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Residents' Perceptions of NTA and AIT Coverage of Artisanal Refining's Environmental Impact in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Artisanal refining has been on the rise in certain areas in Rivers State. As a result, local communities have resorted to illicit oil refining for survival, despite the associated risks and environmental consequences. Authorities and environmental experts have utilised the media to raise awareness and deter this practice. This study examined Ibaa residents' perceptions of NTA and AIT's coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State, Nigeria. Anchored on perception and cognitive dissonance theories, the study adopted a survey design, utilizing a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. This study adopted a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Based on Meyer's sample size determination model, a sample of 322 respondents was drawn from the target population of 2,914. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Findings showed that Ibaa residents had a positive perception of the coverage, with 247 respondents (83.4%) expressing this view. Also, the coverage influenced how residents of Ibaa Community perceived artisanal refining, as reported by 271 respondents (91.5%). The study concludes that television coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State demonstrates a perceived positive influence. The researchers recommend that media houses continue to provide in-depth analysis of the issue.

Keywords: artisanal oil refining, Ibaa community, perception, Rivers State, television coverage

Introduction

Man and his immediate environment are intertwined so that man's activities affect everything in the environment. As the environment in which man lives expanded in population, more and better means of passing messages to heterogeneous, widely dispersed members of his environment were developed. Advancements in science and technology have driven the invention of more sophisticated equipment. The television was one of these inventions. Kushwaha (2015) noted that while television has globally served as a tool for government promotion, there is a growing trend toward allocating prime-time broadcasting slots to environmental issues. Most environmental documentaries shown on television today attract few viewers because of the academic or obscure manner in which they are presented (Kushwaha, 2015). Channels such as Discovery, National Geographic, and Animal Planet broadcast exclusively on endangered species, wildlife, and sea life.

In Nigeria, Channels Television, in conjunction with DW Television, launched a joint environmental programme called *Eco@Africa*. In addition, *Go Wild*, a weekly docuseries on ARISE News, is another environmental programme that focuses on biodiversity conservation, the use of natural resources, and environmental sustainability. Despite the lively media scene and plethora of news sources, the issue is different in the Nigerian context, where most media houses pay less attention to environmental issues unless in emergencies (Dagogo, 2022). According to the Assistant Director of Programmes, Mrs Christie Badung, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has a national network programme titled *Environment Matters*, aired on Wednesdays at 11 am, and repeated on Thursdays. Also, according to the producer and

presenter, Mrs Nkoli Omhoudu, *Environment Today* airs on Wednesdays, 4:30 pm on Africa Independent Television (AIT).

Several studies on mass media coverage of environmental issues have reported a similar pattern in Nigeria, showing inadequate coverage of the subject. However, residents' perceptions of media coverage may differ. This is because individuals may receive the same information but interpret it differently, leading to different conclusions. Drawing on these outcomes, Rao and Narayan (1998, as cited in Ekpo, 2019) emphasized that perception is a critical cognitive factor and psychological mechanism that enables individuals to understand their environment. In addition, perception is the process of selecting, organising, and interpreting stimuli into meaningful information about the work environment. Rao and Narayan (1998) argue that perception is the single most important determinant of human behaviour, stating further that there can be no behaviour without perception.

When issues of concern make the rounds in the media, people develop certain perceptions of such issues. Artisanal refining is one of the issues that have plagued man and his environment. Orisa-Ubi and Eleberi (2023) observed that while acknowledging the seeming social and economic advantages that artisanal refining brings to the host communities, and the argument that the practice proffers a solution to the problem of unemployment and poverty, especially in the oil-producing areas of the country, the demerits far outweigh the supposed merits both to the community and the environment at large.

Describing the processes involved in this oil theft, Dagogo (2022) averred that crude oil is tapped from pipelines and terminals of oil-producing companies with advanced equipment on waterways, creeks, swamps, and high seas. Plastic pipes are fixed on top of manifold points, the intersection of several pipelines, and crude oil is then pumped into barges. In some cases, ships are connected to underwater hoses, siphoning crude oil directly from multinational corporate facilities located several hundred meters away. Unfortunately, this situation mirrors conditions in the target community, where residents of various age groups participate in illegal refining for specific underlying reasons. Field observations indicated that illegal operators connected large hoses to pipeline manifolds to siphon crude oil into open-pit reservoirs. The oil was then manually scooped into cellophane bags, packaged into sacks, and conveyed using local methods (e.g., wheelbarrows, motorcycles, tricycles, and taxis) to crude-processing sites with improvised drum and metal-plate ovens. This aligns closely with Dagogo's (2022) observations.

Furthermore, Tsui (2011) asserted that the negative impact of artisanal refining on economic development, corruption, and democratic institutions is most pronounced in countries with weak institutions, including Nigeria. Also, artisanal refining inflicts heavy losses on oil companies through direct pipeline damage, and on commercial fisheries and aquaculture businesses due to disrupted market activities. Furthermore, fire outbreaks occurring at dumpsites or during the distillation and storage of petroleum products near residential areas often result in significant loss of lives and property (Cheong, 2012). The impact of this human activity is highly pronounced in Nigeria. Nriagu Udofia, Ekong, and Ebuk (2016) reported that a vast majority of the population experiences frequent direct contact with oil pollution from bunkering activities. Besides, most residents perceive their drinking water to be highly contaminated and report emotional distress, including worry, anger, and fear.

Exposure to artisanal refining activities was associated with a significant increase in the prevalence of diarrhoea, sore eyes, itchy skin, occupational injuries, shock, acute renal failure, extensive epidermolysis, conjunctivitis, mucositis, esophagitis, and chemical pneumonitis (Ordinioha & Sawyer, 2010). Nriagu et al. (2016) stated that hundreds of thousands of residents who live in the Niger Delta, a region in Nigeria where Rivers State is located, are being exposed to artisanal refining activities, which lead to oil contamination near their homes, farm lands, fishing grounds, and in their drinking water and food. The consequences of such exposure on their health are pronounced across physical, mental, and social dimensions. The social problems of artisanal refining include, but are not limited to, affecting aboriginal communities and ethnic or rural enclaves that rely on the natural environment for subsistence and sociocultural uses (Rhoan, 2011). The activity of artisanal refining also threatens the social fabric of local communities, incurring direct financial burdens from medical bills on burn injuries, alongside broader societal costs such as reduced life expectancy (Cheong, 2012).

It is pertinent to state that uninhibited artisanal refining activities lead to environmental degradation within the affected regions. In 2015, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) returned to the interior areas of Rivers communities with a campaign against oil theft and illegal refining through initiatives such as the

Ogoni Restoration Project (ORP). Similarly, in 2018, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), launched a campaign tagged *End Kpo-fire Campaign* against illegal oil refining activities in the Niger Delta. The campaign, carried out in conjunction with the Rivers State Ministry of Environment, was to ensure the success of the clean-up of oil-impacted communities in Rivers State.

Also, the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development launched the *Say No to Oil Theft and Illegal Refining in the Niger Delta* initiative. This community sensitization program specifically targeted areas heavily involved in the illicit oil trade and artisanal refining. The objective of these initiatives was to combat oil theft and artisanal refining by conducting community-level training and raising awareness regarding the associated environmental and health impacts. Likewise, the 'Zero Oil Bunkering and Crude Oil Theft Sensitization Campaign,' spearheaded by Ambassador Sukubo Sara-Igbe, aimed to eradicate illegal oil bunkering and other forms of economic sabotage across nine communities within the Kula Kingdom of Rivers State's Akuku-Toru Local Government Area.

According to a media report by Chinedu (2022) in the *Daily Post*, the then Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike, launched a strict crackdown on individuals involved in illegal oil bunkering across the state. The Governor led government officials, including the Commissioner of Police and other security chiefs, to the forests of the Ibaa Community in the Emohua Local Government Area to uncover illegal crude oil refining sites. Similarly, a *Punch* newspaper report from October 4, 2023, indicated that the paramount ruler of the Ibaa Community, Dr. Sunday Jonah Wobo, warned operators that illegal oil bunkering would no longer be tolerated, and subsequently announced strict sanctions against erring individuals. Because the media is believed to influence society and shape public behavior through repeated broadcasting, the researchers were motivated to evaluate its role in the context of artisanal refining. Against this, the current study aimed to achieve the following objectives.

1. To ascertain the level of awareness among Ibaa residents regarding the coverage of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining by NTA and AIT.
2. To examine Ibaa residents' perceptions of how NTA and AIT cover the environmental impacts of artisanal refining.
3. To determine the extent to which NTA and AIT coverage influences Ibaa residents' perceptions of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining.

Despite the diverse perspectives from which researchers have studied artisanal refining, they universally agree on its environmental harms. Nevertheless, none of the previous studies has assessed residents' perceptions of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in the Ibaa Community of Rivers State. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap, as there is a dearth of literature on the environmental impact of artisanal refining in the selected area. Even though the degree of harm, damage, or loss associated with these problems is believed to be devastating, artisanal refining continues. The Ibaa residents were chosen for this study because of the high concentration of artisanal refining activities in the community. This choice was further motivated by the tragic artisanal refining explosion on October 1, 2023, which resulted in mass casualties at an illegal oil dumpsite, highlighting the urgent need for local environmental assessment.

Literature Review

Environmental Communication

The environment refers to any natural or artificial habitat in which people coexist with plants and animals. It includes the totality of activities, actions, and situations that shape the existence of man or any organism in a given habitat (Nwabueze, 2015). Maler (1998), cited in Nwabueze (2015), defines the environment as "the conditions, circumstances, and influences surrounding and affecting the development of an organism or group of organisms" (p. 252). An individual does not exist in isolation but is affected by what goes on or exists in their environment. In this regard, Nwabueze (2015) opined that the environment is an all-embracing concept, involving all the facts that comprise the planet Earth and its surroundings. The human environment encompasses the land on which individuals live and die, the air they breathe, and all hydrographic systems and aquatic life. Man, therefore, is both a product and a shaper of his environment. In the same vein, Ayantayo (2004) describes the environment as "a collection of natural and artificial arrangements in which humanity is completely dependent on survival and sustenance through food, water, and the trees for shelter" (p. 2).

Ayantayo's (2004) definition lends credence to the earlier observation in this study regarding the

relationship between human existence and the environment. This is premised on the fact that the environment provides for and shapes the existence of man. Additionally, this is buttressed by Adegoroye's (1997) definition of environment, as cited in Nwabueze (2015). This definition suggests that the environment is the aggregate of physical and biological entities external to humans that support human existence across terrestrial, aquatic, and atmospheric domains. Similarly, Nwabueze (2015), citing Hughes (1998), averred that the environment encompasses all surrounding conditions and influences that affect an organism or a group of organisms. This demonstrates that the environment encompasses not only humanity's immediate physical habitat but also the interactive relationship shaped by human activities and existence. As Kumar (2015) observes, thus, by environment, we mean not only our immediate surroundings but also a variety of issues connected with human activity, productivity, basic living, and its impact on natural resources such as land, water, atmosphere, forests, dams, habitat, health, energy resources, and wildlife. Based on the definitions presented thus far, it can be deduced that the environment primarily sustains the survival and continuous existence of humanity and other living organisms. The environment consists of all external forces, influences, and substances that enable an organism to survive within a given habitat. The environment is essentially vital to man to the extent that without the right environment, man is nothing. This further demonstrates why human societies must protect the environment, as the continuity of life is entirely dependent upon it (Nwabueze, 2015).

Artisanal Refining and the Environment

Artisanal refining, or oil bunkering or illegal crude oil refining, cooking, or Kpofire, refers to the theft of crude oil followed by local refining using traditional methods and resources, without using modern technology (Douglas, 2018). This process involves heating crude oil in a makeshift oven to extract petroleum products. In this case, the leftover is discharged into the environment without considering the harmful impact on the ecosystem (Douglas, 2018). Emodi et al. (2022) observe that artisanal refining involves heating crude oil in rudimentary metal containers to extract petroleum products. The process completely bypasses environmental, health, and safety protocols, thereby risking catastrophic consequences. It is a small-scale or subsistence distillation of crude petroleum over a specific boiling point to produce usable products, including kerosene, gasoline, and diesel (Luke et al., 2021). This refining method is said to be similar to the process of distilling local gins popularly known as *Ogogoro*. Ikezam et al. (2021) support that artisanal refining frequently uses the same talent and technology utilised in the production of local gin in Nigeria.

Ukponahiusi and Famusudo (2019) observed that the majority of artisanal refiners are disgruntled former employees of multinational oil corporations. Having received specialized training from oil and gas companies under the unfulfilled promise of formal employment, these individuals utilize their technical knowledge to operate artisanal refineries. There is a link between pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, and artisanal crude refining, as the latter cannot exist without the rest. Actors within the sector justify artisanal refining as a survival strategy driven by systemic socio-economic marginalization, arguing that the indigenous populations of the Niger Delta are denied equitable distribution of federal oil revenues. The materials used for illegal crude oil refining are basic, such as drums and metal pipes welded together, and crude oil is heated in these makeshift setups to produce distilled crude products, which are collected, cooled, and stored in tanks for consumption (Douglas, 2018). Additionally, the typical requirements for a refining camp include land with access to a river, a primary cooking “oven,” storage space (GEEPEE tanks is commonly used for storage), a cooling system, a series of drums (typically made of rubber or metal), galvanised pipes, pumping equipment, hoses, bundles of zinc, 12 by one board, and some quantity of detergent (laundry powder for washing drums) (Onuh et al., 2021). These products are easily available at low prices, meeting local energy demand. This artisanal refining process has created jobs for local youths, but it has also harmed the ecosystem (SDN, 2015). The distillation process involves heating crude oil in metal drums to its boiling point, then cooling and condensing the emitted vapor to extract fuel (Ikezam et al., 2021).

In most cases, crude oil is stored at the camp for some time to reduce the amount of gas through evaporation. After that, it goes into the refining oven. It is heated to specific temperature thresholds during distillation, depending on the boiling points of the desired products. Local refining camps are established within the deep forests of the Niger Delta to process crude oil using indigenous distillation methods (Bebeteidoh et al., 2020). In the Niger Delta, artisanal refining procedures involve drilling holes and installing taps to siphon crude oil into a boat (Onakpohor, Fakinle, Sonibare, Oke, & Akeredolu, 2020). Then,

vessels, commonly called “Cotonou boats”, transport refined crude oil. After being carried to the site by boat, the employees use a rubber hose and pump to move the cold crude oil from the tapping point to a storage tank. The stolen crude oil may also be stored in open pits at artisanal refining locations. These pits are nothing more than large holes excavated in the ground and covered with synthetic material or plastic of sufficient thickness to prevent oil leakage. The typical number of camp staff is on the order of the boiling pot, ranging from 2 to 20, while larger camps may have many more (Onakpohor et al., 2020). Due to the proliferation of hundreds of artisanal refineries across the central Niger Delta over the years, this illicit commerce has grown significantly (Onuh et al., 2021). There are several crude oil deposits in the Niger Delta, especially in the South-South area. Ikezam et al. (2021) reported 521, 721, and 82 artisanal refining sites in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta.

Empirical Review

In a related study on the role of mass media in disseminating environmental awareness, Kushwaha (2015) evaluated whether contemporary education adequately equips the younger generation to face the dual challenges of rapid technological advancement and severe ecological degradation in the globalized society. The study indicated that the media play an important role in forming the public’s positive attitudes towards the environment. The work also showed that the media’s role in increasing environmental awareness is enormous, as it reaches a vast percentage of humans in a complex society. Another study by Misra (2021) reviewed available literature to understand the role of online and offline media in environmental awareness. Among the study's findings was that print media slows the dissemination of environmental news, whereas web-based social platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, and X) ensure immediate, borderless transmission. Both studies agreed that the media play an important role in forming positive attitudes towards the environment. Nevertheless, Kushwaha’s (2015) study focused on how modern education equips the younger generation to tackle environmental degradation. The current study concerns residents’ awareness and perception of the media’s coverage of environmental issues. In terms of similarity, Misra’s (2021) study and the current study focused on the role of the media in environmental awareness campaigns. While Misra's (2021) work was a comparative study of print and social media, the current research assesses residents’ awareness and perceptions of broadcast media’s coverage of environmental issues. Also, Misra's (2021) study was desk research utilizing available literature. The current study utilized both primary and secondary data sources.

Similarly, Nwachukwu and Tumba (2021) investigated the role of public awareness campaigns in reducing crude oil illegal refining in the Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State*, Nigeria.* A descriptive research design was employed to examine the current level of awareness, factors influencing engagement in illegal refining, the effectiveness of past awareness efforts, and propose strategies for improving public awareness campaigns. The findings indicated that while the majority of respondents were familiar with the concept of crude oil illegal refining, there was a lack of awareness of the associated dangers. The preceding study is similar to the current research as both studies focused on illegal refining of crude oil in Rivers State and adopted a survey research method. However, the reviewed work was conducted in the Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State, whereas the current study was focused on the Emohua Local Government Area. Also, different templates were used to generate the sample sizes for the studies.

Ukaegbu, Berezi, and Kuro-Berezi (2023) evaluated the potential of community radio to combat crude oil theft within the oil-bearing communities of the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study aimed to evaluate community perceptions of programmes broadcast by state- and privately owned radio stations, as well as the impact of these programmes on the audience. Findings from the study showed that state- and privately-owned radio stations do not have programmes dedicated to discussing oil theft. Further findings indicated that programmes were not aired in the respondents’ native language on state- and privately-owned radio. Respondents find it difficult to understand the language used by the radio stations. This empirical study and the current study focused on the environmental impacts of crude oil activities. Both studies aimed to examine community residents’ perceptions of broadcast media’s coverage and their role in shaping people’s attitudes towards oil vandalism. Based on the studies’ locations, the preceding study was conducted in Bayelsa State and focused on the radio as a broadcast medium. The studies also adopted different theories of the mass media.

Theoretical Framework

Perception Theory

The Perception Theory, propounded by Berelson and Steiner in 1964, posits that mass media messages are subject to individual interpretation, leading to varied responses among audience members. The theory acknowledges the complexity of message interpretation, suggesting that achieving desired attitudes, beliefs, or behavioural changes can be challenging. Decoding, the process of receiving and interpreting messages, involves perception and processing of stimuli through the senses (Severin & Tankard, 2001). This highlights the limitations of mass communication, where the message's effectiveness depends on the receiver's interpretation.

Severin and Tankard (2001) emphasised three processes influencing mass communication: selective exposure, selective attention, and selective retention. Selective exposure refers to the tendency of individuals to engage with messages that align with their existing attitudes, while avoiding discordant ones. This concept stems from Festinger and Carlsmith's (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests people reduce dissonance by seeking consonant information.

Selective attention involves focusing on aspects of a message that align with existing attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours, while avoiding contradictory sections. This selective processing influences how individuals interpret and respond to messages, often reinforcing pre-existing views. Also, selective retention is the tendency for the recall of information to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes, and other psychological factors. Thus, the selective processes can be thought of as four rings of denseness, with selective exposure as the outermost ring, followed by selective attention, and finally selective retention.

Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008) pointed out defence mechanisms against undesired information: selective attention, selective perception, and selective retention. These processes allow individuals to filter out contradictory information, influencing message effectiveness. This highlights the complexity of communication, where receivers actively shape message interpretation. In relation to this study, how Ibaa residents perceive television coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State goes a long way in influencing them.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Ndimele and Innocent (2016) documented that the theory was propounded in 1957 by Leon Festinger. The theory assumes that attitude change occurs when there is cognitive dissonance. According to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling an individual experiences when receiving two contradictory or opposite cognitions and ideas at the same time. Thus, an individual who holds two conflicting attitudes or opinions about a particular issue experiences an uncomfortable internal tension. Anaeto and Aneato (2010) further elaborated that the theory states that, when an individual has cognitions that are not in agreement, a state of dissonance (tension) is created. To reduce the dissonance, the individual either rejects the conflicting thought or rationalizes and absorbs it into an existing attitude.

The theory holds that people strive to justify their behaviours by reducing the dissonance or inconsistency between their cognitive (perceptions or beliefs) and reality (Asemah, 2010; Ndimele & Innocent, 2016). Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) note that cognitive inconsistency gives rise to pressure to reduce the dissonance. To avoid this, individuals hold tightly to their beliefs, opinions, or norms, strongly resisting any information, message, or attempt to alter them. Individuals can achieve a state of consonance if they hold continuously to their beliefs while rejecting contradictory information. To resolve a state of dissonance, individuals must accommodate the contradictory information into their existing belief systems (Ndimele & Innocent, 2016).

The theory argues that the experience of dissonance (incompatible beliefs and actions) is aversive and people are highly motivated to avoid it. In their efforts to avoid feelings of dissonance, people will avoid hearing views that oppose their own, change their beliefs to match their actions, and seek reassurance after making a difficult decision (Asemah, 2011). This argument explains that when individuals encounter new information or experiences, they categorise the information based on their pre-existing attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs. If the new encounter does not coincide with their pre-existing assumptions, then dissonance is likely to occur. When cognitive dissonance occurs, individuals are motivated to reduce it by avoiding information that would either trigger or exacerbate the tension. For

this reason, cognitive dissonance is considered a drive state that motivates people to achieve consonance and reduce dissonance. For instance, if residents of the Ibaa community value a healthy lifestyle and a clean environment yet tolerate local artisanal refining activities, they will likely experience cognitive dissonance due to the contradiction between their beliefs and their actions. If the amount of dissonance is significant, they may be motivated to change their attitudes and shun illegal artisanal refining activities.

Methodology

Design

This research used a survey design to evaluate residents' perceptions of NTA and AIT's coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining. The survey research design is appropriate when data are to be gathered from a group of respondents whose characteristics may be taken as being representative of the large population. It involves studying a sample taken from a population to understand its major characteristics, which can be generalised to the entire population.

Research population

The study's population was drawn from the Ibaa community, which has an estimated population of 2,914. This figure is based on the 2024 projection by the National Population Commission and National Bureau of Statistics using a 2.3% growth rate. A sample of 322 was drawn from the population using Meyer's Sample Size Determination Template.

Data Collection Procedure

This study used purposive and accidental sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researchers to select only the residents of the Ibaa community. They were purposively selected for data collection after meeting the basic selection criteria. The inclusion criteria required that participants be residents of the Rivers State study area, aware of the impacts of artisanal refining, and have regular exposure to the selected television stations. Accidental sampling, also known as grab or opportunity sampling, involves drawing a sample from a readily available population rather than using a systematically determined selection method. The technique was used to elicit responses from Ibaa community residents who were on the ground and available to provide the information needed at hand in the field.

The study utilized a questionnaire to collect data, with items structured on a four-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A consisted of three demographic items, while Section B contained propositions that respondents evaluated using a Likert scale. The questionnaire had a total of 10 items. The items in section B of the questionnaire were couched to address the third and fourth research objectives. Thus, items 1-3 addressed the first research objective, 4-6 addressed the second objective, and 7-10 addressed the third objective. To ensure effective administration of the questionnaire, the researcher stratified the Ibaa community into four geographic blocs. Two trained research assistants were then deployed, each assigned to two blocs, to guide respondents through the survey by reading and interpreting the items. This process lasted two days as the respondents were given enough time from their busy schedules. To ensure that there was no over-administration, the researchers terminated (stopped) the process as soon as the target population was reached.

Also, NTA and AIT were purposively selected because of their operational presence in the study area and their specialized programmes. They broadcast programmes dedicated to environmental segments, namely *Environment Matters* and *Environment Today*, which address the preservation of biological diversity, sustainable natural resource management, and ecological conservation. Apparently, it is believed that since the media have the right to cover issues of public concern, such as artisanal oil refining, the choice of these stations is justifiable on the basis that, given the development media propositions, they ought to use their platform to campaign for an environmentally friendly ecosystem.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the study established face validity by presenting the questionnaire to communication research experts. Based on their scrutiny and feedback, all necessary corrections were implemented. Similarly, for reliability, the researchers used the split-half reliability. This ensured that the responses obtained through the questionnaire were split into two

halves and then scored independently to check correlation. In doing this, the researchers randomly divided all items that purported to measure the same construct into two sets and thereafter administered the entire instrument. The data were analysed using the Cronbach Alpha formula to establish reliability. The total score for each randomly divided half was calculated. This gave a coefficient of 0.85 between the two total scores of the instrument.

Data Analysis Procedure

This research used descriptive statistics to analyze data, and the findings are presented in tables. The demographic data were analysed using simple percentages and frequency. The mean criterion was used to analyse the items on the four-point Likert rating scale in a tabular form. To calculate the mean, numerical values were assigned to the four-point Likert scale responses: Strongly Agree (SA) received 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. Using a criterion mean of 2.5, scores below this threshold were regarded as 'disagreed,' while scores of 2.5 and above were considered 'agreed.

Findings

A total of 322 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents, residents of the Ibaa Community in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, who watch NTA and AIT, out of which 296 copies were retrieved and used for this study. The retrieval rate of the administered instrument was 92%, while the coefficient index was 0.85. From the demographic data analysis, 154 respondents were 26–30 years, representing the highest proportion (56%). This showed their level of maturity regarding the subject matter. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were male, which accounts for 208 individuals (70.3%). Geographically, 86 respondents (29%) were from Mgbuosimini, the first and most populous bloc of the Ibaa community.

Table 1. *Ibaa Residents' Level of Awareness of NTA and AIT Coverage of the Environmental Impact of Artisanal Refining*

S/N	Description	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	WMS	Decision
1.	As an Ibaa resident, I am aware of NTA and AIT coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining	182 728	27 81	63 126	24 24	296 959	3.2	Agreed
2.	I have watched NTA and AIT programmes that discuss artisanal refining activities in Rivers State.	43 172	105 315	125 250	23 23	296 760	2.5	Agreed
3.	I have seen NTA and AIT commercials and promos, as well as announcements about the environmental impact of artisanal refining	63 252	182 546	27 54	24 24	296 876	2.9	Agreed

NTA: Nigerian Television Authority
AIT: Africa Independent Television

The data in Table 1 indicate that Ibaa residents are highly aware of NTA and AIT and their programmes on the environmental impact of artisanal refining, and they watch the television stations.

Table 2. *Ibaa Residents' Perceptions of NTA and AIT Coverage of the Environmental Impact of Artisanal Refining*

S/N	Description	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Decision
4.	As an Ibaa resident, I believe NTA's and AIT's coverage accurately reflected and provided a precise portrayal of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in the state.	64 256	165 495	44 88	23 23	296 862	2.9	Agreed
5.	My perception of the environmental impact of artisanal refining is that NTA's and AIT's coverage misrepresents the environmental	24 96	44 132	165 330	63 63	296 621	2.0	Disagreed

	impact of artisanal refining as obtained in the state.							
6.	I believe there is generally a positive perception of the accuracy of NTA's and AIT's coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State.	24 96	226 678	23 46	23 23	296 813	2.8	Agreed

NTA: Nigerian Television Authority
AIT: Africa Independent Television

The data in Table 2 show that out of the 3 items used to measure residents' perceptions of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State, only item 5 had a negative mean. The other items were above the average. This, therefore, indicated an agreement between the two variables: awareness and perception. However, the data also showed that this perception was predicated on NTA's and AIT's coverage of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining, as indicated by 247 respondents (83.4%).

Table 3. *The Extent to Which NTA and AIT Coverage of Artisanal Refining Influences Ibaa Residents' Perception of the Environmental Impact*

S/N	Description	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Decision
7.	Both stations' reporting has a notable impact on shaping my views on the environmental impacts of artisanal refining in the state.	64 256	207 621	0 0	25 25	296 902	3.0	Agreed
8.	NTA's and AIT's coverage influences my understanding of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining in Rivers State.	0 0	229 689	67 134	0 0	296 823	2.7	Agreed
9.	Due to this coverage, I see artisanal refining as illegal and life-threatening.	67 268	229 689	0 0	0 0	296 957	3.2	Agreed
10.	The coverage exposed me to certain dangers, which led me to stop such illegal activities and advocate for a conducive, friendly environment.	63 252	182 546	27 54	24 24	296 876	2.9	Agreed

NTA: Nigerian Television Authority
AIT: Africa Independent Television

The data in Table 3 show the extent to which NTA's and AIT's coverage of artisanal refining influences Ibaa residents' perceptions of the environmental impact. The results indicated a perceived, positive influence. The data also revealed that this influence was predicated on two major perceptions: the residents' trust in the accuracy of NTA's and AIT's coverage, and their evaluation of the stations' precision in portraying the environmental impacts of artisanal refining. Thus, most respondents (91.5%), representing 271, affirmed that both stations' coverage notably shapes their views about the environmental impact of artisanal refining. Ultimately, 296 of the respondents view the activity as illegal and life-threatening. This outcome implies that NTA's and AIT's coverage of artisanal refining highly influences Ibaa residents' perceptions of its environmental impact.

Discussion

In response to the research objectives, this study sought to: ascertain the level of awareness among Ibaa residents regarding NTA's and AIT's coverage of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining; determine the residents' perceptions of this media coverage; and identify the extent to which the coverage influenced their overall perception of the issue. The findings showed that Ibaa residents were highly aware of NTA's and AIT's coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining, as presented in Table 1. This finding corroborated Nwachukwu and Tumba's (2021) study, which found that a majority of respondents were familiar with the concept of crude oil illegal refining. Also, data in Table 2 showed that a higher number of respondents perceived NTA's and AIT's coverage of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining as accurate. This was due to the stations' precision in portraying artisanal refining.

The data also indicate a high level of residents' perceptions of the issue. This finding contrasts with Nwachukwu and Tumba's (2021) study, which found that the majority of respondents were familiar with the illegal refining of crude oil but perceived the media's coverage as lacking precision and

accuracy. They believed there was a lack of awareness about the associated dangers. However, item 5 in Table 2 showed that the residents disagreed with the statement that the statistics' coverage misrepresents the environmental impacts of artisanal refining as obtained in the state. This could be because NTA's and AIT's stories use community voices and real footage, making the coverage sound accurate to those affected. Since residents rely on what they see and experience, they believe the stations do not misrepresent the issue. The application of Perception Theory aligns with the core of this research, which frames the media as an influential agent of change. This theoretical framework supports the study's findings because, among available programmes, the television audience selectively exposed themselves to NTA's and AIT's coverage of artisanal refining since it aligned with their immediate informational needs and environmental interests. Consequently, selective perception driven by the audience led them to perceive, interpret, and retain messages that aligned with their specific interests, while actively ignoring content that counteracted their established perspectives. This supports the current finding that Ibaa residents perceived the television coverage of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining as accurate.

The data also revealed that television coverage highly influenced how Ibaa residents perceived the situation, with the majority identifying artisanal refining as illegal and life-threatening. This aligns with findings by Kushwaha (2015), who emphasized the media's ability to shape public attitudes and increase environmental awareness. Given its mass reach, the media remains central to advocacy campaigns seeking to protect the environment and support vulnerable populations across the Niger Delta. However, these findings contrast with Nwachukwu and Tumba's (2021) study, which found that while most respondents were familiar with the concept of illegal crude oil refining, mass media coverage was shallow and biased. Consequently, there was a lack of awareness regarding the associated dangers, meaning the coverage failed to significantly influence public perception of the environmental, health, and economic impacts. This disparity highlights an urgent need for relevant agencies to step up interventions and curb this menace in Rivers State.

Furthermore, the empirical evidence presented in Tables 2 and 3 reinforces direct-effects media theory, which posits that the influence of media content is closely tied to an individual's level of exposure. By demonstrating that television coverage significantly shaped residents' views of the environmental impacts of artisanal refining, these findings substantiate a clear relationship between media exposure and audience perception. Also, the findings of this study were at variance with the cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that attitude change occurs when an individual experiences psychological discomfort from holding two conflicting beliefs simultaneously. In this case, the expected cognitive friction did not materialize among the respondents, as their perceptions aligned with the media coverage. This is because, before viewing NTA's and AIT's coverage, Ibaa residents already held preconceived beliefs about artisanal refining. Consequently, they filtered the media content through their existing biases, rejecting coverage that threatened their views while accepting reports that reinforced their established beliefs. This is why there were no cases of behaviour modifications. Even though the television coverage positively influenced the residents' perceptions, it was insufficient to override their established beliefs. Consequently, the local population continued their artisanal refining operations despite the media's messaging. Thus, programme producers and other media workers must strive to highlight the benefits of abandoning artisanal refining. To maximize efficacy, broadcasters should design campaigns tailored specifically to the community's cultural beliefs, ensuring that environmental messages resonate with residents' established views.

Conclusion

Since the media is a critical part of society, every society is as unique as the media. Media organizations require a stable and healthy environment to remain viable. Therefore, priority must be given to initiatives that raise awareness, protect communities, and utilize the media's power to ensure long-term environmental sustainability in the regions where the stations operate. The current study has investigated residents' awareness and perceptions of NTA's and AIT's coverage of oil-related environmental issues in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study has shown that television is a critical medium of creating awareness and closes the information gap to meet the state's development aspirations. It is concluded that television coverage of the environmental impact of artisanal refining in Rivers State demonstrates a perceived, positive influence on Ibaa residents. In the Nigerian context, particularly the South-South region, the findings of this study not only provide a framework for discouraging artisanal refining but also highlight the media's influence in fostering and sustaining a viable ecosystem necessary for the survival of local communities. By evaluating

how Ibaa residents perceive NTA's and AIT's broadcasting, this study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between media representation, community awareness, and environmental action regarding illegal artisanal refining in Rivers State. Given the need for continued research into how broadcast media coverage of artisanal refining impacts society, this study offers the following recommendations:

1. Media houses generally should emulate NTA and AIT in maintaining and prioritising accuracy in all their coverage and programmes.
2. Since the media's coverage influences residents' perceptions, media houses in the course of their programming and coverage should continue to give an in-depth analysis of the environmental impact of artisanal refining to influence the audience's behaviour.

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