stage. It is no wonder that Malcolm X in his Audubon Ballroom speech cited in Sandeep (2015,) asserts that; “The media is so powerful in its image-making role; it can make the criminal look like he’s the victim and the victim look like he is the criminal” p.507. That “If you are not careful, the media will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing”.

In other words,” social media can significantly influence the global landscape, allowing government and political actors to engage in concerted information operations; shaping or manipulating domestic and foreign agendas” (Hasan, 2014). On this note, HYPREP has to focus on its master plan towards environmental restoration which goes beyond engaging stakeholders and chiefs of Ogoni communities and displaying them on social media for public validation. Such a programme should not be allowed to suffer political interference because it is concerned with people’s livelihood and environmental safety. Social media posts could result in the assumption that, the presumed delay in the clean-up of polluted sites in Ogoni land could be as a result of political shenanigans and interference in the affairs of the Hydrocarbon pollution Remediation Project and until the leadership of HYPREP makes it a duty to disseminate appropriate and credible information, the audience will always allege the use of propaganda in the propagation of its activities.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Conspiracy Theory**

The theory was popularised by Frank P. Mintz in 1980s. According to Barkun (2016), “Conspiracy theory holds that the term is used for a belief that explains an event as a result of secret plot by exceptionally powerful and cunning conspirators to achieve a malevolent end”. According to him,” the appeal of conspiracisms” is in three folds, viz; Conspiracy theory posits that conspirators try to be logical yet twist facts, they appear to create order out of chaos. They appear to make sense out of a world that is otherwise confusing in a cunning and captivating manner. They subtly describe the world sharply between forces of light and the forces of darkness. That, evil is usually attributed to a particular source, the conspirators and their agents. Conspiracy theory is often shrouded in secrecy and sacredness which may not be understood by non-initiate. Conspiracy theorists pride themselves in the art of deception and they view the masses as brainwashed herd.

The theory is relevant to this study on the premise that it highlights various ways propaganda can be exhibited. In the case of the Ogoni clean-up activities, allowing incorrect information to pervade social media may seem like propaganda meant to deceive the masses, particularly on the activities of Ogoni clean-up.

### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

The uses and gratification theory explain how the media are used and the benefit derived by the individuals the society at large. Nwaoboli (2023) has it that the theory was propounded by



Maxwell McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw in 1968. It is anchored on three basic principles: how individuals use mass media channels to satisfy their needs; what do people do with the media? What motives drive individuals to use the media? What are the positive and negative implications of media use by individuals?”

The uses and gratification theory is of the notion that members of the audience actively seek out the mass media and its tools to gratify their needs. They posit that the recipient of mass media messages influences the effect process. In other words, the media do not do things to people, rather people do things with the media. This theory is suitable for the study on the premise that users of social media such as authorities involved in the clean-up exercise like the coordinators of HYPREP may intentionally use social media to gratify their performance through the eyes of social media especially to passive observers of the project.

The theories, Conspiracy Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory provide explanation on how members of host communities may interpret HYPREP related social media messages on the environmental clean-up activities in Ogoni.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design to investigate public opinion on social media reports relating to the activities of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data directly from respondents on their perceptions of social media propaganda and HYPREP's remediation activities. The study was conducted in Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas of Ogoniland, Rivers State. The target population comprised 757,600 residents of the two Local Government Areas. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined.

The study population consisted of indigenes and residents of Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas who had access to Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) and were exposed to information relating to HYPREP's remediation activities through these social media platforms. The study focused on this category of respondents because they were considered more likely to have knowledge of both the online reports and the actual remediation activities within their communities. The respondents included civil servants, artisans, youths, traders, farmers, and local contractors engaged in or affected by HYPREP's activities.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents. At the first stage, the study area was stratified into two strata corresponding to the two Local Government Areas- Khana and Gokana. At the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select three communities from each Local Government Area based on their relevance to HYPREP's remediation programme. The selected communities were Kpean, Buan, and Wiiyaakara in Khana Local Government Area, and Bomu, Mogho, and Kegbara Dere in Gokana Local Government Area. The selection was based on: population density, level of completion of/and ongoing HYPREP remediation activities, severity of oil pollution and environmental degradation; and the types of natural resources affected, including shorelines, farmlands, swamps, and other ecologically sensitive areas.



At the third stage, simple random sampling was used to select major streets and residential areas within the six selected communities. Thereafter, systematic sampling was employed to select respondents for questionnaire administration. One out of every five houses was selected, and where more than one eligible respondent was available in a household, one respondent was chosen through simple random selection. Eligibility was restricted to individuals who used Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) and had been exposed to information relating to HYPREP's activities on these platforms.

The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. The responses were coded into categorical variables suitable for statistical analysis. Data were analysed using frequency distributions and percentages to answer the research questions, while the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical test was used to test the hypotheses and determine the existence of significant relationships between the study variables.

## DATA PRESENTATION

**Table 1: Host communities' perception of alleged propaganda in social media reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	35	9.3
Agree	10	2.6
Disagree	75	19.7
Strongly Disagree	260	68.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Field data (2024).

The above table revealed that the reports do not reflect the true state of the clean-up activities as 68.4% admitted that social media reports do not reflect the current state of the exercise while 19.7% corroborated the assertion. On the other hand, 9.3% and 2.6% disagreed with the assertion.

**Table 2: Relationship between social media reports and host communities' perceptions of propaganda regarding HYPREP activities in Ogoniland**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	1.4
Agree	10	2.6
Disagree	135	35.5
Strongly Disagree	230	60.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Field data (2024).

The table above established that social media reports do not represent the host communities' views as regards the remediation and restoration project in Ogoniland by HYPREP as host communities view the reports on Facebook and X as misleading. The investigation revealed that 60.5% and 35.5% respectively disagreed with the notion that the social media reports were not biased.



**Table 3:** Social media propaganda has been deployed in promoting the HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	230	60.5
Agree	135	35.5
Disagree	10	2.6
Strongly Disagree	5	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Field data (2024).

The above table revealed that 60.5% strongly agreed and 35.5% respondents agreed that social media have been employed to spread information that may not be accurate on the true state of the work of HYPREP.

**Table 4:** Social media reports on the clean-up activities by HYPREP are inaccurate

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	230	60.5
Agree	135	35.5
Disagree	10	2.6
Strongly Disagree	5	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Field data (2024).

Respondents 60.5 % and 35.5% agreed that reports on the activities of HYPREP on social media contradict the exact pace of the remediation project thereby misinforming the public.

**Hypothesis I: There is no significant relationship between social media use and perceptions of HYPREP reports in Ogoniland**

Responses	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
SA	230	95	135	18225	191.8
A	135	95	40	1600	16.8
D	10	95	95	9025	95
SD	5	95	-90	8100	85.2
	380				218.4



The above shows the value of 218.4; this is greater than the critical table value of 7.815 at 3-degree significant level of freedom (df). By this, the alternate is accepted and the null rejected. This means that social media use have significant influence on reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.

**Hypothesis II: The use of propaganda has no significant correlation with the reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.**

Responses	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
SA	250	95	185	34225	360.2
A	90	95	-5	25	0.2
D	35	95	-60	3600	37.8
SD	5	95	-90	8100	85.2
	380				312.6

The above shows a value of 312.6; this is greater than the critical table value of 7.815 at 3-degree significant level of freedom (df). It means that the use of propaganda has significant correlation with the reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate upheld.

**DISCUSSION**

**Research Question One:** How do host communities perceive alleged propaganda in social media reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?

In line with the conspiracy theory which holds that “secret plot by exceptionally powerful and cunning conspirators” are used “to achieve a malevolent end”. The results from data analysed and as shown in Table 1, revealed that 68.4%, being majority of respondents, perceived social media reports as not accurately reflecting the current state of the clean-up exercise in Ogoniland. The finding is in line with Osimen and Adeyefa, (2023) who posit that the rise of social media has been a boon to propaganda without regards that people are more enlightened and can see through the veil of deception.

**Research Question Two:** What relationship exists between social media reports and host communities' perceptions of propaganda regarding HYPREP activities in Ogoniland?

In Table 2, majority of the respondents 60.5%, revealed that social media reports are not in tandem with host communities' views, as host communities see the reports as untrue and exaggerated. The findings suggest that many respondents perceived a disconnect between social media reports and their observations of HYPREP activities within their communities. The findings support the views of Adeniyi (2017) who stated that “this is the age of instant information, disinformation and post truth-fact, fiction, outlandish lies and alternative facts mix and meet in a new amorphous reality in which the truth may have disappeared for all time”.



**Research Question Three:** How has propaganda been deployed through social media in promoting the activities of HYPREP in Ogoniland?

Data analysed revealed that 60.5% of respondents largely perceived social media reports concerning HYPREP activities as misleading or lacking objectivity. This corroborates the findings of hypothesis one which states that there is significant relationship between social media use and perceptions of HYPREP reports in Ogoniland. This is evident from the data analysed which revealed that reports on the activities of HYPREP on Facebook and X were not objective. The findings support of (Saaida, 2023), who posited that social media have significantly impacted propaganda, “it has given individuals new means of” communicating and sharing of information”, thereby making it simpler for meanings to be shared and conveyed by political actors. This corroborates the finding of hypothesis one that social media use have significant influence on reports of HYPREP activities in Ogoniland.

**Research Question Four:** What is the type of social media propaganda used in the activities of HYPREP in Ogoniland?

The results revealed that reports on the activities of HYPREP on social media were biased, not objective, and unsatisfactory as they contradict the exact pace of the remediation project. Respondents perceived the reports as biased and lacking objectivity, characteristics that some propaganda scholars associate with propagandistic communication. This nature of propaganda shows misleading information, and that those who use this propaganda generally have covert agenda. The finding corroborates the assertion of Hasan (2014) that propaganda “involves making things known (in a controlled and biased manner) in gaining support for an opinion, ideology or belief”.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The study examined host communities’ perceptions of alleged propaganda in social media reports relating to HYPREP activities in Ogoniland. Findings revealed that a majority of respondents perceived social media reports on HYPREP remediation and restoration activities as not accurately reflecting the situation in their communities. Respondents also expressed concerns regarding the objectivity and credibility of information disseminated through Facebook and X concerning the clean-up exercise.

The study further found that many respondents perceived a disconnect between official social media reports and their observations of remediation activities within the affected communities. These perceptions suggest the need for greater transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement in communicating HYPREP activities. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of ensuring that information disseminated through social media is credible, verifiable, and reflective of realities on the ground in order to build public trust and confidence in environmental remediation efforts.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are imperative:

- i. HYPREP should enhance transparency and stakeholder engagement by ensuring that information disseminated through social media platforms accurately reflects the progress of remediation and restoration activities in affected communities.
- ii. Government and relevant regulatory agencies should establish independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to periodically assess remediation activities and provide credible updates to host communities.
- iii. HYPREP should adopt a more participatory communication approach by incorporating feedback from community members into its public communication strategy to improve trust and credibility.
- iv. Periodic field inspections and independent verification exercises should be conducted by relevant authorities to ensure consistency between official reports and conditions observed in affected communities.
- v. Social media communication relating to environmental remediation projects should be evidence-based, verified, and regularly updated to promote public confidence and reduce perceptions of bias or misinformation.

### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Bibiana Uguoma Ineji, PhD and Precious Barivure Kpenu conceived the study, including the design, Bibiana Uguoma Ineji, PhD and Precious Barivure Kpenu collated the data, and Precious Barivure Kpenu handled the analysis and interpretation, while Bibiana Uguoma Ineji and



Precious Barivure Kpenu wrote the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

#### **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure**

We declare that no generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing, analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

#### **Data availability statement**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

#### **Citation**

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