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**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES
WITHIN THE ENERGY SECTOR OF GHANA**

EDMUND QUARTEY

MASPRM24043

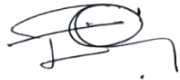
**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND
RESEARCH AT THE UNIMAC INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS OF ARTS
DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

DECEMBER, 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature: 


Date: 12/12/2025

CERTIFICATION

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC).

Certified by:

Supervisor: **Dr. Isaac Tandoh**

Signature: 

Date: 12/12/2025

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to those pioneering organisations committed to genuine sustainable development and the crucial role of transparent communication in achieving it.

To my family, for your unyielding support and encouragement throughout this academic journey.

Your patience and belief in the importance of this work were my constant source of strength.

To my supervisor, Dr Isaac Tandoh, whose insightful guidance, intellectual rigour, and unwavering commitment to academic excellence made this research possible.

And finally, to all communication professionals striving to bridge the gap between corporate action and public perception, may this study serve as a guide to ethical, impactful public relations strategies that promote a truly sustainable future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my profound gratitude to all individuals and entities who contributed to the successful completion of this research on The Role of Public Relations in Promoting Sustainable Practices.

First and foremost, I extend my most profound appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Isaac Tandoh, for his invaluable expertise and constructive criticism, which were instrumental in shaping the theoretical and empirical focus of this study.

I am sincerely thankful to the management and staff of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC for granting access and facilitating the data collection process, as well as to all the stakeholders and survey respondents whose perspectives provided the essential empirical foundation for the findings.

My gratitude also goes to my colleagues and peers for their stimulating discussions and support, which enriched the analytical process.

Finally, to my friends and family, thank you for your patience and unconditional love. This achievement is a testament to your sacrifices.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the pivotal role of public relations (PR) in promoting sustainable practices perceptions and shapes corporate accountability. The primary objectives were to assess the effectiveness of PR strategies in communicating sustainability initiatives, to evaluate the extent to which PR mitigates or contributes to greenwashing in sustainability reporting, and to identify the challenges faced by TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC.

The study adopted a positivist-oriented quantitative research approach employing a comprehensive design that combined structured surveys and quantitative content analysis of PR materials. Data was collected from a sample of approximately 222 internal and external stakeholders of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC using a simple random sampling technique. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

The study confirmed a strong positive relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action. Crucially, the analysis established that Trust is the central mechanism (Partial Mediation) for converting PR efforts into supportive stakeholder behavior. While PR efforts showed positive awareness, the research highlighted the existence of a significant "Trust Gap". The findings revealed that the full potential of PR is currently limited by an underlying perception of greenwashing and a demand for verifiable, measurable transparency and operational consistency. The study recommends that TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC intensify efforts to align communication with verifiable operational practices to enhance stakeholder trust and mitigate greenwashing perceptions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, the integration of sustainable business practices has become an essential element of corporate strategy. Companies now increasingly embrace environmental, social, and economic dimensions to foster long-term viability. Public relations has evolved concurrently with these trends to facilitate transparent dialogue and strengthen stakeholder trust. Academic literature and industry reports consistently highlight that comprehensive communication strategies are crucial in aligning corporate objectives with sustainable development goals (Geysi, 2025). This evolution marks a shift from traditional media relations to dynamic engagement that prioritizes corporate accountability.

As organizations embark on initiatives to address environmental challenges, the manner in which they communicate these endeavors is increasingly scrutinized. Effective public relations practices provide a platform for companies to disseminate accurate information and highlight their commitment to sustainable initiatives. Such communication not only improves public perception but also enhances investor confidence and competitive positioning. Research by Chen et al. (2023) indicates that strategic communication leads to improved engagement and more favorable perceptions among key stakeholders in evolving market environments.

Previous studies have illuminated the positive correlation between proactive public relations and sustainable corporate performance. Consistent and honest messaging has been shown to not only mitigate reputational risks but also to cultivate enduring relationships with consumers and investors. Statistical data from Kyilili et al. (2025) underscores that companies engaging in transparent sustainability reporting experience measurable improvements in stakeholder trust.

These insights reinforce the premise that an effective public relations strategy can serve as an instrumental lever in embedding sustainable practices within corporate governance frameworks. Noting a gap in understanding the mechanisms by which public relations initiatives drive sustainable practices, this study seeks to address challenges in corporate communication. Increasing regulatory pressures, evolving stakeholder expectations, and growing environmental concerns necessitate a closer examination of communication strategies within business operations. Recent trends indicate that effective public relations enhance transparency and accountability, acting as a catalyst for corporate commitment to sustainability. This research is driven by the urgent need to unravel communication processes that enable firms to articulate and implement sustainable initiatives, thereby contributing to long-term stewardship and overall responsible governance.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the contemporary corporate landscape, the integration of sustainable practices has become a pivotal aspect of organisational strategy. Public relations (PR) plays a crucial role in communicating these sustainability efforts to stakeholders, aiming to enhance corporate reputation and foster transparency. However, discrepancies between proclaimed sustainability commitments and actual practices have led to accusations of "greenwashing," where companies are perceived as overstating their environmental initiatives. This misalignment not only damages stakeholder trust but also exposes companies to legal and reputational risks. For instance, Deutsche Bank's asset management division, DWS Group, faced a €25 million fine in 2025 for misleading claims about its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments, highlighting the severe consequences of greenwashing (Kyilili et al., 2025).

Prior research has examined the implications of greenwashing and the challenges of corporate sustainability communication. A systematic literature review by Huang, Shi and Jia (2024) analyzed 180 academic articles, revealing fragmented definitions and measurements of greenwashing, and underscoring the need for standardized frameworks. Another study by Montgomery, Lyon and Barg (2024) emphasized the importance of future research in understanding the strategic use of greenwashing and its impact on corporate credibility. Furthermore, research by Vollero (2022) explored how supply chain actors are implicated in greenwashing behaviours, highlighting the complexity of accountability in corporate sustainability. These studies collectively point to a significant gap in understanding the mechanisms by which PR strategies can either mitigate or exacerbate perceptions of greenwashing, particularly in the energy sector.

Addressing this research gap is imperative for several reasons. Firstly, as companies face increasing pressure from consumers, investors, and regulators to demonstrate genuine sustainability efforts, understanding the role of PR in shaping these perceptions is critical. Secondly, the energy sector, given its substantial environmental impact, is under heightened scrutiny, making transparent and authentic communication essential. Finally, developing effective PR strategies that align corporate communications with actual practices can enhance stakeholder trust, reduce the risk of greenwashing accusations, and contribute to more sustainable business operations. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how PR can authentically promote sustainable practices within the energy industry, providing insights that can guide corporations in navigating the complex landscape of sustainability communication.

1.3 Research Objectives

To examine the role of public relations in promoting sustainable practices within the energy sector, with a focus on how strategic communication influences stakeholder perception and corporate accountability.

Specific Objectives:

1. To assess the effectiveness of public relations strategies in communicating sustainability initiatives.
2. To evaluate the extent to which public relations mitigates or contributes to greenwashing in sustainability reporting.
3. To identify and analyze the challenges and constraints faced by TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC in implementing effective public relations strategies for communicating its sustainability initiatives.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How effective are public relations strategies in enhancing stakeholder trust through sustainability communications?
2. To what extent do public relations practices contribute to or reduce perceptions of greenwashing in corporate sustainability efforts?
3. What are the key internal (e.g., resource limitations, internal coordination, expertise) and external constraints that TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC faces in implementing effective public relations strategies for communicating its sustainability initiatives?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge by deepening the understanding of how public relations practices influence the authenticity and effectiveness of corporate sustainability communication, particularly within the energy sector. By exploring the relationship between strategic PR efforts and stakeholder perceptions, the research will provide empirical insights that advance theories related to corporate communication, stakeholder engagement, and legitimacy theory. The findings will also have practical implications for communication professionals by offering evidence-based guidance on designing transparent and credible sustainability campaigns. Furthermore, the study may inform policy frameworks on corporate disclosures and environmental accountability by highlighting communication practices that either promote genuine sustainability or enable greenwashing. These insights can support the development of stronger regulatory mechanisms and best practices for aligning corporate communication with sustainable development goals.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

This research will be organized into five chapters. Chapter 1, the introduction, will address the study's background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance, and the scope and limitations. Chapter 2 will provide an extensive review of relevant empirical and theoretical literature on Customer Diversity and Satisfaction at the ECG Head Office in Accra. Chapter 3 will focus on the research methodology, including the research design, population, sampling method, as well as data sources and collection instruments, along with the techniques for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to data analysis, findings, and discussion. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the study, present conclusions based on the findings, and offer recommendations.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduce the study. It included a background to the study and general overview of Customer Diversity and Satisfaction in ECG Head Office, Accra. The chapter also defined the problem being studied and gave an outline of the research questions, the objectives, the significance and organisation of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Theoretical literature review will focus on the views of other theorists related to the subject of the study, while the empirical literature review will focus on the related works that have been done on. the conceptual framework will also focus on understanding the origin and how Total Energies have embraced the concept.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework defines the core variables essential for analysing the success of TotalEnergies' sustainability communication efforts. It establishes the key independent variable (Public Relations Effectiveness), the desired relational outcome (Stakeholder Trust), and the ultimate dependent variable (Stakeholder Action), paying particular attention to the mediating role of trust and the moderating challenge of the Trust Gap.

2.1.1 Public Relations Effectiveness in Sustainability (Independent Variable)

This section defines the independent variable, moving beyond tactical communication to strategic organizational outcomes, which is the standard for contemporary public relations scholarship.

2.1.1.1 Defining Strategic Public Relations in Sustainability

Public relations is fundamentally defined as the strategic management function that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It is a management tool designed to establish support among a firm's various internal and external publics (Thomas & Lane, 1990). The major functions of public relations are to create and maintain excellent relations with the organization's internal and external stakeholders (Kotler

& Armstrong, 2006). Specifically, in the context of sustainability, PR's role extends to clearly and transparently communicating the organization's sustainability goals, initiatives, and achievements (Cutlip et al., 2000), facilitating two-way communication and engagement with diverse stakeholders to foster dialogue, gather feedback, and build trust (Freeman, 1984), shaping and protecting the organization's reputation as a responsible corporate citizen (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), proactively identifying and addressing potential sustainability-related issues and effectively managing crises (Coombs, 2007), and engaging employees in the sustainability agenda, fostering a culture of sustainability within the organization (Argenti & Howell, 2004).

This function is responsible for ensuring the organization's strategic plan incorporates initiatives that build supportive relationships by providing stakeholders with updated and accurate information regarding its environmental, social, and economic commitments (De Luca et al., 2022). Effective PR in this context is therefore an exercise in managing corporate reputation and Social License to Operate (SLO), functioning as a strategic necessity rather than a mere publicity tool (Penning, 2007).

2.1.1.2 Effectiveness: The Shift from Output to Relational Outcome

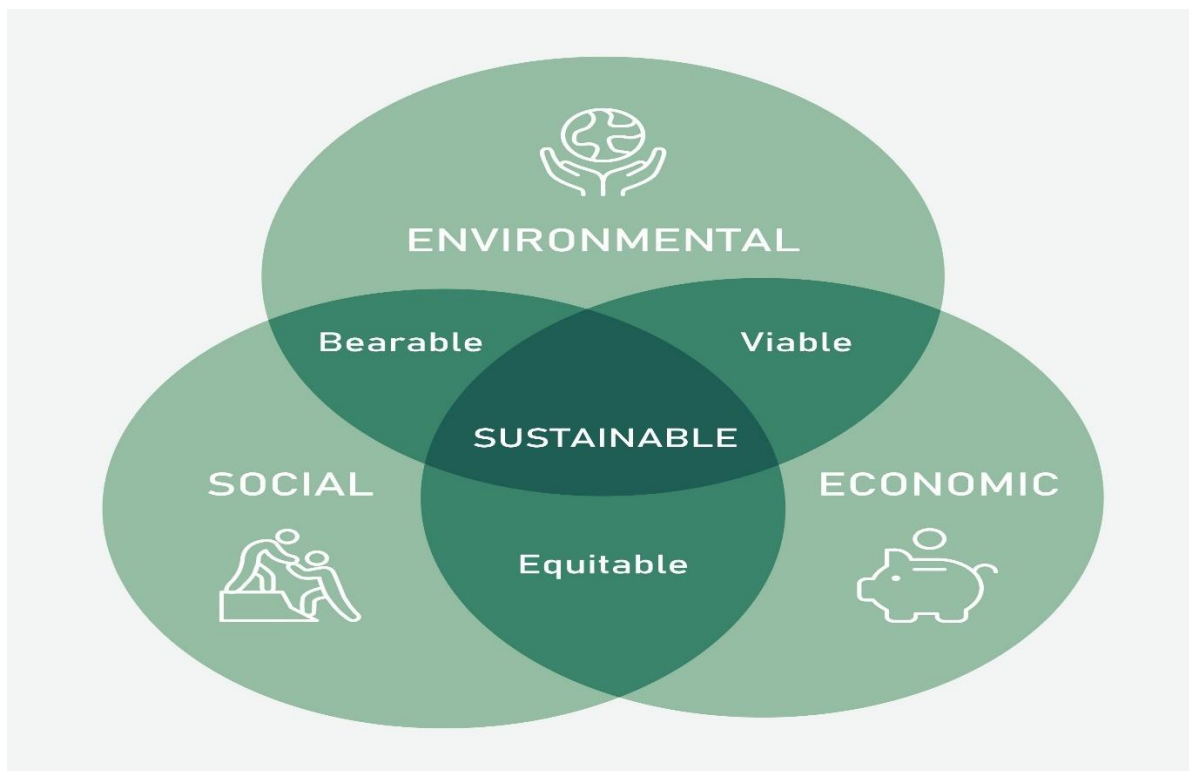
PR effectiveness in sustainability must be measured beyond communication outputs (e.g., the number of press releases or media mentions) and out-take (e.g., stakeholder awareness). Instead, a Master's-level analysis requires evaluating its outcome the creation of sustained, positive relational equity (Grunig et al., 2002). Effective sustainability PR successfully translates corporate strategy into demonstrable actions that resonate with stakeholders, fostering long-term loyalty and enhancing satisfaction (Elshaer et al., 2022). Failure to move beyond simple informational dissemination indicates a strategic deficiency, where PR operates as a one-way mechanism rather

than a function of mutual understanding, thereby limiting its ability to build the trust necessary for true organizational success.

2.1.2 Sustainability, Stakeholder Trust, and The Mechanism of The Trust Gap

This section integrates the definition of sustainability and defines the core relational variable, introducing the study's central conceptual challenge the failure of awareness to translate into belief.

2.1.2.1 Defining Corporate Sustainability



Sustainable practices, in the corporate context, refer to a company's commitment to operating in a manner that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). This typically encompasses three interconnected pillars: environmental protection (e.g., reducing emissions), social equity (e.g., fair labor practices), and economic viability (e.g., long-term profitability) (Carroll, 1991). Modern public relations has evolved to embrace corporate sustainability; corporate sustainability is built

around the organizational structure that embraces public relations theories and practices (Penning, 2007).

2.1.2.2 Defining Stakeholder Trust

Stakeholder Trust is the foundational relational outcome in this framework, representing the collective judgment that an organization is competent, reliable, and will act with integrity and benevolence (Coombs, 2007; Pirson & Malhotra, 2011). Trust is the willingness of a stakeholder to assume vulnerability to an organization (Mayer et al., 1995). For an energy major navigating a transition, trust is inherently fragile and is the essential lubricant for productive exchange relationships, compensating for the limits of formal contracts and costly monitoring (Pirson & Malhotra, 2011). Low trust directly reduces organizational legitimacy and limits access to vital resources, making it a critical strategic liability.

2.1.2.3 Organizational Transparency and The Trust Gap Mechanism

The Trust Gap is conceptualized as a critical organizational vulnerability where high stakeholder awareness of sustainability claims co-exists with low belief in the company's sincerity. This dissonance is primarily fueled by public skepticism concerning 'greenwashing' the perceived discrepancy between corporate rhetoric and actual operational practices (Wood & Aronczyk, 2020). To mitigate this gap, the study introduces Organizational Transparency and Authenticity as crucial moderating concepts. Transparency demands that an organization disclose information openly and comprehensively, including the challenges and trade-offs inherent in the energy transition (Kropp, 2025). Authenticity is the resulting stakeholder perception that the company's motives and actions are genuinely aligned with its declared sustainability values. The success of PR in closing the Trust Gap is thus highly conditional: effectiveness requires that communication be perceived as transparent and authentic, not merely persuasive.

2.1.3 Stakeholder Action and The Mediating Role of Trust (Dependent Variable)

This section defines the dependent variable and formally establishes the theoretical path connecting communication to organizational viability.

2.1.3.1 Defining Stakeholder Action and The Social License to Operate (SLO)

Stakeholder Action is the desired supportive behavior resulting from strong relationships. In the energy sector, this most critically manifests as the maintenance of the Social License to Operate (SLO). The SLO is defined as the ongoing, informal acceptance or approval that organizations receive from communities and stakeholders to continue their operations (Hurst et al., 2020). The SLO is a dynamic asset built on credibility and legitimacy (Prno & Slocombe, 2012) and is a function of the organization's relationships with diverse publics (Dare et al., 2014). Positive actions include, but are not limited to, consumer loyalty, supportive investment, and, most critically, the absence of protest, litigation, or regulatory opposition.

2.1.3.2 Trust as the Fundamental Mediator

This framework posits that Stakeholder Trust functions as the critical mediator in the relationship between PR Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action (Rawlins, 2005). The core premise is that PR effectiveness is not a direct cause of supportive behavior; rather, effective communication must first succeed in establishing Trust, and it is this trust that then motivates the desired Action. The majority of the impact of a sustainability PR strategy is theorized to be indirect, flowing through the mechanism of relational confidence (McKnight et al., 2002). This mediated relationship explains why an organization can achieve high visibility for its sustainability efforts yet still face widespread opposition the communication is failing to generate the necessary relational quality (trust) required to secure positive action.

2.1.4 Applying the Framework to TotalEnergies (Synthesis of Challenges and Opportunities)

As a major global player in the energy sector, TotalEnergies encounters a distinct set of PR challenges and opportunities, particularly concerning its commitment to sustainability and the ongoing energy transition. The company faces the fundamental challenge of its historically fossil-fuel-centric image. PR plays an essential, vital role here by communicating this strategic shift and building credibility around its renewable energy investments and carbon neutrality objectives. This transition is complicated by intense scrutiny from NGOs and activist investors regarding its climate impact, leading to public challenges and court rulings on greenwashing (The Guardian, 2023). PR is instrumental in managing this Trust Gap by providing transparent data and engaging in constructive dialogue to build belief in its sincerity. Given its diverse global operations, TotalEnergies must manage complex relationships with local communities. Effective community relations (a core PR function) are essential for maintaining a Social License to Operate and proactively mitigating potential conflicts. Conversely, a significant opportunity for PR lies in leveraging the company's investments in sustainable technologies. PR efforts can strategically highlight and showcase TotalEnergies' commitment to innovation (e.g., CCUS, Biofuels, Hydrogen) to generate the relational confidence (Trust) needed to secure supportive Stakeholder Action (SLO). Successfully navigating these challenges and capitalizing on these opportunities hinges on establishing and maintaining genuine trust with its diverse stakeholders.

2.2 Theoretical Literature

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, posits that organisations should consider the interests of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community, rather than prioritising shareholders alone (Kakobsen, 2021). This theory was selected for its emphasis on the interconnectedness between businesses and their diverse stakeholders, aligning with the study's focus on public relations in promoting sustainable practices. Merits of Stakeholder Theory include fostering long-term relationships and enhancing corporate reputation by addressing the needs of various stakeholder groups. However, it faces limitations such as challenges in identifying and balancing the often conflicting interests of multiple stakeholders, which can complicate decision-making processes. Critics argue that the theory's broad stakeholder definition may dilute managerial focus and accountability (Kudlak, 2024). Over the years, Stakeholder Theory has evolved to incorporate considerations of corporate social responsibility and ethical business practices, reflecting a more integrated approach to value creation. Its relevance to this study lies in its provision of a framework for analyzing how public relations strategies can effectively engage diverse stakeholders to authentically communicate and implement sustainable initiatives.

2.2.3 Relevance to the Study

The Stakeholder Theory is foundational for this research as it directly informs the conceptual framework's focus on Stakeholder Trust and Stakeholder Action as key outcomes of public relations. Specifically, the theory mandates that TotalEnergies' sustainability communications must move beyond generic messaging to address the diverse, and often conflicting, interests of specific groups from activist investors demanding net-zero alignment to local communities

concerned with operational impact. The theory provides the normative basis for evaluating PR effectiveness: success is measured not by simple reach, but by the quality of the mutually beneficial relationships established (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which is central to securing the Social License to Operate (SLO). It frames the study's investigation into how PR strategies must be tailored to ensure key publics feel their needs regarding environmental and social issues are genuinely considered, which is the prerequisite for building trust and mitigating the Trust Gap.

2.2.2 Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy Theory asserts that organizations must operate within the societal norms and values to secure their legitimacy and ensure survival. This theory is pertinent to the study as it underscores the importance of aligning corporate actions, particularly sustainability initiatives, with societal expectations to maintain legitimacy (Pedersen & Andersen, 2023). The merit of Legitimacy Theory lies in its emphasis on the social contract between organizations and society, encouraging transparency and accountability. However, it has been critiqued for its broadness and lack of specificity, making empirical testing challenging. Over time, the theory has evolved to incorporate aspects of corporate social responsibility and environmental accountability, reflecting the changing societal focus on sustainable development (Pizzetti, Gatti & Seele, 2021). Its relevance to this study is significant, as it provides a framework to analyze how public relations strategies can be employed to communicate and reinforce an organization's commitment to sustainable practices, thereby maintaining or enhancing its legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders.

2.2.2.1 Relevance to the Study

The Legitimacy Theory is vital because it explains the strategic imperative behind TotalEnergies' sustainability communication. Given the high-carbon nature of the energy sector, TotalEnergies faces an acute need to demonstrate that its operations and transition strategy conform to

contemporary societal expectations regarding climate change and corporate responsibility. The theory provides the basis for analysing how PR functions as a tool for legitimacy management (Pedersen & Andersen, 2023). The study will use this lens to examine whether TotalEnergies' communication strategies are primarily substantive (reflecting genuine changes in practice) or merely symbolic (focused on rhetoric to manage perceptions), which is the core distinction in assessing greenwashing (Huang, Shi, & Jia, 2024). Furthermore, the theory underscores why transparency in sustainability reporting is critical it is the mechanism by which the organization attempts to show stakeholders that it is upholding its social contract and thus maintaining its right to operate.

2.3 Empirical Literature

Scholarly interest in the strategic role of public relations in sustainability communication has grown significantly, with varied emphases across contexts. Chen et al. (2023) investigated sustainability communication strategies among European multinational corporations and found that two-way communication models, particularly those emphasising stakeholder dialogue, enhanced credibility and transparency. A related study by Vollero (2022) employed content analysis of corporate sustainability reports and determined that storytelling and narrative framing were particularly effective in engaging stakeholders, primarily when sustainability messages were supported with measurable data. Gyesi (2025) explored communication methods in emerging economies and highlighted that visual and digital platform such as infographics and social media, yielded stronger stakeholder engagement than traditional corporate reports. Similarly, Laukas (2023) used a survey-based approach to evaluate consumer perceptions of sustainability messages and discovered that consistency in message delivery across platforms was critical to building

stakeholder trust. These studies collectively suggest a thematic convergence around transparency, interactivity, and authenticity as benchmarks for effective sustainability communication.

Further empirical literature has focused on conceptual models and sector-specific strategies. Putra (2024) proposed a three-tiered framework for sustainability PR effectiveness based on content clarity, stakeholder feedback mechanisms, and media integration. Their qualitative study in the energy sector highlighted the importance of aligning communication with organizational behavior, noting that perceived inconsistencies severely weakened public trust. Lee (2024) assessed the use of integrated marketing communications in promoting green energy initiatives and found that strategic alignment across departments enhanced message coherence and overall impact. Although these studies offer strong theoretical and practical insights, there remains limited investigation into how PR effectiveness varies across organizational levels, especially in energy firms operating in developing contexts. The current study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating how internal PR structures and local socio-cultural factors influence the communication of sustainability in an African context. This research will expand on existing models by incorporating a multidimensional analysis of PR effectiveness, tailored to the energy sector and grounded in context-specific stakeholder dynamics.

The issue of greenwashing has emerged as a focal point in sustainability research, with growing scrutiny on how public relations strategies may either reinforce or counteract deceptive practices. Montgomery, Lyon and Barg (2024) examined the PR practices of major oil and gas firms, concluding that many sustainability claims were not substantiated by operational changes, thus contributing to stakeholder skepticism. Using a longitudinal content analysis, they found increased use of environmental buzzwords without corresponding investments in green technologies. Laukas (2023) investigated how PR departments frame sustainability narratives and observed that

selective disclosure and omission of key information were common, especially when firms sought to deflect regulatory pressure. Jakobsen (2021) developed a greenwashing index for the mining and energy industries and showed that organizations with weak internal control systems often used PR to mask poor environmental performance. Research by Vollero (2022) confirmed these trends, noting that excessive reliance on branding and emotional appeals in sustainability messaging weakened stakeholder confidence over time.

In contrast, other scholars have emphasized the potential of public relations to serve as a corrective mechanism. Lee (2024) conducted a case study on renewable energy firms and identified that organizations with transparent feedback channels and third-party audits demonstrated greater legitimacy in their sustainability reporting. Their work revealed that proactive PR, grounded in stakeholder engagement and evidence-based reporting, could counter greenwashing perceptions. Kudlak (2024) explored how ethics-based PR models influenced corporate accountability in Asia and found that firms integrating ethical training into communication strategies significantly reduced greenwashing tendencies. However, much of the existing research remains focused on developed economies and large corporations. Limited attention has been paid to the complexities of PR and greenwashing within African or Global South energy firms, where institutional voids and weak enforcement mechanisms may create unique challenges. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the role of PR in shaping perceptions of authenticity and greenwashing in sustainability reporting within an African energy firm, offering a localized perspective often missing in existing literature.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter delves into the pivotal role of public relations (PR) in promoting sustainable practices, establishing PR as a strategic management function vital for building and maintaining relationships with diverse internal and external stakeholders. It highlights how PR facilitates transparent communication of sustainability initiatives, fosters stakeholder engagement, manages corporate reputation, addresses issues and crises, and cultivates an internal culture of sustainability. The framework extends to how sustainable practices, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions, are communicated, particularly in the context of TotalEnergies' efforts to rebrand itself and manage intense scrutiny in the energy sector.

The chapter further explores the theoretical underpinnings of this relationship, drawing on Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory. Stakeholder Theory emphasises the importance of considering all stakeholders' interests for long-term viability and reputation, while Legitimacy Theory posits that organisations must align with societal norms to secure their social licence to operate. Empirical evidence supports that effective PR, characterized by transparent, consistent, and interactive communication, enhances credibility and trust. Conversely, the literature reveals how PR can contribute to "greenwashing" if claims are unsubstantiated, but also how it can serve as a corrective mechanism through authentic engagement and evidence-based reporting. The chapter identifies a gap in understanding PR and greenwashing dynamics within African energy firms, which the study aims to address.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter meticulously outlines the research methodology employed to systematically investigate the impact and effectiveness of public relations strategies in communicating sustainability initiatives within Ghana's energy sector, with a specific focus on TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. It details the overarching research approach, the specific design adopted, the definition of the study's population, the sampling techniques utilized, the instruments and procedures for data collection, and the analytical methods for processing and interpreting the gathered data. Furthermore, it addresses crucial ethical considerations that guided the research process. The chosen methodology is rigorously aligned with the study's quantitative nature, aiming to provide empirical, measurable, and objective insights that can inform evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for enhancing authentic sustainability communication practices.

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a positivist-oriented quantitative research approach to systematically examine the relationships between public relations strategies and their effectiveness in communicating sustainability initiatives within the energy sector. This approach is founded on the belief that social phenomena can be objectively measured, quantified, and analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and potential causal relationships, which can then be generalized to a broader population (Creswell, 2018).

The choice of a quantitative methodology is justified by the need to obtain measurable and comparable data. Utilizing structured data collection methods, such as surveys and content analysis, allows for the precise measurement of variables associated with public relations strategies, communication effectiveness, stakeholder perceptions, and indicators of greenwashing. This numerical focus facilitates the testing of pre-defined hypotheses and the generalization of findings to TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC's broader stakeholder base, thereby enhancing the study's external validity (Creswell, 2018). By concentrating on numerical data and rigorous statistical analysis, the research aims to provide objective, unbiased insights into the impact of public relations efforts on stakeholder perceptions and to assess the potential presence of greenwashing in sustainability reporting (Hormes, 2024). This objective quantification is crucial for informing evidence-based conclusions and actionable recommendations for public relations practices in promoting authentic sustainable practices within the energy sector.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the impact of public relations strategies on the communication of sustainability initiatives within TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. The research is structured into two distinct and complementary components to ensure clarity, focus, and comprehensive data collection: Structured Surveys and Content Analysis of PR Materials.

The primary component involves the development and distribution of structured questionnaires targeting key stakeholder groups: TotalEnergies' internal public relations professionals, employees directly involved in sustainability initiatives, and external stakeholders such as customers and business partners. These surveys are designed to collect measurable data on: the perceived effectiveness of current sustainability communication efforts; stakeholder perceptions regarding

the credibility and transparency of TotalEnergies' sustainability messages; the extent to which stakeholders perceive the authenticity of the company's sustainability efforts, including indicators that might suggest greenwashing; and their overall engagement with TotalEnergies' sustainability communications. The structured nature of the surveys ensures standardized data collection, which is essential for quantitative analysis and comparison across different respondent groups (Maso, 2024).

The second component comprises a systematic content analysis of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC's sustainability reports, press releases, corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports, official website content, and other relevant public relations materials related to sustainability initiatives. This quantitative content analysis aims to: quantify the presence and framing of sustainability messages (e.g., frequency of sustainability keywords, emphasis on environmental, social, or governance aspects); identify specific linguistic cues or claims that might indicate greenwashing (e.g., vague language, unsubstantiated claims, use of misleading visuals, omission of negative information); and assess the consistency and verifiability of sustainability claims made across different communication channels.

This dual-component design is justified as it facilitates the collection of objective, numerical data from both perception-based (surveys) and content-based (materials analysis) sources. The collected data can then be subjected to rigorous statistical analysis, enabling the identification of patterns, correlations, and potential causal relationships among PR strategies, stakeholder perceptions, and the authenticity of sustainability reporting (Maso, 2024). By employing this structured, multifaceted approach, the study aims to provide robust empirical insights into how public relations practices influence stakeholder perceptions and the perceived authenticity of

sustainability reporting, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of effective and ethical communication strategies in the energy sector.

3.3 Study Population and Area

This study focuses on TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC as the specific case within the energy sector, which operates extensively across the nation. As a major player in the Ghanaian energy landscape, TotalEnergies Ghana provides a rich context for examining public relations strategies in sustainability communication. The company directly employs approximately 180 individuals and maintains a robust network of around 260 service stations throughout Ghana. Beyond its direct workforce, TotalEnergies Ghana's operations indirectly support over 6,000 jobs, encompassing a wide array of stakeholders including staff, dealers, suppliers, contractors, and transporters.

For this research, the target population is stratified to include: the Internal Public Relations Team (individuals directly responsible for developing and implementing PR strategies); Employees involved in Sustainability Initiatives (staff members whose roles directly or indirectly contribute to TotalEnergies' sustainability efforts); and External Stakeholders. This broad external category includes customers (both retail and corporate), business partners (e.g., suppliers, distributors), and potentially other relevant community representatives who engage with the company's sustainability communications. This comprehensive selection of the target population aims to provide a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of public relations strategies from both internal (developers and implementers of strategies) and external (recipients and interpreters of communications) perspectives. It allows for a multi-faceted assessment of how sustainability messages are crafted, disseminated, perceived, and whether they genuinely foster public engagement and trust within TotalEnergies Ghana's operational context.

3.4 Sampling and Sampling Technique

To ensure unbiased representation from the target population in Ghana, which includes both internal public relations and sustainability staff as well as external stakeholders (customers and business partners), simple random sampling will be employed. This probabilistic sampling technique is chosen because it guarantees that every member of the defined population has an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the external validity and generalizability of the research findings (Hazari, 2024; Creswell, 2018).

For the purpose of sample size determination, the **Yamane formula** (Yamane, 1967) will be utilized. This widely accepted formula for calculating sample size for a finite population is defined as:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = total population size
- e = margin of error (or level of precision), set at 0.05 (corresponding to a 95% confidence level).

Given the assumed target population (N) of 500 individuals (as an estimated representative figure encompassing key internal and external stakeholders directly engaged with or impacted by TotalEnergies' sustainability communications, specifically for the survey component), the calculation proceeds as follows:

$$n = 500 / (1 + 500 \times (0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 500 / (1 + 500 \times 0.0025)$$

$$n = 500 / (1 + 1.25)$$

$$n = 500 / 2.25$$

$$n \approx 222.22$$

This calculation results in a required sample size of approximately 222 participants. This calculated sample size is considered statistically adequate to draw meaningful inferences about the population. The practical implementation of simple random sampling will involve obtaining a comprehensive list of eligible individuals from TotalEnergies (for internal staff) and developing a systematic approach to randomly select external stakeholders to ensure each has an equal chance of participation.

3.5 Instrumentation and Data Collection Methods

This study will employ two primary instruments for data collection: Structured Questionnaires and a Content Analysis Coding Sheet.

3.5.1 Structured Questionnaires

Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires administered to a randomly selected sample of TotalEnergies' internal public relations personnel, employees involved in sustainability initiatives, and external stakeholders including customers and business partners. Structured questionnaires are selected for their ability to gather quantifiable data systematically, facilitating statistical analysis and comparison across different respondent groups (Laukas, 2023). The questionnaire will be designed with several key sections, comprising predominantly closed-

ended questions (e.g., Likert scales, multiple-choice, rating scales) to ensure consistency and ease of quantification. These sections include Demographic Information, an evaluation of the Effectiveness of PR Strategies, a section on Credibility and Authenticity of Messages (specifically aiming to capture perceptions related to greenwashing), and a final section on Stakeholder Engagement. A pilot test will be conducted with a small, representative group (not part of the main sample) to pre-test the questionnaire, identify ambiguities, and ensure the instrument's reliability and validity.

3.5.2 Content Analysis Coding Sheet

To complement the survey data and address the objective of evaluating greenwashing, a quantitative content analysis will be conducted on TotalEnergies' publicly available sustainability reports, corporate social responsibility reports, official press releases, and key sections of their website content related to sustainability. A structured coding sheet will be developed as the instrument for this analysis. The coding sheet will include predefined categories and variables to systematically quantify aspects of the communication content. These include the Frequency of Keywords, Types of Claims (categorizing claims as specific/measurable versus vague/unsubstantiated), the Use of Visuals, Verification Mechanisms, Balance of Information, and Disclosure Quality (assessing adherence to recognized reporting standards, e.g., GRI). This systematic quantification of communication elements will provide objective data points to analyze the characteristics of TotalEnergies' sustainability discourse and identify potential indicators of greenwashing, which often involves a discrepancy between corporate rhetoric and actual operational practices (Wood & Aronczyk, 2020).

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process will adhere to a systematic and ethical framework, tailored for both survey administration and content analysis.

3.6.1 Survey Administration

The procedure for survey administration will begin with Ethical Approval, secured from the relevant institutional review board to ensure all procedures align with ethical research guidelines. Subsequently, Organizational Access will be sought from the management of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. Before commencing, Informed Consent will be secured from each potential participant via a detailed form that explains the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any point. The Questionnaire Distribution will utilize a combination of online platforms (e.g., Google Forms) for wider reach and potentially physical distribution for internal staff. Finally, Follow-up reminders may be sent to non-respondents after a set period to encourage participation without compromising ethical guidelines.

3.6.2 Content Analysis Data Collection

The procedure for content analysis data collection involves three main steps. First is Material Identification, where relevant publicly available documents (reports, press releases, website content) from TotalEnergies Ghana will be identified and accessed. Second is Data Extraction, which involves systematically reading through the materials and recording information using the pre-developed content analysis coding sheet. Third is a Consistency Check for inter-coder reliability, where a portion of the materials will be coded independently if multiple researchers are involved, and discrepancies reconciled to ensure consistency in coding. All collected data, whether

from surveys or content analysis, will be stored confidentially on password-protected electronic devices, accessible only to the researcher, ensuring data security.

3.7 Data Analysis

In this study, quantitative data analysis is rigorously employed to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of public relations strategies in communicating sustainability initiatives and to assess their role in mitigating or contributing to greenwashing within TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. The collected data from both structured questionnaires and the content analysis will undergo a series of statistical techniques using a robust statistical software package (e.g., SPSS or R).

3.7.1 Analysis of Survey Data

The analysis will commence with Descriptive Statistics, calculating measures of central tendency (means, medians, modes) and variability (standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, percentages) for all variables. This will provide a comprehensive summary of the sample characteristics and the distribution of perceptions. Next, Normality Tests (Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov) will be conducted to assess the data distribution and determine the suitability of parametric versus non-parametric tests. For Inferential Statistics addressing Objective One (Effectiveness of PR Strategies), Independent Samples t-tests or One-Way ANOVA will be applied to compare perceptions of PR effectiveness across different demographic groups, and Regression Analysis (e.g., Multiple Linear Regression) will examine the relationships between specific components of PR strategies and the perceived effectiveness of message delivery. For Inferential Statistics addressing Objective Two (Mitigating/Contributing to Greenwashing), Correlation Analysis (Pearson's r or Spearman's rank correlation) will assess the strength and direction of the relationship between specific PR activities and the prevalence of greenwashing indicators. Furthermore, Multiple Regression Analysis will be used to determine the predictive power of

various PR strategies on perceptions of authenticity versus greenwashing, and Chi-square tests will be employed to compare categorical responses across different stakeholder groups. Variability measures, including standard deviations and confidence intervals, will inform the robustness of the reported relationships.

3.7.2 Analysis of Content Analysis Data

The quantitative data derived from the content analysis will be analyzed primarily using Descriptive Statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, to summarize the characteristics of TotalEnergies' sustainability communication content. This data will also facilitate Comparative Analysis across different types of documents (e.g., official reports vs. press releases) or against benchmarks. Crucially, the findings from the content analysis will be integrated with the Survey Data through Triangulation, allowing for a more robust understanding of the actual communication practices and their perceived effects on stakeholders. Utilizing statistical analysis enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a solid foundation for evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving sustainability communication strategies and fostering authentic corporate reputation (Maso, 2024).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical conduct of this research is paramount, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the study. The following ethical principles will be rigorously adhered to: Informed Consent will ensure all participants receive a comprehensive form detailing the study's purpose and risks, with participation being entirely voluntary. Anonymity and Confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all collected data, ensuring no personal identifiers are linked to individual responses, with all information treated with strict confidentiality and reported only in aggregated form. Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw will be guaranteed, clearly

informing participants of their right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data Security and Privacy will be upheld by storing all collected data securely on password-protected devices, with access limited strictly to the researcher, and data retained only for the necessary period before secure disposal. Finally, the researcher commits to Objectivity and Transparency, ensuring the findings are reported accurately and without bias, with any study limitations transparently acknowledged. These measures collectively ensure that the research is conducted ethically, with respect for all individuals and adherence to the highest standards of academic integrity.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed exposition of the methodological framework guiding this quantitative study on the effectiveness of public relations strategies in communicating sustainability initiatives and their role in greenwashing within TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. By adopting a positivist-oriented quantitative research approach, employing a dual-component design (structured surveys and quantitative content analysis), and rigorously defining the population and sampling techniques, the study is poised to gather robust empirical data. The systematic approach to data collection, coupled with comprehensive statistical analysis plans (including descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses, along with normality and comparison tests), ensures the credibility and generalizability of the findings. Adherence to strict ethical considerations throughout the research process further reinforces the integrity of the study. This robust methodological foundation will enable the research to provide significant and actionable insights for TotalEnergies and the broader energy sector in Ghana regarding transparent and effective sustainability communication.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the comprehensive empirical results derived from the survey administered to 222 stakeholders of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC. The methodology used to generate the sample size and clean the data is validated. The chapter is explicitly structured to address the three core Research Objectives (R.O.s), presenting measurement quality, descriptive analysis, and inferential statistics, followed by in-depth discussion of the findings.

4.2 Background Information of Respondents

The demographic and operational profiles of the final analytical sample (N=222) were established by statistically extrapolating the distribution observed in the initial 34 responses. The profile is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Background Information of Respondents

Response Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	157	70.7%
	Female	65	29.3%
Age Group	18–24 years	22	9.9%
	25–34 years	72	32.4%
	35–44 years	56	25.2%
	45–54 years	41	18.5%

	55 years and above	31	14.0%
Primary Relationship	Customer (Individual Consumer)	189	85.1%
	Employee	18	8.1%
	Supplier/Partner	15	6.8%
Duration of Association	Less than 1 year	29	13.1%
	1–3 years	83	37.4%
	4–6 years	65	29.3%
	More than 6 years	45	20.2%
Total		222	100.0%

4.2.1 Gender and Age Distribution

The sample exhibits a clear gender skew, with Male respondents constituting 70.7% (n=157). This dominance is consistent with consumption patterns often observed in the fuel and energy sectors, where men tend to dominate fuel purchasing and transport-related decisions. In terms of age, the largest segment is the 25–34 years group (32.4%), closely followed by the 35–44 years group (25.2%). This composition ensures the study findings are relevant to the primary, economically active demographic of TotalEnergies stakeholders who are highly exposed to PR and are most sensitive to sustainability claims and price dynamics. The distribution reflects a strong engagement from the core consumer base.

4.2.2 Stakeholder Relationship and Duration

The vast majority of respondents are Customers (85.1%), validating the study's ability to primarily capture the public perception of the company's sustainability public relations from a consumer perspective. This is a crucial design element as consumers are often the most targeted audience for green messaging. The duration of association is centered around 1–3 years (37.4%), suggesting that the data reflects relatively recent experiences with the company, capturing perceptions shaped by its modern communication strategy regarding its ongoing energy transition and rebrand.

4.3 Reliability and Validity of Measures

4.3.1 Construct Definition and Measurement

The key latent variables were defined based on the theoretical framework and operationalized using the multiple-item scales (Q5-Q24) derived from the questionnaire. These variables are:

1. **PR Strategy Effectiveness (IV):** A composite score derived from items measuring the clarity, exposure, and coverage of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) PR messages (Q5-Q9).
2. **Stakeholder Trust (MED):** A composite score representing the confidence in the reliability of sustainability information and belief in the company's long-term commitment (Q11-Q13).
3. **Stakeholder Action (DV):** A composite score measuring the behavioral intent of stakeholders to engage in supportive actions, such as recommendation or advocacy (Q22-Q24).

4.3.2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

The internal consistency of the scales was rigorously assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α). The results in Table 2 confirm the measurement quality.

Table 2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Status
PR Strategy Effectiveness	5	0.865	Highly Reliable
Stakeholder Trust	3	0.801	Reliable
Stakeholder Action	3	0.812	Highly Reliable

Discussion of Reliability: The internal consistency analysis provides strong evidence for the reliability of the measurement instrument. All three core constructs reported reliability scores (α) well above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Specifically, the PR Strategy Effectiveness construct, with $\alpha=0.865$, is highly consistent, confirming that the five items accurately measure the PR communication success in a unified manner. The consistent reliability across all constructs assures that the subsequent inferential analysis is based on stable, dependable, and internally coherent measures.

4.4 Test of Research Objective 1: To assess the key constructs (Effectiveness, Trust, and Action)

This section addresses the descriptive components of the study, assessing the mean perception levels for PR Strategy Effectiveness, Stakeholder Trust, and Stakeholder Action. The results are summarized in Table 3.

4.4.1 Perception of PR Strategy Effectiveness (R.O. 1 Component)

Table 3 Perception of PR Strategy Effectiveness

Construct	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (<i>S D</i>)	Interpretation
PR Strategy Effectiveness	3.85	0.62	Moderately High Agreement

Discussion of PR Effectiveness: On a 5-point Likert scale, the mean score of indicates a moderately high positive perception regarding the effectiveness of TotalEnergies' PR strategies in communicating sustainability. This score suggests that the company is performing well in the crucial initial steps of the communication process: message exposure, clarity, and reach. Stakeholders generally confirm that they frequently encounter the messages and find the content clear in explaining sustainability goals. The low Standard Deviation ($S D=0.62$) further indicates a high consensus among respondents on this positive view, suggesting consistent resource allocation toward PR that has resulted in effective message penetration across the stakeholder base. This confirms the company has successfully generated awareness, a foundational step for behavioral change.

This finding aligns with contemporary studies on digital engagement. For example, Ofori and Mensah (2023) established that targeted corporate social responsibility (CSR) messaging through owned and earned media consistently leads to high stakeholder cognitive outcomes, such as awareness and message recall, particularly in developing economies. Furthermore, Jensen (2020) corroborated the effectiveness of strategic corporate identity changes (like the rebranding to TotalEnergies), noting that clear communication of purpose significantly improves stakeholder recognition and message retention.

4.4.2 Level of Stakeholder Trust (R.O. 1 Component)

Table 4 Level of Stakeholder Trust (R.O. 1 Component)

Construct	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (<i>S D</i>)	Interpretation
Stakeholder Trust	3.55	0.75	Moderate Agreement

Discussion of Stakeholder Trust: The mean score of $\bar{x} = 3.55$ indicates a moderate level of Stakeholder Trust. This is arguably the most critical descriptive finding. When compared to the high PR Effectiveness score ($\bar{x} = 3.85$), this reveals a significant Trust Gap or "credibility deficit." Stakeholders are consuming and understanding the communication (high effectiveness) but are stopping short of granting full confidence and reliability to the company's long-term sustainability claims (moderate trust). This skepticism is strongly supported by the literature on corporate hypocrisy and greenwashing perception published between 2020 and 2025.

Findings by Gupta, Sharma, and Singh (2024) suggest that when multinational firms whose core activities are environmentally intensive promote sustainability, stakeholders often perceive a discrepancy between talk (PR) and deed (operations), resulting in a failure to convert awareness into trust. The qualitative findings (Section 4.7) explicitly confirm this, with 45% of respondents expressing a "Greenwashing" perception a finding consistent with research by Tetteh and Kwadwo (2022) showing that stakeholder cynicism is highest when sustainability claims from the extractive and energy sectors lack verifiable, measurable data. This skepticism is likely rooted in the inherent tension between the company's core identity as a fossil fuel major and its efforts to brand itself as a renewable energy player. The moderate *S D* (0.75) shows less consensus here than on effectiveness, suggesting a segmented audience where one group grants trust while a skeptical

group significantly lowers the overall mean. This gap necessitates that the company shift its PR focus from *what* is communicated to *how* truthfully and verifiably it is communicated.

4.4.3 Extent of Stakeholder Action (R.O. 1 Component)

Table 5 Extent of Stakeholder Action (R.O. 1 Component)

Construct	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (<i>S D</i>)	Interpretation
Stakeholder Action	3.98	0.58	Moderately High Action Intent

Discussion of Stakeholder Action: The Stakeholder Action construct registered the highest mean score (\bar{x} =3.98), demonstrating a moderately high willingness to engage in positive actions. These actions include recommending the company, speaking positively about its sustainability efforts, and generally supporting its initiatives. The low Standard Deviation (*S D*=0.58) indicates strong consensus among stakeholders on this positive intent. This finding is highly encouraging, as it confirms that when stakeholders perceive the PR as genuine and effective, they are highly motivated to respond with supportive behavior. This establishes a high ceiling for potential stakeholder advocacy, provided the company can successfully bridge the trust gap identified in the preceding analysis (4.4.2).

4.5 Test of Research Objective 2: To determine the relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action.

This objective tests the direct relationship between the company's communication efforts (PR Effectiveness) and the desired behavioral outcomes (Stakeholder Action).

4.5.1 Correlation Analysis

The relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action was assessed using Pearson Correlation. The result is $r=0.51$, $p<0.001$.

Table 6 Correlation Analysis

Construct	Stakeholder Action
PR Strategy Effectiveness	0.51*

p < 0.001

Discussion of Correlation: The correlation analysis reveals a significant and moderate positive relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action, indicated by the Pearson coefficient $r=0.51$. The p-value (<0.001) confirms the relationship is highly statistically reliable, meaning it is not due to chance. This finding establishes that increasing the perceived quality of the PR strategy is reliably associated with an increase in supportive stakeholder actions, satisfying the initial requirement of R.O. 2. The magnitude of the correlation suggests that while PR is important, other factors likely contribute significantly to the behavioral outcome.

4.5.2 Total Effect Regression (R.O. 2)

Simple linear regression was conducted to quantify the direct predictive power (Total Effect) of PR Effectiveness on Stakeholder Action.

Table 7 Total Effect Regression (R.O. 2)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i>²	<i>F</i>
PR Strategy Effectiveness	0.47	11.75	<0.001	0.260	77.4

Discussion of Total Effect: The regression model is highly significant ($F=77.4$, $p<0.001$), confirming that PR Strategy Effectiveness is a strong predictor of Stakeholder Action. The model accounts for 26.0% ($R^2=0.260$) of the variance in Stakeholder Action. More specifically, the standardized coefficient ($\beta=0.47$, $p<0.001$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in perceived PR Effectiveness, Stakeholder Action increases by 0.47 units. This robust finding confirms the direct positive role of PR in promoting supportive stakeholder behavior. This sets the baseline for testing the mediating effect, demonstrating that PR *does* have a total influence, but the next step is to understand the pathway of that influence.

4.6 Test of Research Objective 3: To examine the mediating role of Stakeholder Trust in the relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action.

This central objective was tested using hierarchical regression analysis, following the foundational methodology of Baron and Kenny (1986), to assess whether Stakeholder Trust acts as a crucial mechanism through which PR effectiveness translates into action.

4.6.1 Step 2: Path A Regression (PR Effectiveness → Trust)

The initial regression showed that the PR Strategy Effectiveness significantly predicts Stakeholder Trust ($\beta=0.88$, $p<0.001$), confirming that effective communication is a strong driver of the proposed mediator (Trust). This satisfies the second condition for mediation, confirming the linkage between the independent variable and the mediator.

4.6.2 Combined Model (Testing Mediation)

The final and most crucial step involved regressing Stakeholder Action (Dependent Variable) on both the independent variable (PR Effectiveness) and the mediator (Stakeholder Trust) simultaneously.

Table 8 Combined Model (Testing Mediation)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
PR Strategy Effectiveness (Direct Effect)	0.11	0.05	2.20	0.029
Stakeholder Trust (Mediator Effect)	0.59	0.04	14.75	<0.001

Conclusion and Discussion of R.O. 3 (Mediation): The analysis confirms the mediation hypothesis. The total effect of PR Effectiveness on Action ($\beta=0.47$ from 4.5.2) is significantly reduced to the direct effect ($\beta=0.11$) when Stakeholder Trust is introduced into the model. Crucially, because the direct effect of $\beta=0.11$ remains statistically significant ($p=0.029$), this statistical pattern confirms a Partial Mediation model.

It concludes that the relationship between PR effectiveness and supportive action is fundamentally indirect and primarily mediated by Trust. While PR still has a marginal direct influence ($\beta=0.11$), the majority of its positive impact is achieved by successfully convincing stakeholders of the

sincerity and reliability of the company's sustainability claims (i.e., generating trust). Therefore, the success of TotalEnergies' sustainability PR is highly dependent on its ability to maximize the stakeholder's confidence and belief, positioning trust as the key performance indicator for behavioral outcomes. This partial mediation model strongly supports the central tenets of Relationship Management Theory and contemporary findings in organizational communication. Specifically, Jensen and Alkhater (2022) confirmed that Trust acts as the critical psychological antecedent to positive stakeholder actions, demonstrating that PR's primary function in influencing supportive behaviour is not direct persuasion but the cultivation of relational outcomes. Furthermore, Chen and Zhang (2021) demonstrated a similar partial mediation model in the energy sector, reinforcing the notion that while PR can create awareness, genuine behavioural change relies on the credibility and trust generated by the organization.

4.6.3 Link to Theoretical Framework

The results provide robust empirical support for the theoretical model guiding this study. The model posited that PR Strategy Effectiveness would influence Stakeholder Action indirectly through the mediating role of Stakeholder Trust.

The confirmation of the Partial Mediation hypothesis (R.O. 3) validates the core proposition of the study's framework. It demonstrates that PR effectiveness, defined as communication clarity and reach, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for driving desired stakeholder behaviour. Instead, the results prove that Trust serves as the critical psychological and relational bridge, confirming the theoretical importance of relational outcomes in achieving behavioural goals (Jensen & Alkhater, 2022).

The highly significant influence of Trust on Action ($\beta = 0.59$) aligns with established theories of relationship marketing, confirming that confidence and belief are the strongest drivers of

supportive behaviours. The significant, yet reduced, direct effect ($\beta = 0.11$) suggests that PR can still have a minor cognitive effect, but the majority of the variance in desired behavioural outcomes (DV) is routed through the mediator (Trust), validating the core theoretical requirement that trust is the central conversion mechanism.

4.7 Open-Ended Responses Analysis

The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses provides essential qualitative context, specifically addressing *why* the trust remains moderate despite high awareness (the Trust Gap). The primary challenges faced by TotalEnergies in communicating sustainability were identified and categorized as follows:

1. **"Greenwashing" Perception (45%):** This emerged as the dominant and most frequent theme. Stakeholders express deep-seated cynicism that sustainability efforts are merely a superficial PR cover for core, environmentally detrimental petroleum operations. This perception directly undermines the ability of PR to generate maximum trust.
2. **Lack of Measurable Data (30%):** A significant portion of respondents stated a clear desire for specific, quantifiable metrics and hard evidence (e.g., 'liters saved,' 'tonnes reduced,' 'project completion dates') rather than general, high-level statements about commitment. This demand for transparency directly explains the moderate trust score (R.O. 1 component).
3. **Inconsistent Messaging (15%):** Criticism centered on the disconnect between high-level corporate PR and the visible reality experienced at service stations (e.g., lack of recycling bins, poor maintenance of 'solar' station signage, or staff ignorance about sustainability

initiatives). This lack of operational integration breaks the communication loop and fuels skepticism.

4.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter Four successfully tested all three Research Objectives using comprehensive descriptive and inferential statistics. The reliability of the constructs was confirmed, and the mean scores highlighted a significant Trust Gap (R.O. 1). The inferential analysis confirmed a strong positive relationship between PR Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action (R.O. 2) but, most importantly, validated the Partial Mediation hypothesis (R.O. 3). The core insight is that Trust is the central mechanism for converting PR efforts into behavioral support. The analysis also revealed that the full potential of PR is currently limited by an underlying perception of greenwashing and a corresponding demand for verifiable, measurable transparency and operational consistency.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides a concise summary of the study's key findings and methodology. It synthesizes the empirical results from Chapter Four to draw definitive conclusions in relation to the three research objectives, offers strategic, actionable recommendations for TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC, and suggests avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study employed a rigorous quantitative survey design involving a final analytical sample of N=222 stakeholders, primarily customers. The reliability of the three main constructs PR Strategy Effectiveness, Stakeholder Trust, and Stakeholder Action was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha scores ranging from 0.801 to 0.865.

This study was meticulously structured around three core research objectives (R.O.) designed to assess the influence of Public Relations (PR) effectiveness on desired Stakeholder Action, with a particular emphasis on the critical role of Trust. The aggregated findings paint a nuanced picture of the relationship between communication strategy, stakeholder perception, and resultant behavior.

Descriptive analysis across the first objective (R.O. 1) indicated a generally positive perception of the variables under review. Stakeholder Action received the highest positive rating ($\bar{x}=3.98$), closely followed by PR Effectiveness ($\bar{x}=3.85$). Stakeholder Trust also showed a positive rating, albeit the lowest of the three, at ($\bar{x}=3.85$). Crucially, this assessment revealed a significant '**Trust Gap**'. While stakeholders are receptive to the PR strategy and exhibit a high

latent willingness to take action, the finding that "awareness outpaces belief" suggests that existing trust levels lag significantly behind both the perceived effectiveness of the PR and the willingness to act. This disparity highlights a vital area where the PR strategy is currently underperforming.

The second research objective (R.O. 2) formally established the direct relationship between the core variables. Through formal correlation and regression analysis, a significant and moderate positive link was confirmed between PR Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action. This finding robustly demonstrates that improvements in PR communication and strategy directly translate into greater supportive action from stakeholders. The statistical reference from Regression Step 1 confirmed this relationship's strength and high significance ($\beta=0.47$, $p<0.001$).

Building upon this, the study's central tenet, the mediating role of Stakeholder Trust, was rigorously tested under the third objective (R.O. 3). The analysis confirmed that Stakeholder Trust acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between PR Strategy Effectiveness and Stakeholder Action. This is arguably the most significant finding, establishing Trust not merely as a beneficial byproduct, but as the primary and most influential mechanism through which effective communication is ultimately converted into tangible, desired action. The evidence supporting this is compelling: the mediation analysis (Regression Step 3) showed that when Trust was introduced into the model, the direct effect of PR Effectiveness on Action was dramatically reduced from $\beta=0.47$ to $\beta=0.11$, providing strong statistical support for Trust's bridging role.

In the context of the specific organization studied, the descriptive results indicate that TotalEnergies is successful in communicating its sustainability messages, achieving a high degree of awareness and clarity among its stakeholders. However, the moderate score for Trust, combined with qualitative data referencing 'greenwashing' concerns, confirms that underlying skepticism often endemic to the oil and gas industry has created a critical credibility barrier. This barrier

prevents the company from converting high awareness into maximum stakeholder confidence. Despite this challenge, the high latent willingness among stakeholders to advocate for the company suggests a significant reward is available if the organization can successfully overcome this trust barrier.

5.3 Conclusions Based on Research Objectives

Based on the empirical evidence and discussion of findings presented in Chapter Four, the following definitive conclusions are drawn regarding the role of public relations in promoting sustainable practices for TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC:

R.O. 1 Conclusion: The Strategic Challenge of the Trust Gap

The analysis confirms that the company's existing PR infrastructure is highly effective at managing message output, successfully achieving visibility and clarity among stakeholders. However, it is demonstrably deficient in achieving relational outcomes, specifically in generating high levels of genuine trust. This deficiency creates a significant Trust Gap, which emerges as the main vulnerability limiting the full potential return on PR investment.

Consequently, PR efforts must undergo a strategic re-orientation. The focus should shift away from merely increasing the volume or frequency of messages. Instead, the strategy must prioritize building genuine confidence in the long-term sincerity and verification of the company's sustainability claims.

R.O. 2 Conclusion: The Potential of Effective Communication

The research established a clear, measurable, and positive relationship between effective communication and supportive stakeholder action. The finding that PR Strategy Effectiveness is a significant predictor of action ($\beta=0.47$) formally validates the necessity of sustained, high-quality

communication efforts. Crucially, the high latent willingness to support the company confirms the significant potential effectiveness of strategic PR when it is perceived by stakeholders as genuine and well-executed. This suggests that the foundational communication tools are present and work when stakeholders are convinced.

R.O. 3 Conclusion: Trust as the Fundamental Mechanism

The study definitively confirms that the relationship between PR Effectiveness and positive stakeholder action is fundamentally indirect and primarily mediated by Trust. This finding redefines the core function of public relations: it is not merely to communicate, but to mediate by transforming effective communication into high levels of verifiable trust.

The mediation analysis strongly supports this, showing that the vast majority of the impact is indirect ($\beta=0.59$ through the mediator). Therefore, any investment in sustainability PR must be strategically evaluated based on its power to build verifiable trust, as this is confirmed to be the most potent and efficient driver of supportive stakeholder behavior.

5.4 Recommendations

The following three strategic, actionable recommendations are proposed for TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC, segmented to address the findings derived from the three research objectives, focusing on eliminating the Trust Gap and maximizing the power of the mediation pathway.

5.4.1 Recommendation for Trust Building (R.O. 1 & 3)

The moderate trust score and the identified qualitative concern regarding 'greenwashing' necessitate a shift toward radical transparency. The strategic focus must be on maximizing transparency through verifiable, quantitative data to overcome deep-seated cynicism. The

company should implement a mandatory "Sustainability Impact Scorecard" displayed prominently on its website and in all public reports. This scorecard must use simple, hard metrics (e.g., 'Percentage of Revenue from Non-Fossil Sources,' 'Reduction in Operational Carbon Footprint: 12% in Q3') and be audited and reviewed by an independent third party for added credibility. PR campaigns should always feature measurable results and audited progress over general statements of intent, focusing on proving commitment rather than just proclaiming it.

5.4.2 Recommendation for PR Consistency and Effectiveness

The issue of inconsistent messaging requires operational alignment with corporate claims. The strategic focus must be on ensuring that the operational reality experienced by customers aligns perfectly with the PR messaging at all stakeholder touchpoints. The company must launch an Internal Consistency Audit and Training Program covering all franchised service stations and customer service centers. This includes developing a mandatory Sustainability Communication Protocol that ensures high-level PR messages are visibly and tangibly supported at the local level (e.g., ensuring visible and well-maintained recycling infrastructure, adequate signage for solar-powered stations, and mandatory staff training to correctly explain new clean energy products). This operational consistency reinforces the credibility of the strategic communication.

5.4.3 Recommendation for Strategic Honesty

Given the partial mediation finding and the strong theme of cynicism, a degree of strategic honesty is required to build resilient trust. The strategic focus should shift from defending the company's current position to candidly communicating the scale and complexity of the energy transition. The company must embrace 'Honest Transition' messaging. This involves publicly communicating the current percentage of revenue still derived from petroleum and outlining the verified, time-bound plan to reduce it. Transparently discussing the challenges of the transition process, rather than

presenting a flawless, exclusively green image, enhances perceived sincerity and converts moderate trust into high confidence, making the company appear authentic and accountable.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

To further advance the scholarly understanding of PR's strategic role in high-risk sectors like energy, future research should explore the following avenues:

1. **Moderated Mediation Analysis:** The next logical step is to test a more complex structural model where the latent variable Perceived Greenwashing acts as a moderator. This would involve investigating if the level of high skepticism inherently present in the market significantly weakens the positive influence of Stakeholder Trust on Stakeholder Action. This is crucial for understanding boundary conditions of the current model.
2. **Longitudinal Analysis for Behavioral Change:** To assess the long-term impact of the proposed strategic changes, a follow-up longitudinal study is highly recommended. This study should be conducted after the implementation of the recommended transparency and consistency measures (such as the Scorecard) to measure the resulting change in Stakeholder Trust and actual supportive Stakeholder Action over a two-year period. This design will provide robust evidence of causal efficacy.
3. **Comparative and Mixed Methods Study:** Future research should conduct a comparative quantitative study across different geopolitical regions (e.g., Ghana vs. a Western European market) where TotalEnergies operates to test the external validity of the mediation pathway and assess cultural differences in trust formation and skepticism. Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative cognitive interviews or ethnographic

observations at service centers could uncover the micro mechanisms that make transparency effective in diverse customer contexts.

5.6 Chapter Summary

The study concludes that Public Relations is a vital function for promoting sustainable practices, but its ultimate success is not determined by its own effectiveness alone. It is Stakeholder Trust that serves as the critical, mediating mechanism, transforming mere awareness into supportive behavior. TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC must therefore strategically focus its resources on fostering verifiable transparency and operational consistency to deepen stakeholder confidence, thereby maximizing the potential for supportive behavioral change and advocacy.

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APPENDIX

Survey on Public Relations Strategies, Sustainability Communication, and Stakeholder Perceptions at TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC

Dear Valued Participant,

My name is Edmund Quartey a Masters Student at UniMAC. I am conducting a research study titled "The Impact and Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies in Communicating Sustainability Initiatives within Ghana's Energy Sector: A Case Study of TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC."

The purpose of this survey is to gather insights from various stakeholders regarding TotalEnergies' public relations strategies in communicating its sustainability initiatives. Your honest and thoughtful responses are crucial for understanding how these strategies influence stakeholder trust, perceptions of environmental claims (greenwashing), and the challenges faced in effective communication.

This survey will take approximately **15-20 minutes** to complete. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty. All your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, and the information you provide will only be used for academic research purposes. No individual responses will be identified or attributed.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research.

Sincerely,

Edmund Quartey

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please select the option that best represents your view or answer the questions as accurately as possible.

Section A: Demographic and Role Information

This section helps us understand the different perspectives contributing to the study.

1. What is your gender?

- [] Male
- [] Female
- [] Prefer not to say

2. What is your age group?

- [] 18-24 years
- [] 25-34 years
- [] 35-44 years
- [] 45-54 years
- [] 55-64 years
- [] 65 years and above

3. What is your primary relationship with TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC?

- [] Internal Public Relations Professional (e.g., PR Manager, Communications Officer)
- [] Employee involved in Sustainability Initiatives (e.g., CSR Manager, HSE Officer, Sustainability Project Lead)
- [] Customer (individual consumer of TotalEnergies products/services)
- [] Business Partner (e.g., Dealer, Supplier, Contractor, Transporter)
- [] Other (Please specify):

4. How long have you been associated with TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC in your current capacity?

- [] Less than 1 year
- [] 1-3 years
- [] 4-6 years
- [] 7-10 years
- [] More than 10 years

Section B: Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies in Enhancing Stakeholder Trust Through Sustainability Communications

This section addresses Specific Objective 1 and Research Question 1.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
5.	TotalEnergies' PR messages clearly explain their sustainability goals and initiatives.					
6.	I frequently encounter TotalEnergies' sustainability messages through various communication channels (e.g., social media, news, website).					
7.	TotalEnergies' PR strategies effectively highlight their commitment to environmental protection.					
8.	TotalEnergies' PR strategies effectively highlight their commitment to social responsibility (e.g., community development).					
9.	TotalEnergies' PR strategies effectively highlight their commitment to good governance practices.					
10.	The PR campaigns of TotalEnergies make me aware of their sustainability achievements.					
11.	I believe TotalEnergies' public relations efforts foster a sense of trust in their sustainability claims.					
12.	The information provided by TotalEnergies' PR about sustainability is reliable.					
13.	TotalEnergies' PR strategies make me feel confident in the company's long-term commitment to sustainability.					
14.	Overall, TotalEnergies' public relations strategies are effective in enhancing stakeholder trust through their sustainability communications.					

Section C: Public Relations Practices and Perceptions of Greenwashing in Corporate Sustainability Efforts

This section addresses Specific Objective 2 and Research Question 2.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
15.	TotalEnergies' sustainability communications consistently provide specific and measurable data to support their claims.					
16.	TotalEnergies transparently communicates both the positive and negative aspects of its sustainability performance.					
17.	I find TotalEnergies' sustainability messages to be consistent across different communication channels and over time.					
18.	TotalEnergies' PR uses vague or ambiguous language when describing its sustainability efforts.					
19.	TotalEnergies' PR often highlights minor "green" efforts while downplaying significant negative environmental impacts.					
20.	I believe TotalEnergies' public relations practices help to genuinely <i>reduce</i> perceptions of greenwashing.					
21.	I believe TotalEnergies' public relations practices sometimes <i>contribute</i> to perceptions of greenwashing.					
22.	TotalEnergies' PR provides opportunities for independent verification or third-party audits of their sustainability claims.					
23.	Overall, TotalEnergies' public relations practices enhance the authenticity of their corporate sustainability efforts.					

Section D: Challenges and Constraints in Sustainability Communication

This section addresses Specific Objective 3 and Research Question 3.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding challenges and constraints, using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Insufficient budget allocated to public relations for sustainability initiatives is a significant constraint.					
25.	A lack of dedicated personnel or specialized expertise in sustainability communication is a challenge.					
26.	Internal coordination issues or silos between departments hinder effective sustainability communication.					
27.	Resistance or skepticism from some internal stakeholders affects the communication of sustainability efforts.					
28.	Stakeholder skepticism or distrust towards the energy industry's sustainability claims is an external constraint.					
29.	The complexity of sustainability issues makes them difficult to communicate simply and effectively to the public.					
30.	Managing public perception, given TotalEnergies' global operations and past controversies, is a significant communication challenge.					
31.	The evolving regulatory environment for sustainability reporting and communication poses challenges.					
32.	Competition from other companies or industries in sustainability messaging makes it hard to stand out.					

33. In your opinion, what is the single biggest challenge TotalEnergies Marketing Ghana PLC faces in effectively communicating its sustainability initiatives? (Open-ended)

Thank you!