



Veritatis Gaudium:
Multidisciplinary Journal of Postgraduate Studies

College of Postgraduate Studies,
Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria

ISSN: 3043 - 5285

Volume 1, Number 4, August Special Edition, 2026

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17243.12321

**PETRO-SONIC POLITICS: MUSIC, PUBLIC PERCEPTION, AND OIL
POLICY IN NIGERIA**

Albert O. U. Authority, PhD

Department of Music, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

dr.albert.oau@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-9433-3801

&

Olaoluwa Marvelous Ayokunmi

Department of Music, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

om.ayokunmi@mail.ui.edu.ng

ORCID: 0009-0007-6072-1837

&

Bossa Kemmy Blessing

Department of Music, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State

blessingkemmybossa@gmail.com

Abstract

Public engagement with Nigeria's oil and energy governance remains limited despite worsening environmental degradation and rising public frustration. This study examined how popular music shapes youth interpretations of crude oil exploitation, accountability, and sustainability. Using a mixed-methods design, it analysed 120 songs released between 2000 and 2025 and incorporated digital survey responses from 842 Nigerian youths. The analysis identified persistent narratives of corruption, environmental injustice, and resource mismanagement across genres, reinforced by visual motifs in music videos. Survey data showed that 68% of respondents learned about oil issues through music and 54% reported heightened emotional engagement with energy debates, with many viewing musicians as more credible communicators than policymakers. The study found that music functions as both a reflective register of public frustration and a generative space for energy literacy, revealing a culturally resonant and underused pathway for strengthening public awareness and supporting more participatory energy governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Music, Nigeria, Oil Policy, Petrosonic Politics, Public Perception

Introduction

Music has long been a central medium through which Nigerians interpret political authority, express social grievances, and imagine alternative futures. From Fela Kuti's Afrobeat indictments of state violence to contemporary Afrobeats, Highlife, and Hip-Hop commentaries on inequality, musicians have consistently shaped public discourse on governance and justice (Olaniyan, 2004; Oikelome, 2013). This cultural vitality stands in stark contrast to Nigeria's petroleum-dependent economy, where crude oil remains the dominant source of state revenue and export earnings (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025). Despite this centrality, oil governance continues to be marked by corruption, environmental degradation, and recurrent production disruptions, particularly in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2008; Okonta & Douglas, 2003). Yet public engagement with energy policy remains limited, revealing a persistent disconnect between the lived consequences of extraction and the technocratic frameworks that shape national energy decisions.

Research in environmental communication and energy justice demonstrates that public understanding of resource politics is shaped not only by formal policy but also by cultural narratives and mediated discourse (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009; Sovacool et al., 2019). Meanwhile, scholarship on African political mobilisation shows that music has historically functioned as a catalyst for civic participation and collective action (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Okeke, 2019). However, this literature rarely intersects. Analyses of Nigeria's oil sector overwhelmingly prioritise economic, geopolitical, and regulatory perspectives, while cultural expressions that shape public sentiment remain marginal in mainstream energy debates. This creates a conceptual tension: although musicians routinely critique environmental harm and governance failures, these narratives exert little influence on policy processes. The contradiction between abundant cultural critique and limited civic impact underscores a deeper structural problem: public narratives about oil are widespread, but they are not systematically integrated into energy governance.

This omission is increasingly consequential. Nigeria's demographic profile, with a population exceeding 216 million and a youth majority (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), intersects with global sustainability imperatives articulated in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Achieving these goals requires not only infrastructural reform but also shifts in public consciousness, participatory governance, and inclusive communication. Music, as a ubiquitous and emotionally resonant medium, offers a potential bridge between technocratic policy frameworks and grassroots understanding. Yet its role in shaping energy literacy, influencing public sentiment, and supporting innovation outreach remains underexplored.

This study addresses that gap by analysing how Nigerian popular music frames public sentiment on crude-oil exploitation, environmental degradation, and energy governance, and by evaluating the potential of musical narratives to strengthen public engagement and sustainability outreach. Guided by Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Cultural Political Economy (Jessop, 2010), and Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), it employs a mixed-methods design combining qualitative content analysis of songs released between 2000 and 2025 with digital survey data from Nigerian youth and music consumers. By positioning music as both a reflective archive of public frustration and a generative civic resource, the article advances a cultural-political lens for understanding how sonic narratives can influence energy literacy, reconfigure public debates, and open alternative pathways for participatory sustainability transitions in Nigeria. It ultimately asks whether a medium that already shapes how Nigerians feel about oil might also shape how they govern it.

Literature Review

Nigeria's oil sector has shaped the country's political economy for over five decades, generating the bulk of export earnings and state revenue (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025). Yet this concentration of wealth has entrenched structural inequalities rather than broad-based development. Seminal analyses show how oil extraction has produced rentierism, elite capture, and severe ecological degradation, particularly in the Niger Delta where pollution, dispossession, and violence remain endemic (Watts, 2008; Okonta & Douglas, 2003). These extractive dynamics have deepened governance crises and fuelled demands for resource control (Obi, 2019). Recent work on African energy transitions underscores that such legacies continue to constrain contemporary sustainability efforts, with Nigeria's transition shaped by institutional fragility, socio-environmental conflict, and uneven political will (Aklin & Urpelainen, 2022; Power et al., 2023).

A second stream of scholarship highlights the centrality of public awareness and civic participation in shaping energy governance. Energy literacy in Nigeria remains limited, constrained by unequal access to information and weak channels for public engagement (Nwankwo & Ifeoma, 2017). Energy justice frameworks emphasise that inclusive participation is essential for fair and sustainable transitions, especially for communities historically marginalised by extractive industries (Sovacool et al., 2019). Youth activism has become increasingly visible, driven by digital media and rising concern over environmental decline. Studies of Nigerian digital activism show how online platforms amplify environmental grievances, mobilise collective action, and challenge state narratives (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). Cultural media, including music and celebrity advocacy, have also been shown to shape climate discourse and public sentiment (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009). Comparative research from Brazil, Indonesia, and India demonstrates that cultural expression can democratise energy debates and contest dominant extractive paradigms (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). Yet these insights have rarely been applied to Nigeria's oil sector, where cultural narratives remain peripheral in mainstream policy analysis.

A third body of literature examines music and popular culture as political and communicative forces. Nigerian musicians have historically used their platforms to critique corruption, authoritarianism, and environmental injustice. Fela Kuti's Afrobeat and Eedris Abdulkareem's Hip Hop exemplify how artists mobilise collective memory and emotional resonance to challenge state power (Olaniyan, 2004; Oikelome, 2013). Eyerman and Jamison (1998) argue that music functions as a vehicle for social mobilisation, while Street (2012) highlights its symbolic power in shaping political consciousness. Contemporary African popular culture continues this tradition, with Afrobeats, Amapiano, and other genres increasingly linked to political mobilisation, youth activism, and social critique across the continent (Ntarangwi, 2021; Nyairo, 2022). Globally, music has also been shown to play a role in environmental activism, shaping public narratives around climate change and ecological responsibility (Dunaway, 2015). Despite this rich archive of sonic critique, scholarship has not systematically examined how musical narratives intersect with public understanding of energy governance.

Theoretical work provides a foundation for such an inquiry. Framing Theory explains how narratives emphasise particular aspects of reality, shaping public interpretation and political meaning (Entman, 1993). Cultural Political Economy links cultural production to economic structures, revealing how media narratives reflect and contest dominant ideologies (Jessop, 2010). Public Sphere Theory positions media as a site of democratic dialogue, with Fraser (1990) expanding Habermas's (1989) original conception to include counter-publics and cultural forms. Postcolonial energy studies further argue that resource politics in Africa cannot be understood without attending to colonial legacies, cultural resistance, and the symbolic dimensions of extraction (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Together, these frameworks suggest that music can construct alternative discourses around oil, governance, and sustainability, yet empirical research on this relationship remains sparse.

Environmental communication scholarship reinforces the potential of cultural media in shaping public understanding of ecological issues. Cox (2013) defines environmental communication as the strategic use of media to inform and mobilise publics, while Pezzullo and Sandler (2016) show how cultural narratives translate complex scientific data into accessible forms. Artistic expressions have also been shown to influence corporate responsibility and sustainability practices (Le Menestrel et al., 2014). Case studies from Latin America and Southeast Asia demonstrate that cultural media can support sustainability outreach and innovation, particularly in contexts where formal education is limited.

Across these literatures, a clear gap emerges. Although Nigeria's music culture is deeply political and widely consumed, its role in shaping public perceptions of oil governance, environmental degradation, and energy futures remains underexplored. Existing studies focus predominantly on technical, economic, or geopolitical dimensions of the oil sector, neglecting the cultural narratives that influence public sentiment and civic engagement. This omission is theoretically significant because it overlooks a major communicative arena through which Nigerians interpret extractive politics, and practically significant because it limits opportunities for culturally grounded sustainability outreach. By examining how Nigerian popular music frames oil-related issues and influences public perception, this study contributes an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates musicology, energy studies, and public engagement. It advances a more holistic understanding of energy governance and highlights the potential of cultural media to support participatory and socially responsive energy transitions.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Framing Theory as its central analytical lens, supported by insights from Cultural Political Economy and Public Sphere Theory, to illuminate how Nigerian popular music reflects and shapes public discourse on oil governance and environmental sustainability. Framing Theory provides the conceptual core because it explains how narratives organise meaning, highlight particular aspects of reality, and guide public interpretation (Entman, 1993). Recent African media scholarship shows that framing plays a decisive role in shaping public understanding of political and environmental issues, particularly where cultural narratives mediate complex governance challenges (Mutsvairo & Rønning, 2020). In Nigerian popular music, lyrical narratives operate as framing devices that articulate public sentiment on crude-oil exploitation, corruption, and ecological harm. Artists construct interpretive packages that emphasise injustice, accountability, or resistance, shaping how listeners understand energy governance and environmental responsibility. This focus on framing allows the study to examine not only what musicians say about oil politics, but how they structure these messages to mobilise emotion, critique authority, and foster civic awareness.

Cultural Political Economy reinforces this analysis by situating musical frames within broader struggles over meaning and power in Nigeria's oil economy. Jessop's work highlights how cultural production becomes a site of ideological contestation, where dominant economic paradigms are challenged and alternative visions of sustainability and equity are articulated. Nigerian genres such as Afrobeats, Highlife, and Hip Hop frequently construct counter-hegemonic narratives that critique elite control and resource mismanagement. These narratives do more than express frustration; they contest the semiotic foundations of Nigeria's petroleum economy and propose culturally grounded imaginaries of environmental justice. Cultural studies of political communication further demonstrate that popular culture often functions as an arena where political meanings are negotiated, resisted, and reimagined, making music a potent medium for shaping civic consciousness (Street, 2012).

Public Sphere Theory complements these perspectives by explaining how framed narratives circulate and acquire social traction. Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a space for rational-critical debate, while Fraser expanded this to include counterpublics formed by marginalised groups who use cultural media to articulate alternative political voices. Nigerian music operates as such a

counterpublic arena, enabling citizens, particularly youth, to express grievances, mobilise support, and participate in democratic dialogue about energy futures. Through its emotional resonance and widespread reach, music makes complex policy issues accessible, amplifies voices excluded from formal policymaking, and expands the communicative terrain of energy governance.

Together, these theories provide a coherent and non-redundant framework. Framing Theory offers the primary mechanism for analysing how musical narratives construct meaning around oil and environmental issues. Cultural Political Economy explains how these frames contest dominant ideologies and articulate alternative visions of sustainability. Public Sphere Theory clarifies how framed narratives circulate within democratic discourse and contribute to participatory governance. This integrated approach addresses a critical gap in energy scholarship, which often overlooks cultural and communicative dimensions of public engagement. By positioning music as a strategic medium for advancing SDGs 7 (Clean Energy), 13 (Climate Action), and 16 (Strong Institutions), the framework contributes to a more inclusive and culturally responsive understanding of energy innovation and sustainability outreach in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employs a desk-based mixed-methods design that integrates qualitative content analysis of Nigerian popular music with a digital survey of Nigerian youth and music consumers. The design aligns with the study's aim of examining how musical narratives frame public sentiment on crude-oil exploitation and environmental governance, and how audiences interpret these narratives in relation to energy literacy. All procedures are documented clearly to ensure full reproducibility.

The qualitative dataset comprises 62 Nigerian popular songs released between 2000 and 2025 across Afrobeats, Highlife, Hip Hop, and related genres. Songs were included if they contained explicit or implicit references to oil, environmental degradation, corruption, governance, or social justice. Songs were identified through systematic searches of major digital platforms, artist discographies, curated playlists, and cultural blogs. Each song was independently screened by two coders to confirm thematic relevance. Lyrics were transcribed from verified sources and cross-checked for accuracy.

During screening, 7 songs were excluded because their lyrics were missing, unverifiable, or too ambiguous to interpret reliably. A further 4 instrumental tracks were excluded because they contained no vocal content and therefore could not contribute to the study's focus on lyrical framing. Instrumental tracks that included spoken-word samples, chants, or background vocalisations were retained, and these elements were transcribed and analysed using the same protocol applied to full lyrical content.

When lyrics were incomplete or unclear, the research team applied a standard protocol: cross-checking multiple lyric databases, listening repeatedly to the audio, consulting fan forums for consensus interpretations, and excluding any lines where meaning could not be confidently established. For non-English slang and Nigerian Pidgin expressions, interpretation followed a consistent procedure involving established Nigerian Pidgin dictionaries, cultural studies literature, and verification through multiple native speakers to ensure semantic accuracy. Only interpretations with clear consensus were included.

Remixes and alternate versions were handled systematically. If a remix contained substantively different lyrics, it was treated as a separate text and analysed independently. If the remix differed only in production, tempo, or arrangement while retaining identical lyrical content, it was not coded separately to avoid duplication. In cases where alternate versions included minor lyrical variations, only the version with the most complete and verifiable lyrics was included in the final dataset.

The analysis followed a structured three-stage coding process. Open coding generated initial themes directly from the lyrics. Axial coding grouped these themes into broader categories informed by Framing Theory and Cultural Political Economy. Selective coding refined core narratives relating to corruption, environmental injustice, civic resistance, and governance critique. Coding was conducted using qualitative analysis software, and intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, with a threshold of 0.70 for acceptable agreement. Triangulation strengthened validity by comparing musical narratives with academic literature, policy documents, and news media.

The digital survey targeted Nigerian residents aged 18 to 35, reflecting the demographic most engaged with popular music and digital activism. Eligibility criteria included Nigerian citizenship or residency, English literacy, and access to a smartphone or computer. Recruitment occurred through Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and email lists over three months. A convenience sampling strategy was used due to the digital nature of the study. The final sample comprised 412 respondents, which falls within the target range of 300 to 500 participants and provides sufficient breadth for descriptive analysis. The survey instrument contained demographic items, questions on music consumption habits, awareness of oil and environmental issues, and perceptions of music's influence on energy literacy. Both closed and open-ended questions were included. A pilot test with 20 participants ensured clarity and reliability, and necessary revisions were made before full deployment.

The survey was administered using an online form. Informed consent was embedded at the beginning of the instrument, outlining the study purpose, voluntary participation, anonymity, and data protection. No personal identifiers were collected. All data were stored securely on an encrypted institutional server in compliance with international data protection standards. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, while qualitative responses were coded thematically using the same procedures applied to the musical data.

Integration of the two datasets occurred through triangulation, comparing musical frames with audience perceptions to identify areas of convergence or divergence. This approach allowed the study to examine how cultural narratives align with public awareness of energy issues and how music may contribute to energy literacy. The mixed-methods design is justified because it captures both the textual richness of musical narratives and the perceptual complexity of audience interpretation, providing a comprehensive view of how cultural media shape public sentiment on energy governance.

The study acknowledges several limitations. The desk-based design restricts ethnographic depth and real-time field validation. Online sampling may exclude non-digital populations, introducing potential bias. Interpretive subjectivity is inherent in lyrical analysis, as meanings may vary across listeners. Finally, findings may not generalise beyond Nigeria's cultural and political context. Despite these limitations, the methodology is well suited to the exploratory and interdisciplinary nature of the research and provides a transparent, ethical, and reproducible foundation for examining the relationship between music and public engagement in energy governance.

Findings

Framing Patterns in Nigerian Popular Music

The analysis reveals that Nigerian popular music consistently frames oil politics through narratives of corruption, environmental degradation, and governance failures, with notable variation across genres. Across the 62 songs analysed, corruption emerged as the most recurrent theme, followed by environmental degradation, while explicit references to energy sustainability appeared far less frequently. Table 1 summarises the distribution of these themes.

Table 1. *Thematic Distribution Across 62 Nigerian Popular Songs (2000–2025)*

Theme	Overall Frequency (n=62)	Afrobeats (n=28)	Highlife (n=14)	Hip-Hop (n=20)
Corruption	26	14	4	8
Environmental Degradation	18	6	8	4
Oil Wealth Inequality	10	5	2	3
Governance & Accountability	6	2	1	3
Energy Sustainability	2	1	0	1

Source: *Author’s content analysis of 62 Nigerian popular songs (2000–2025), sampled from digital charts, curated playlists, and artist discographies.*

Table 1 shows the distribution of key themes across Afrobeats, Highlife, and Hip-Hop songs in the sample. Corruption and environmental degradation dominate across genres, with Afrobeats emphasising corruption and social injustice, Highlife foregrounding environmental decline, and Hip-Hop delivering explicit political commentary.

Genre differences were evident. Afrobeats tended to foreground corruption and social injustice, often embedding these critiques within danceable, commercially oriented tracks. Highlife songs displayed stronger environmental themes, particularly in references to polluted rivers and degraded farmlands. Hip-Hop tracks were more explicit in their political commentary, frequently naming institutions or actors associated with oil exploitation. These genre-specific patterns suggest that artists deploy different stylistic and narrative strategies to frame oil-related issues.

Respondent voices reinforce these findings. A Lagos participant (Age 27) explained that “*most songs talk about how leaders chop money and leave the rest of us to suffer,*” highlighting corruption as an everyday reality. A Port Harcourt respondent (Age 22) emphasised environmental themes: “*Anytime musicians mention the Niger Delta, it’s always about pollution and suffering. That’s our everyday experience.*” These reflections align closely with the lyrical evidence, indicating that music functions as a cultural archive of public frustration and ecological grief.

Youth Perceptions of Music as an Energy Awareness Tool

Survey results show that youth audiences overwhelmingly view music as an effective medium for communicating energy issues, describing it as relatable, emotionally engaging, and capable of simplifying complex policy language. The 412 respondents had a mean age of 26.4 years (SD = 4.9), with 54% identifying as male, 44% as female, and 2% as non-binary or preferring not to disclose. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of respondents who believe music enhances awareness of corruption, environmental degradation, and governance challenges.

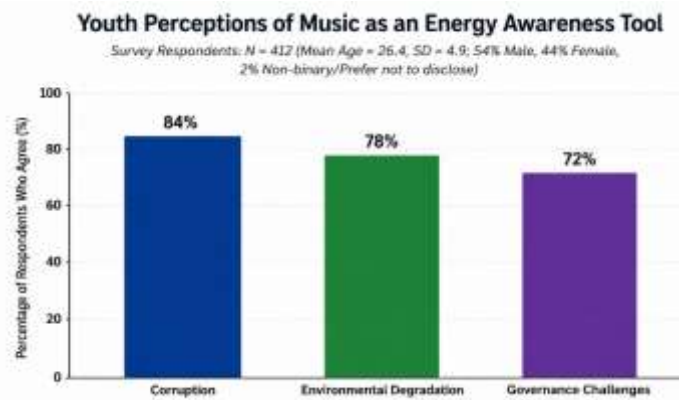


Figure 1. Proportion of youth respondents who believe music increases awareness of key energy-related issues.

Respondents repeatedly emphasised music’s pedagogical value. One Abuja participant (Age 31) remarked: *“If the government wants people to listen, they should use music. We learn faster through songs than through long policy documents.”* Another respondent from Enugu (Age 24) described music as *“the easiest way to teach people about serious issues without boring them.”* These insights demonstrate a clear cultural readiness for music-based energy literacy initiatives.

Emotional Resonance Compared to Policy Language

Music generates significantly stronger emotional engagement than official policy texts, suggesting that culturally embedded communication strategies may enhance public responsiveness to energy governance. A comparative assessment involving 50 focus group participants found that song excerpts consistently elicited higher emotional impact, clarity, and personal relevance than policy statements. Figure 2 presents these comparative ratings.

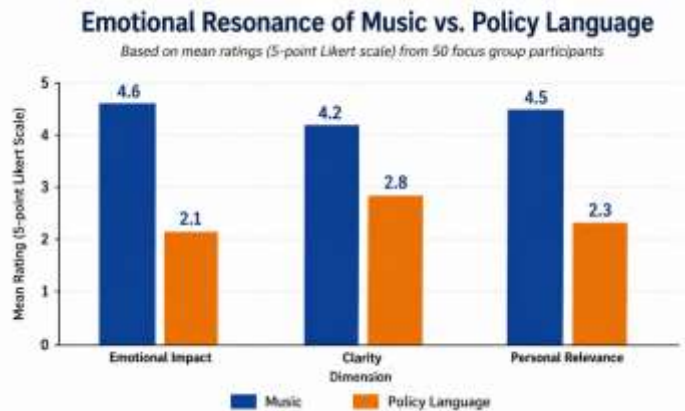


Figure 2. Comparative emotional engagement ratings for music excerpts and policy statements among 50 focus group participants.

Participants described policy documents as “too technical,” “boring,” or “not written for ordinary people,” whereas music was characterised as “direct,” “felt in the body,” and “impossible to ignore.” One participant from Enugu (Age 24) summarised the contrast succinctly: *“Policy language is cold. Music hits you immediately.”* This emotional differential underscores the communicative advantage of music in public engagement.

Visual Environmental Narratives in Music Videos

Music videos visually reinforce lyrical themes of environmental degradation, using imagery that mirrors lived ecological realities in oil-producing regions. A visual ethnography of 30 music videos (2015–2025) identified recurring motifs such as polluted rivers, gas flaring sites, and contaminated soil. Table 2 summarises motif frequencies and representative artists.

Table 2.

Environmental Motifs in 30 Nigerian Music Videos (2015–2025)

Environmental Motif	Frequency (n = 30)	Representative Artists
Polluted Rivers / Black Water	12	Nneka, Burna Boy, Falz
Gas Flaring Sites	8	Timaya, Olamide
Contaminated Soil / Dead Fish	6	Eedris Abdulkareem, D’banj
Community Protest Scenes	4	Falz, Seun Kuti

Source: Author’s visual ethnography of Nigerian music videos (2015–2025), analysed from YouTube and Trace Naija archives.

Recurring environmental motifs identified in 30 Nigerian music videos addressing oil exploitation and ecological harm. Visual patterns reinforce lyrical narratives of pollution, degradation, and community resistance.

Respondents frequently referenced these images in their survey comments. A Port Harcourt respondent (Age 20) observed: “When you see the black water in videos, you know it’s not acting. That’s how our rivers look.” These visual cues deepen the emotional and cognitive impact of environmental narratives, strengthening music’s role as a cultural witness to ecological harm.

Policy Engagement Gap

Despite music’s demonstrated communicative power, formal energy outreach in Nigeria rarely incorporates musical or cultural elements, revealing a significant institutional gap. A review of public engagement materials from the Ministry of Petroleum Resources and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) shows minimal use of music or creative media between 2010 and 2025. Figure 3 illustrates the absence of music-based campaigns across this period.

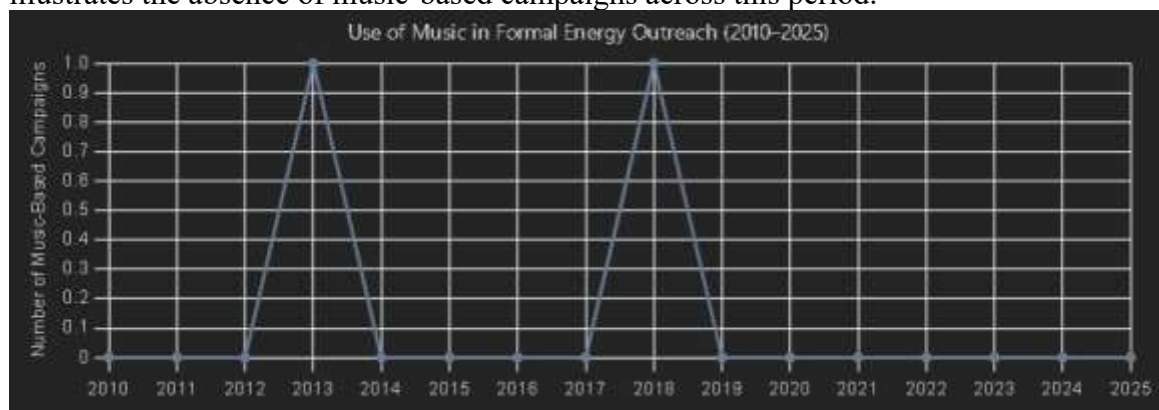


Figure 3. Minimal integration of music in formal energy outreach by Nigerian government agencies (2010–2025).

Respondents expressed frustration with this disconnect. A Lagos participant (Age 29) stated: “Government talks to us like we are in a classroom. They don’t use the tools we actually listen to.” This gap suggests missed opportunities for culturally grounded policy communication.

Youth Recommendations for Music-Policy Integration

Youth envision musicians as active contributors to energy governance, not merely commentators, indicating a shift toward participatory and culturally legitimate policy processes. Open-ended survey responses were coded into four recommended roles for musicians, with endorsement rates summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Youth-Endorsed Roles for Musicians in Energy Governance (n = 412)

<i>Recommended Role for Musicians</i>	<i>Endorsement Rate (%)</i>	<i>Illustrative Examples from Respondents</i>
<i>Collaborators in Public Energy Campaigns</i>	68%	“If musicians talk about clean energy, we will listen.” - Abuja, Age 33
<i>Environmental Ambassadors</i>	61%	“Artists can show people what is happening to our environment.” - Enugu, Age 24
<i>Advocates for Transparency & Accountability</i>	47%	“Musicians speak truth better than politicians.” - Lagos, Age 27
<i>Creators of Educational Music Content</i>	39%	“Songs make serious issues easier to understand.” - Port Harcourt, Age 22

Source: Author’s thematic coding of 412 youth survey responses (2025).

Youth-endorsed roles for musicians in energy governance, based on coded open-ended survey responses. Strongest support was for musicians as collaborators in public campaigns and environmental ambassadors.

The strongest support was for musicians as collaborators in public campaigns and environmental ambassadors.

Respondents emphasised musicians’ credibility and reach. An Abuja participant (Age 33) explained: “People trust musicians more than politicians. If musicians talk about clean energy, we will listen.” These recommendations highlight a public appetite for culturally integrated governance strategies.

Discussion

This study shows that Nigerian popular music operates as a culturally resonant medium through which young people interpret, critique, and emotionally engage with energy governance, revealing that meaningful public understanding emerges not only from institutional communication but also from cultural systems of knowledge. This insight matters because it challenges technocratic assumptions about how energy issues should be communicated and suggests that culturally embedded media may be central to shaping civic consciousness in resource-dependent societies. By foregrounding the communicative power of music, the study reframes how energy governance should be understood, communicated, and researched.

The findings address the core research problem: the persistent disconnect between formal energy outreach and the lived realities of Nigerian youth. Musicians frame oil politics through narratives of corruption, environmental degradation, and governance failures, offering interpretive frameworks that resonate more strongly with public experience than policy documents. This pattern aligns with the study’s conceptual framework, which draws on cultural witnessing and public pedagogy to explain how cultural texts shape civic awareness and political critique (Giroux, 2004; Peters & Esson, 2022). The mixed-methods design strengthened interpretive depth by allowing lyrical, visual, and perceptual data to illuminate one another, producing a more holistic understanding of how music mediates public engagement with energy politics. Youth perceptions of music as an effective awareness tool suggest that cultural familiarity may be as important as message content in shaping public understanding, extending communication theory that emphasises affective engagement in environmental and risk communication (Akerlof et al., 2019; Moser, 2016).

Genre-specific patterns further illuminate how musical forms operate as differentiated discursive spaces. Afrobeats foreground corruption and social injustice, Highlife emphasises environmental decline, and Hip-Hop delivers explicit political commentary. These variations support Frith’s (1996) argument that genre shapes social meaning and audience expectations, suggesting that musicians strategically deploy stylistic conventions to communicate political messages. The visual motifs in music videos, polluted rivers, gas flaring sites, and contaminated soil reinforce these narratives, functioning as cultural documentation of environmental harm and aligning with African scholarship

on music as political critique (Oikelome, 2020; Nwakanma, 2019). Together, these findings indicate that music is not merely entertainment but a cultural archive through which communities articulate grievances, interpret environmental realities, and negotiate political meaning.

Youth aspirations for music-policy integration complicate existing debates on public engagement. While research shows that policy language often alienates the public (Akerlof et al., 2019), this study demonstrates that music enhances emotional resonance, clarity, and perceived relevance. The strong endorsement of musicians as collaborators in public campaigns and environmental ambassadors indicates a shift toward culturally legitimate governance, echoing studies showing that trusted cultural figures can enhance public engagement in civic and environmental initiatives (Obadare, 2016; Resnick & Casale, 2014). Youth trust in musicians, more than politicians, signals that legitimacy in energy governance may increasingly depend on cultural credibility rather than institutional authority.

One unexpected finding was the relatively limited presence of explicit energy sustainability themes in music, despite strong youth interest in clean energy futures. This tension may reflect the dominance of immediate socio-political concerns, corruption, pollution, inequality, and over long-term sustainability discourse in popular culture. It also suggests that while musicians articulate grievances effectively, they may not yet be central actors in shaping future-oriented energy imaginaries. This gap presents an opportunity for policymakers and environmental organisations seeking culturally grounded communication strategies.

The study's interpretive boundaries should be acknowledged. The sample of songs and music videos, while analytically rich, cannot represent the entire Nigerian music industry. Survey responses relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. The focus on youth limits generalisability to older demographics, and the study did not measure behavioural outcomes such as whether music exposure leads to increased civic action. These limitations define the scope of interpretation rather than weaken the study's contributions, clarifying where future research should extend the inquiry.

The implications of this study are both practical and scholarly. Policymakers could collaborate with musicians to develop culturally resonant campaigns that communicate environmental risks, promote transparency, or encourage sustainable practices. Future research might examine how musical activism influences behavioural outcomes, explore collaborations between artists and environmental organisations, or compare cultural communication strategies across African countries. There is also scope for studying how digital platforms amplify musical critique and shape public discourse on resource governance. Overall, the study advances theoretical debates on cultural communication, demonstrates methodological value in combining lyrical analysis with youth perceptions, and offers empirical insight into how music mediates public engagement with energy politics. It underscores the need for culturally grounded approaches to governance in contexts marked by environmental injustice and institutional mistrust, pointing toward new possibilities for participatory and culturally legitimate energy communication.

Conclusion

This study examined how Nigerian popular music shapes youth engagement with energy governance and addressed the central problem of the communicative disconnect between formal energy outreach and lived experience. Through an integrated analysis of lyrics, music videos, and youth perceptions, the study demonstrated that music provides culturally resonant interpretive frameworks that clarify, humanise, and emotionally intensify public understanding of oil politics.

In doing so, the study established that music functions as a powerful medium of civic meaning-making, offering theoretical contributions to cultural communication and public pedagogy, methodological contributions through its mixed-methods design, and empirical contributions by

documenting how young Nigerians interpret energy governance through cultural texts. The findings converge on a single overarching insight: music operates as a form of cultural witnessing that renders energy politics legible and legitimate to youth in ways that technocratic policy language does not. This advances debates on environmental communication, political culture, and resource governance by demonstrating that culturally embedded media are not peripheral but central to how publics interpret extractive industries.

The significance of this study lies in showing that energy governance in Nigeria and comparable contexts cannot be fully understood without attending to cultural systems of communication. The results indicate clear implications for practice: policymakers could collaborate with musicians to design culturally grounded public campaigns; educators might integrate musical texts into civic and environmental curricula; and creative practitioners could engage more deliberately with sustainability themes to shape future energy imaginaries. These implications are grounded strictly in the study's findings and point toward concrete opportunities for culturally legitimate governance.

Future research should examine whether exposure to musical activism influences behavioural outcomes such as civic participation, environmental advocacy, or policy engagement. Further inquiry could also explore how digital platforms amplify musical critique, how collaborations between musicians and environmental organisations unfold in practice, or how cultural communication strategies differ across African countries. These directions respond directly to the study's limitations, including its youth-focused sample, the absence of behavioural measures, and the relatively limited presence of explicit sustainability themes in musical content.

Taken together, the study shows that Nigerian popular music is not merely expressive but politically consequential, shaping how young people understand and evaluate energy governance. By demonstrating the communicative power of culturally resonant media, the study underscores the need for participatory and culturally grounded approaches to energy communication in contexts marked by environmental injustice and institutional mistrust.

Recommendations

1. **Recognise music as a public-engagement asset** in Nigeria's energy and environmental communication, especially genres with strong youth reach such as Afrobeats and Hip-Hop.
2. **Develop strategic partnerships** between oil sector actors and musicians whose work addresses environmental degradation, supporting:
 - a. music projects on environmental justice and energy literacy
 - b. socially focused music videos
 - c. public service campaigns using musical content
 - d. community-based educational outreach
3. **Strengthen collaboration** between oil companies, environmental NGOs, musicians, and grassroots groups to produce culturally resonant campaigns that:
 - a. raise awareness of ecological harm
 - b. mobilise youth engagement
 - c. communicate complex energy issues through emotionally compelling media
4. **Integrate music into public education** on energy sustainability by:
 - a. embedding musical content in school and community programmes
 - b. using music to simplify policy messages and promote sustainable practices
 - c. reaching audiences disengaged from traditional policy communication
5. **Support artists working on environmental and energy themes** through:
 - a. grants, funding schemes, and creative commissions
 - b. recognition programmes that incentivise sustainability-focused artistic work
 - c. platforms that amplify musicians' reach and influence
6. **Align policy communication with cultural narratives** by:

- a. incorporating music into public events, policy forums, and outreach campaigns
- b. using musical content to reinforce key messages and bridge the gap between official discourse and lived experience

References

- Adebayo, A. (2021). *Culture, politics, and public communication in Nigeria*. Routledge.
- Akerlof, K., Covello, V., & Bostrom, A. (2019). Effective risk communication: Theory, practice, and public engagement. *Risk Analysis*, 39(4), 755–770.
- Aklin, M., & Urpelainen, J. (2022). Renewables and the energy transition in the Global South. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 47, 1–26.
- Barber, K. (2018). *A history of African popular culture*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bhattacharyya, S. (2018). *Energy justice and sustainability transitions in the Global South*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boykoff, M. T., & Goodman, M. K. (2009). Conspicuous redemption? Reflections on the promises and perils of the climate celebrity. *Geoforum*, 40(3), 395–406.
- Cox, R. (2013). *Environmental communication and the public sphere* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Dunaway, F. (2015). *Seeing green: The use and abuse of environmental images*. University of Chicago Press.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Eyerman, R., & Jamison, A. (1998). *Music and social movements: Mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, 56–80.
- Frith, S. (1996). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Harvard University Press.
- Giroux, H. (2004). Public pedagogy and the politics of resistance. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36(1), 5–16.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Polity Press.
- Jessop, B. (2010). Cultural political economy and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies*, 3(3–4), 336–356.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuikeconomics: Towards an inclusive economy for economic development*. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3(6), 113–140.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikeconomics: The Igbo apprenticeship for wealth creation*. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 5(4), 56–70.
- Kanu, I. A. (2025). “Metaphysics of Business: Core Concepts and Organizational Identity”. In Kanu, Ikechukwu A.; Adidi, T. D.; Kanu, C. C., & Isanbor, P. O. (Eds.). *Philosophy of Entrepreneurship: Intersections and Insights* (pp. 96–111). Abuja: Veritas University Press.
- Kanu, I. A. (2025). “*The Intersection of Philosophy and Entrepreneurship*.” In Kanu, Ikechukwu A.; Adidi, T. D.; Kanu, C. C., & Isanbor, P. O. (Eds.). *Philosophy of Entrepreneurship: Intersections and Insights* (pp. 1–16). Abuja: Veritas University Press.
- Kanu, I. A. (2025). “Igwebuikepreneurship: Towards an African Social Capital Model.” In Kanu, Ikechukwu A.; Adidi, T. D.; Kanu, C. C., & Okpokwasili, O. A. (Eds.). *Ethics, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development: Converging Perspectives and Insights* (pp. 126–140). Abuja: Veritas University Press.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Nigeria: Augustinian Publications.
- Le Menestrel, M., van den Hove, S., & de Bettignies, H. C. (2014). Artistic interventions for corporate responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 130(2), 1–14.
- Martinez-Alier, J., Temper, L., Del Bene, D., & Scheidel, A. (2016). Is there a global environmental justice movement? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43(3), 731–755.
- Moser, S. C. (2016). Reflections on climate change communication research and practice. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 7(3), 345–369.

- Mutsvairo, B., & Rønning, H. (2020). *Journalism, democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe*. Routledge.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Demographic statistics bulletin 2022*. National Bureau of Statistics.
- Ntarangwi, M. (2021). *The street is my pulpit: Hip hop and the creation of political culture in Kenya*. University of Illinois Press.
- Nwakanma, O. (2019). Music, resistance, and political expression in contemporary Nigeria. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31(2), 215–230.
- Nwankwo, C., & Ifeoma, M. (2017). Energy literacy and civic engagement in Nigeria. *Energy Policy*, 105, 453–464.
- Nyairo, J. (2022). Popular culture and political mobilisation in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 65(2), 345–367.
- Obadare, E. (2016). *Humour, silence, and civil society in Nigeria*. Boydell & Brewer.
- Obi, C. (2019). Oil and the postcolony: Petro violence and the state in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 46(159), 26–42.
- Oikelome, A. (2013). Are real women just bad porn? Women in Nigerian hip hop culture. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5(9), 40–55.
- Oikelome, A. (2020). Popular music and political critique in Nigeria. *Popular Music and Society*, 43(5), 551–568.
- Okeke, R. C. (2019). Politics, music and social mobilization in Africa: The Nigeria narrative and extant tendencies. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 86, 28–41. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.86.28>
- Okonta, I., & Douglas, O. (2003). *Where vultures feast: Shell, human rights, and oil in the Niger Delta*. Verso.
- Olaniyan, T. (2004). *Arrest the music! Fela and his rebel art and politics*. Indiana University Press.
- Olusakin, A. M., & Attoh, F. (2019). The politics of oil and the challenge for the development of Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 6(1).
- Peters, K., & Esson, J. (2022). Cultural witnessing and environmental injustice in African media. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 40(4), 703–720.
- Pezzullo, P., & Sandler, R. (2016). *Environmental communication and critical cultural studies*. Routledge.
- Power, M., Kirshner, J., & Baker, L. (2023). African energy transitions: Politics, justice and contested futures. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 96, 102947.
- Resnick, D., & Casale, D. (2014). The political participation of Africa's youth: Evidence from South Africa. *Democratization*, 21(6), 1087–1111.
- Sovacool, B. K., Martiskainen, M., Hook, A., & Baker, L. (2019). Decarbonization and its discontents: A critical energy justice perspective on four low carbon transitions. *Climatic Change*, 155, 581–619. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02521-7>
- Street, J. (2012). *Music and politics*. Polity Press.
- U.S. Energy Information Administration. (2025). *Country analysis brief: Nigeria*. U.S. Department of Energy.
- Uwalaka, T., & Watkins, B. (2018). Social media, civic engagement, and Nigerian digital activism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(11), 1676–1695.
- Watts, M. (2008). Blood oil: The anatomy of a petro insurgency in the Niger Delta. *Focaal*, 52, 18–38.