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Evaluation of Community Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility of Oil Marketers in Owerri Metropolis

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Abstract

This study evaluated the community relations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis, examining their scope, effectiveness, and perceived impact. Guided by three research questions, the study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised approximately 1.07 million people, including residents of host communities and employees of selected oil marketing companies. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed through descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that oil marketers undertake CSR initiatives such as educational scholarships, health facility support, and minor infrastructural projects. However, these activities were found to be irregular, poorly sustained, and not consistently aligned with the actual needs of host communities. The study concludes that CSR in the oil marketing sector of Owerri Metropolis requires a more strategic, proactive, and participatory approach. Recommendations include conducting regular community needs assessments, establishing structured liaison mechanisms, and aligning CSR initiatives with broader sustainable development objectives.

Keywords: Community Relations, Corporate Social Responsibility, Oil Marketers, Stakeholder Engagement.



Introduction

In recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and community relations have evolved from optional philanthropic acts to strategic imperatives for corporate legitimacy, especially in sectors with high environmental and social impact such as oil marketing. Businesses today are expected not only to pursue economic gains but also to contribute meaningfully to the development of their host communities (Ezekwesili & Okonkwo, 2021). CSR practices, when properly implemented, help to foster positive community relations, reduce conflict, and enhance corporate reputation.

The oil marketing sector in Nigeria operates within a highly sensitive socio-economic environment where community expectations are high. Owerri Metropolis, being a growing urban centre in southeastern Nigeria, is home to several oil marketers whose activities affect and interact with the local communities. While some of these firms engage in CSR initiatives such as youth empowerment, healthcare, and education, the actual impact and sustainability of these efforts are often questioned (Umeokafor, 2020). Moreover, the nature of community relations between oil marketers and host communities plays a vital role in determining operational success and long-term acceptance.

Despite the increasing awareness and implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) across industries in Nigeria, there remains a significant gap between CSR expectations and actual community impact, particularly in the downstream oil sector. Oil marketers operating in urban centres such as Owerri Metropolis are expected to play a vital role in addressing local developmental needs through deliberate community relations and CSR initiatives. However, many of these initiatives are often perceived as superficial, short-term, and lacking genuine commitment to the welfare of host communities (Onyekachi & Eze, 2023).

In several instances, CSR projects by oil marketers appear to be driven more by regulatory compliance or brand positioning rather than a strategic alignment with the real needs and priorities of the community. This disconnect has resulted in growing community dissatisfaction, mistrust, and in some cases, tension between the companies and their host populations (Ezekwesili & Okonkwo, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of clearly defined communication and feedback mechanisms between oil marketers and community stakeholders weakens community relations and undermines the long-term sustainability of CSR programmes.

The lack of empirical evaluation of CSR practices among oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis also contributes to the problem. There is limited scholarly evidence assessing the effectiveness, perception, and community impact of CSR and community engagement efforts in this specific context. Consequently, it becomes difficult to determine whether the initiatives carried out are improving lives, promoting corporate-community harmony, or merely fulfilling a corporate obligation on paper (Umeokafor, 2020).

Therefore, this study becomes essential to evaluate the nature, effectiveness, and perception of community relations and CSR practices among oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis, with the aim of identifying gaps, challenges, and strategies for improvement.

This study sought to evaluate the CSR activities and community engagement strategies of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis. It examines the extent to which these companies align their corporate practices with community needs, the perception of residents toward such initiatives, and the challenges hindering more effective engagement. Understanding these dynamics is critical to ensuring that CSR efforts move beyond tokenism to become instruments of genuine development and trust-building (Onyekachi & Eze, 2023).



Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, propounded by R. Edward Freeman (1984), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between organisations and the various groups that influence or are influenced by their activities. The theory challenges the traditional shareholder centred view of the firm by arguing that organisations owe responsibilities to a broad range of stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, investors, government institutions, and host communities. These stakeholders possess varying degrees of power, legitimacy, and urgency, and their interests must be carefully managed to ensure organisational success and continuity.

Over time, stakeholder theory has evolved into both a normative and instrumental framework. Normatively, it emphasises the ethical obligation of organisations to consider the rights and welfare of all stakeholders. Instrumentally, it demonstrates that organisations which effectively manage stakeholder relationships tend to achieve improved performance outcomes, enhanced reputation, and sustained competitive advantage. Contemporary scholars further argue that stakeholder engagement fosters mutual trust and cooperation, thereby reducing conflicts and enhancing organisational legitimacy, particularly in environments where corporate activities directly impact local populations (Edeh & Okolie, 2022).

In developing countries such as Nigeria, the relevance of stakeholder theory is even more pronounced due to the socio economic and environmental challenges associated with corporate operations, especially in the oil and gas sector. Oil marketing companies often operate in communities that experience environmental degradation, infrastructural deficits, and social disruptions. As a result, host communities emerge as critical stakeholders whose perceptions and reactions can significantly influence the operations and sustainability of these firms.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study on the evaluation of community relations and corporate social responsibility of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis. It provides a theoretical basis for examining how oil marketing firms identify, prioritise, and engage their host communities through CSR initiatives. By applying stakeholder theory, this study assumes that effective community relations programmes are not merely philanthropic gestures but strategic mechanisms for managing stakeholder expectations, reducing tensions, and promoting social acceptance.

Furthermore, stakeholder theory helps to explain why oil marketers that invest in meaningful CSR activities such as infrastructure development, health interventions, environmental protection, and community empowerment are more likely to enjoy peaceful coexistence with their host communities. Conversely, failure to address stakeholder concerns may result in conflicts, resistance, and reputational damage, which can undermine business operations.

Therefore, stakeholder theory underpins this study by providing a lens through which the interactions between oil marketers and their host communities can be critically analysed. It establishes that sustainable business practice is inherently tied to the extent to which organisations recognise and respond to the needs of their stakeholders, thereby reinforcing the importance of CSR and community relations as essential components of corporate strategy.



Method

Research Design

This study adopted the survey research design. The survey method was considered most appropriate because it enables the researcher to gather data from a representative sample of the population using structured instruments such as questionnaires. It is also suitable for assessing public opinion, attitudes, and perceptions on issues relating to community relations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised residents in Owerri Metropolis, including community members and consumers who live within the vicinity of major oil marketing companies. This population was chosen because they are in a position to observe, evaluate, and respond to the CSR practices and community engagement strategies of these companies. Recent estimates put the metropolitan population at about 1.07 million people as of 2025, covering the urban agglomeration that includes the core city and surrounding suburban areas (Macrotrends, 2025; World Population Review, 2025).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error, ensuring that the sample adequately represents the study population. This statistical approach provides a reliable basis for generalising the findings to the wider population.

The study adopted a multistage sampling technique to enhance representativeness and practicality. At the first stage, purposive sampling was employed to select communities within Owerri Metropolis where major oil marketing companies are present. This was necessary because the study specifically focuses on community relations and corporate social responsibility activities of oil marketers, making it important to target locations where such activities are evident.

At the second stage, households within the selected communities were chosen using a systematic approach based on accessibility and spatial distribution, rather than simple random sampling, due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame listing all residents. Within each selected household, one eligible respondent was purposively selected based on their knowledge or experience of the activities of oil marketing companies in the area.

This combination of multistage and purposive sampling techniques ensured that respondents were both relevant to the study objectives and adequately distributed across the selected communities, thereby improving the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into sections, each designed to elicit responses on key aspects of the study, including types of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, effectiveness of community relations, and public perceptions of oil marketers' social responsibility.



The questionnaire consisted of both closed ended and a few open ended questions. The closed ended questions were mainly structured on a Likert scale format, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with given statements, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This format was used to measure respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness, impact, and adequacy of CSR activities carried out by oil marketing firms.

In addition, some multiple choice questions were included to identify specific types of CSR initiatives present in the communities, such as infrastructural development, health interventions, educational support, and environmental management efforts. A limited number of open ended questions were also incorporated to allow respondents to express their opinions and provide further insights on their experiences with oil marketers' community relations practices.

This combination of question formats ensured that the study generated both quantitative data for statistical analysis and qualitative insights for deeper understanding of respondents' perspectives.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication and professionals in the field of CSR. For reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents outside the main study area. The results yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher, with the assistance of trained field workers, personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents. This direct approach helped clarify unclear items and ensured a high response rate. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires at their convenience.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency tables, percentages, and mean scores. These tools helped in interpreting the results in line with the research questions. The analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

Findings

This section presents the data collected from respondents in Owerri Metropolis on community relations and Corporate Social Responsibility practices of oil marketers. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 380 were correctly filled and returned, representing a 95 percent response rate.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 380)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	55.3
	Female	170	44.7
Total		380	100



Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18 to 25 years	80	21.1
	26 to 35 years	130	34.2
	36 to 45 years	100	26.3
	46 years and above	70	18.4
Total		380	100
Education Level	Secondary	90	23.7
	Tertiary	250	65.8
	Postgraduate	40	10.5
Total		380	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The data shows that the majority of respondents were male, accounting for 55.3 percent, while females constituted 44.7 percent. Most respondents fell within the age bracket of 26 to 35 years, indicating a youthful and active population. In terms of education, a large proportion had tertiary education, suggesting that respondents were well informed and capable of providing reliable responses to the study.

Research Question 1

What forms of community relations do oil marketers engage in within Owerri Metropolis?

Table 4.2: Forms of Community Relations (N = 380)

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)
Oil marketers sponsor community development projects	68.2	21.0	10.8	100
Oil marketers regularly interact with community leaders	59.4	28.9	11.7	100
They organise town hall meetings or forums	52.1	35.3	12.6	100
There is open communication with host communities	47.6	38.4	14.0	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table indicates that a majority of respondents affirmed that oil marketers sponsor community development projects and maintain interactions with community leaders. However, fewer respondents confirmed the organisation of town hall meetings and the existence of open communication channels. This suggests that while some forms of engagement exist, communication remains relatively weak.

Research Question 2

What Corporate Social Responsibility programmes are provided by oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis?



Table 4.3: CSR Programmes of Oil Marketers (N = 380)

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)
Provision of scholarships to students	45.8	42.6	11.6	100
Provision of healthcare support	50.2	35.8	14.0	100
Employment opportunities for residents	61.0	28.2	10.8	100
Support for environmental sanitation	56.6	30.0	13.4	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal that employment opportunities, environmental sanitation, and healthcare support are the most recognised CSR activities. However, scholarship provision received lower affirmation, indicating that educational support is not as prominent among oil marketers in the study area.

Research Question 3

How do residents perceive the effectiveness of CSR and community relations?

Table 4.4: Perception of CSR Effectiveness (N = 380)

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)
CSR projects meet community needs	48.9	36.3	14.8	100
Oil marketers are sincere and consistent	42.4	40.5	17.1	100
CSR has improved quality of life	53.2	32.1	14.7	100
Residents are involved in decision making	38.7	46.8	14.5	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results show that while respondents generally acknowledged that CSR initiatives have contributed to improving quality of life, there are concerns about sincerity, consistency, and inclusiveness. A significant proportion of respondents indicated that they are not involved in decision making, suggesting a gap in participatory engagement.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide critical insights into the community relations and Corporate Social Responsibility practices of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis. The responses collected from both community residents and oil marketing company staff indicate varying levels of engagement and impact regarding CSR initiatives and community interactions.



Firstly, the study revealed that most oil marketers engage in some form of CSR, particularly in areas such as community development projects, employment opportunities, educational support, and health interventions. However, the frequency and sustainability of these initiatives differ significantly across companies. This finding aligns with the study of Edeh and Okolie (2022), who observed that CSR practices among firms in Nigeria are often inconsistent and largely dependent on organisational priorities and available resources. Similarly, Okafor (2021) found that while many companies undertake CSR activities, such efforts are often fragmented and lack long term strategic planning. In contrast, Adegbite et al. (2020) argue that organisations with clearly defined CSR frameworks tend to achieve more sustainable community impact, suggesting that the inconsistencies observed in this study may be attributed to the absence of institutionalised CSR policies among some oil marketers.

Secondly, community relations were generally perceived as moderate to fair, with respondents noting that interactions between oil marketers and host communities are often top down. This finding is consistent with the work of Ojo (2023), who reported that limited stakeholder engagement and poor communication channels often undermine corporate community relations in developing economies. However, this finding contrasts with the study by Amaeshi et al. (2021), which emphasised that effective stakeholder engagement enhances trust and mutual understanding between corporations and host communities. The lack of inclusiveness identified in this study therefore suggests a gap between theoretical expectations and practical implementation.

Furthermore, the study found that CSR activities are largely reactive rather than proactive, as many companies tend to respond to community pressure or regulatory demands instead of adopting a planned and continuous engagement strategy. This observation supports the findings of Emeh and Obi (2020), who noted that CSR in Nigeria is frequently driven by external pressures rather than internal commitment. Such reactive approaches limit the long term effectiveness of CSR initiatives and weaken corporate reputation. In contrast, global best practices emphasise proactive CSR as a tool for sustainable development and stakeholder satisfaction.

The study also highlighted the influence of regulatory bodies and government oversight in shaping CSR activities. Companies tend to concentrate their CSR efforts in areas with higher visibility or regulatory scrutiny. This finding aligns with the study of Idemudia (2021), which found that weak regulatory enforcement in some regions leads to uneven distribution of CSR benefits. It further suggests that institutional factors play a critical role in determining the scope and impact of CSR practices.

The findings of this study strongly reflect the assumptions of Stakeholder Theory as propounded by R. Edward Freeman. The theory emphasises that organisations must consider the interests of all stakeholders, particularly host communities, in their operations. However, the observed top down communication, limited community participation, and reactive CSR strategies indicate that oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis have not fully embraced stakeholder oriented practices. This partial application of stakeholder theory may explain the moderate level of trust and perceived insincerity reported by respondents.

From an instrumental perspective, stakeholder theory suggests that organisations that effectively engage stakeholders are more likely to achieve legitimacy, stability, and long term success. The findings of this study support this proposition, as companies that demonstrated more consistent and visible CSR efforts were perceived more positively by community members. Conversely, failure to actively involve stakeholders in decision making processes contributed to dissatisfaction and weakened community relations.



In summary, while oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis are involved in CSR and community relations, their efforts remain inconsistent, reactive, and insufficiently inclusive. The study underscores the need for oil marketers to adopt structured, proactive, and stakeholder driven CSR strategies. Integrating stakeholder theory into corporate practice will not only enhance corporate image but also foster sustainable development and peaceful coexistence with host communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the community relations and Corporate Social Responsibility practices of oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis. The findings reveal that although oil marketers engage in CSR activities such as donations, road repairs, and health interventions, these efforts are largely inconsistent, reactive, and not strategically planned for long term impact.

The study also found that community relations are weak, characterised by poor communication, limited consultation, and low community participation in decision making. As a result, many residents perceive CSR initiatives as insincere and driven more by corporate image than genuine commitment to development.

Furthermore, CSR activities are influenced more by external pressures such as government regulations and community agitation than by internal corporate responsibility. This limits the sustainability and effectiveness of such initiatives.

The study therefore concludes that CSR and community relations among oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis remain sub optimal. There is a need for more proactive, inclusive, and stakeholder driven approaches to enhance trust, improve impact, and promote sustainable development.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis should institutionalise Corporate Social Responsibility through clearly defined policies and sustainable programmes embedded in their operational frameworks. These initiatives should be strategically aligned with the developmental needs of host communities as well as organisational objectives.
2. Oil marketing companies should establish regular and structured channels of communication with host communities. Such engagement should be participatory in nature, allowing community members to actively contribute to the identification, planning, and implementation of CSR projects.
3. Oil marketers in Owerri Metropolis should develop effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of their CSR activities. Feedback from host communities should be systematically incorporated into future initiatives in order to enhance accountability, transparency, and overall effectiveness.

Implications of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Corporate Social Responsibility and community relations within the Nigerian oil marketing sector. While existing literature has largely focused on the upstream segment of the oil industry, this study extends scholarly attention to the downstream sector, particularly oil marketers operating in urban centres such as Owerri Metropolis. It therefore provides empirical evidence that enriches discourse on CSR practices in a relatively underexplored context.



Practically, the findings of this study are significant for oil marketing firms. The study highlights gaps in current CSR practices, particularly in the areas of consistency, stakeholder engagement, and communication. By revealing community perceptions and expectations, the study provides a basis for oil marketers to design more structured, inclusive, and sustainable CSR strategies that can improve community relations, strengthen corporate reputation, and enhance long term operational stability.

The study also has policy implications. It offers evidence based insights that can guide policymakers and regulatory agencies in developing frameworks that promote accountability and standardisation of CSR practices within the oil marketing sector. Such frameworks can ensure that CSR initiatives are not only aligned with corporate objectives but also responsive to the developmental needs of host communities.

Furthermore, the study is relevant to civil society organisations and community leaders, as it provides empirical support for advocacy aimed at promoting greater corporate responsibility and community participation in development initiatives.

Finally, for scholars and students in communication, business, and development studies, this research serves as a valuable academic resource that deepens understanding of the intersection between CSR and community relations in a developing country context, while also providing a foundation for further research in this area.

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