

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A REVIEW OF NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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### Abstract

*The paper examined religious diversity and employee engagement: a review of Nigerian Public Sector. The population of the study comprised of the MDAs at Federal Secretariat, Rivers state. 100 Federal Government employee were purposively sampled. Through the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Spearman Rank Correlation was used for the analysis. The findings showed that dimensions of religious diversity has a noteworthy and positive nexus with the employee engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) of employee of Nigerian Public Sector. The findings of the study revealed that religious diversity is negatively correlated with vigor, dedication and absorption of Nigerian public sector employees. The identified negative correlations suggest that there is a tendency for levels of engagement, enthusiasm, and absorption in work-related activities to decline in tandem with the increase in religious diversity. The study recommends that organizations should encourage employees to engage in open dialogue and communication in order to promote appreciation and comprehension of diverse religious viewpoints and leadership should lead by example in promoting diversity and inclusion.*

**Keywords:** Religious Diversity, Employee Engagement, Vigor, Dedication, Absorption, Nigerian Public Sector

### Introduction

Many organisations have focused on cultivating an engaged workforce, since experts argue that engaged employees are crucial for establishing a healthy work environment marked by diligence, integrity, and accountability. Research indicates that defining employee engagement methods is essential to boosting organisational success (Cleland Mitchinson & Townend, 2008). The strategies aim to recognise and utilise factors that increase employee engagement, which in turn inspire workers and lead to improved productivity, profitability, loyalty to the organisation, and overall success (Clapon, 2014). Employees engage fully in their job as

a result of several workforce diversity issues of which religious diversity is a major one.

Religious diversity is becoming essential to the composition of the workforce in the present period of globalisation and heightened migration. Employees are increasingly interacting with coworkers, managers, and associates that follow different religious beliefs. Day (2005) proposes that companies with religious diversity may experience increased interpersonal disputes and misunderstandings, which could worsen biases among colleagues. Organisations must properly address religious diversity to

improve staff retention rates and productivity.

There is scarce study on religious diversity, however Aoun and Gibeily (2006) contend that effectively handling diversity, particularly religious difference, is essential because of its substantial influence on organisational performance. They stress the significance of organisational rules being considerate of individuals' religious practices, traditions, holidays, appearance, and clothing to avoid any negative impacts on them (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Nigeria faces common issues due to its religious variety. Employee apparel, observance of religious holidays, and ethnic practices have been partly dealt with in the workplace and are no longer seen as new challenges. The researchers emphasise that addressing issues related to apparel, holidays, food, and customs inside organisations is important, but more complex concerns arising from religious diversity need immediate attention and resolution. Thus, drawing from the Nigerian experience, the aim of this research is to draw the attention to and maybe highlight other concerns of religious diversity that might relate with employee engagement.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study seeks to ascertain the relationship between religious diversity and employee engagement. The following objectives are to be achieved:

- i. To determine the relationship between religious diversity and vigor.
- ii. To ascertain the relationship between religious diversity and dedication.
- iii. To find out the relationship between religious diversity and absorption.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### **Religious Diversity**

Religious diversity in the workplace refers to the comprehensive implementation of measures to safeguard and assist individuals practicing various religions within a professional setting. This encompasses more than just providing time off for religious observance, it includes the daily operations of a workplace (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2015). Despite extensive scholarship and developments in the field of management over the last century, and plentiful evidence of the worldwide increasing religious diversity (Alesina et al., 2002), not much attention has been paid to religious diversity and its role in the workplace.

Religion emphasises intellectual views (Byrd & Scott, 2014), while spirituality emphasises a personal connection with the universe and its parts. Spirituality-focused businesses are more tolerant of demographic and ideological differences (Groschl, 2016). Egalitarian and inclusive religion and spirituality may provide people a sense of purpose, connection, and pleasant social relations and improve their ability to work together without conflict (Byrd & Scott, 2014).

According to Kirton & Greene (2015) and Messarra (2014), religious and spiritual diversity is a slogan that is universally acknowledged but rarely implemented until disputes arise. In Western countries, preemptive policies exist to minimise religious discrimination, but organisations normally take a less proactive approach (Kirton & Greene, 2015).

Religion is a problem in increasingly varied workplaces. Organisational policies and employees' religious practises often conflict (Mathis et al., 2016). For instance, some companies have dress codes. However,

certain men and women may not accept this for religious reasons, such as Sikhs wearing turbans and Muslim women wearing hijabs. Sabbath and Ramadan may also prevent some workers from working (Hambler, 2015).

Religious discrimination against Muslims, Sikhs, and Jews persists in Western employment (Moodie, 2016). Lack of knowledge of religious and cultural beliefs can cause misunderstandings and animosity. Thus, religious disputes may arise between employees and their employers (Byrd & Scott, 2014). Discriminatory or non-inclusive behaviours may not be intentional but may indicate a lack of workplace diversity understanding (Mor Barak, 2014). These concerns often mask deeper behavioural results that affect organisational performance, employee commitment, and engagement (Bendl et al., 2015).

### **Employee Engagement**

Company based definitions see employee involvement as a result, whereas academic research has explored its complex characteristics in more detail. Scholars have investigated different facets, such as the results, mental states, and mutual connection between employees and organisations (Markwick & Smith, 2009). Employee engagement involves an employee's mental state, visible actions, and attitudes that enhance organisational effectiveness. Schaufeli, et. al. (2002) define engagement as a motivating process that results in a good and rewarding work-related well-being. Brown links engagement with job involvement, whereas Schaufeli (2002) and colleagues have identified three interrelated elements of employee engagement and created a scale to assess them. These are: (a) Vigour is characterised by a person's strong spirit, vitality, and resilience in the profession; (b) Dedication refers to an employee's sense

of being pushed and their enthusiasm, motivation, and enjoyment in the workplace; (c) Absorption is a state of complete focus and intense engagement with one's work, where time seems to pass rapidly and it becomes difficult for the employee to disconnect from their tasks.

### **Religious Diversity and Employee Engagement**

Within the current context, identity threats resulting from religious discrimination will more likely result in the worker being less engaged at work. Scholarly literature on engagement has emphasized that harmonious relation between coworkers fosters a psychological sense of safety in the work environment. A study by Avey et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between positive emotions and engagement. Kahn (1990) suggested that employee engagement at work varies based on the ways in which they “psychologically” experience their jobs. Additionally Schaufeli and Van Rhenen (2006) attributed increased productivity of engaged employees to positive emotions they experience at work. Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes (2003) concluded that employee engagement “generates higher frequency of positive affect (job satisfaction, commitment, joy, fulfillment, interest, caring),” which in turn affects retention and efficiency. According to Markos and Waltair (2010), what drives employee engagement is mostly non-financial in nature. Seijts and Crim (2006) highlighted ten factors that drive employee engagement, called “The Ten C’s of Employee Engagement”. These are connect (relationship between manager and employee), career (room for career advancement), clarity (understanding the goals and vision), convey (regular feedback and expectations), congratulate (praise and recognition), contribute (involvement),

control (control over his or her job), collaborate (teamwork), credibility (feeling of pride in one's job or organization), and confidence (confidence in employee's own ability, or in the credibility of the team or organization).

The correlation between religious diversity and employee engagement is intricate and has several aspects. An inclusive workplace that values religious diversity can improve employee engagement. Employees who feel appreciated, respected, and encouraged to express their religious beliefs are more likely to be engaged and dedicated to their work and organisation. Religious diversity in some settings can enhance employees' sense of belonging and purpose, therefore reinforcing their bond with the organisation. Challenges may occur if religious diversity is not appropriately managed. Issues stemming from misunderstandings, biases, or disputes based on religious differences can have a detrimental effect on employee engagement. Employees who feel marginalised or discriminated against due to their religious beliefs may become disengaged and experience decreased morale. Religious

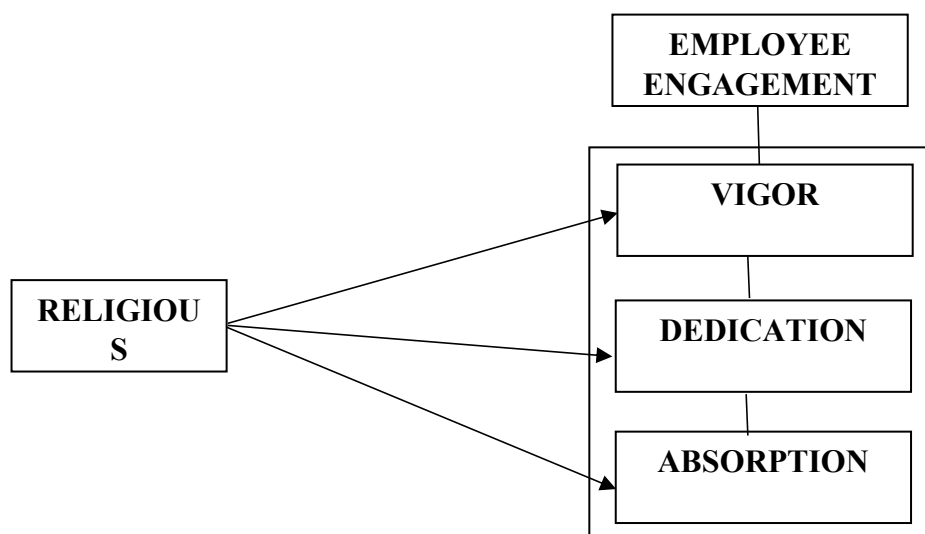
issues in the workplace can lead to a hostile environment, impeding collaboration and teamwork.

If the employee perceived these factors positively, then his or her engagement level would most likely increase. Based on the above, teamwork and manager/employee relationship are important attributes of employee engagement, which can be negatively affected by discrimination. Generally, the higher the engagement level, the higher the performance, feedback, appraisal, and the lower the turnover rate (Perrin, 2003). Therefore, given the positive relationship between the religious diversity of the individual and his/her engagement and the negative relation between perceived discrimination and work related behaviors, the following hypotheses can be drawn:

**Ho1:** Religious diversity and vigor are negatively related.

**Ho2:** Religious diversity and dedication are negatively related.

**Ho3:** Religious diversity and absorption are negatively related.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework of Religious Diversity and Employee Engagement.

**Source:** Marhanum et al. (2021), Markwick & Smith, (2009) and Groschl, (2016).

### Empirical Review

Canaan (2014) investigated religious diversity in the workplace, specifically looking into how employees perceive religious discrimination and how it affects their engagement and commitment. The purpose of this research was to examine how employees' perceptions of religious discrimination affected their dedication and enthusiasm on the job. Five hundred forty-eight workers from religiously diverse organisations participated in the poll. According to the results, employees' dedication and enthusiasm take a hit when they feel religious bias at work. Managers, and HR managers in particular, should endeavour to lessen the impact of religious prejudice on their organisations and employees by creating plans to address the problem and implementing solutions. Employees' perceptions of religious discrimination may influence other behavioural consequences; future research should investigate this more.

Marhanum et al. (2021) conducted an empirical investigation on religious diversity practices at both public and private sectors in Malaysia. Their study looked at how both the public and business sectors in Malaysia deal with religious diversity. The following have been thoroughly researched: business policy, dress code, religious artefacts or symbols, hiring practices, advancement opportunities, education, religious holidays, and physical locations. The research purpose was to achieve by using quantitative approach to survey 759 personnel from the public and private sectors. Given Malaysia's multicultural and multi-religious society, the descriptive and factor analyses conducted in this research indicate that religious freedom is practiced in the majority of public and private sector workplaces. This study's

findings may suggest that religious discrimination was not an issue in Malaysia's public and private sector.

Looking into the impact of religion on Muslim workers' involvement and productivity, Anthony et al. (2021) presented their findings. This study aims to examine, from the viewpoint of Muslim employees, the direct and indirect effects of religiosity on job performance and employee engagement. Using a sample of 569 Muslim employees in Bandung, Indonesia, this study examines the religiosity-job performance hypothesis using Partial Least Squares (PLS) modelling. According to the results, there is a strong relationship between employee engagement and the three components of religiosity (practice, altruism, and belief). On the other hand, only benevolence among the aspects of religion affects employee engagement indirectly as well as directly. Furthermore, this one-of-a-kind study sheds light on the importance of employee engagement and the correlation between employee religiosity and job performance, in addition to confirming the link between engagement and job performance.

### Methodology

For this study, a quasi-experimental design was adopted in the research process. As a result, a survey is frequently more accurate because the entire population cannot be examined. All of Nigeria's Ministry, Department and Agencies (MDA) are therefore the work's target demographic. The decision to focus on a readily available population of public sector in Rivers State was made since it would be exceedingly time-consuming to analyse all of Nigeria's MDA's. Information mortality has traditionally been seen as a barrier to investigating big populations, particularly when the study's components are dispersed throughout

various clusters. In the light, one hundred (100) employees from diverse branches at the Federal Secretariat, Port Harcourt were purposively sampled. Hence, purposive sampling technique was adapted to employees from Federal Secretariat Rivers state branch. Questionnaires were designed to enable respondents tick on their suggestions on the subjects.

In order to empirically ascertain the connection involving the dependent as well as independent variables in this research (as well as their elements), the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Spearman-Rank-Statistical-Technique were both employed. In order to test hypotheses 1 through 3, the Spearman's rho was used to

examine the affiliation betwixt the independent variable dimensions and the dependent variable measures. Since all the variables in this research are calculated on an ordinal scale, the choice of the Spearman's rho is determined by how well it fits the type or volume of data that had been acquired. This makes it appropriate for our review.

## Results and Discussion

### Distribution and Collection of Data

#### Demographic Analysis

In relation to the research variables, the demographic report identifies key traits in the sample, such as the survey respondents' age, gender, religion, and length of service with the specific organisation.

**Table 1: Bio-data of the respondents.**

	Number	Percentages
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	59	59%
Female	41	41%
<b>Age</b>		
18-25years	9	9%
26-35years	17	17%
36-45years	32	32%
46-60years	26	26%
60years and above	16	16%
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	58	58%
Islam	39	39%
Others	3	3%

A profile of the sampled respondents showed that the sampled respondents comprised of 59% males and 41% females. Of these 9% of the respondents are in the age bracket of 18-25years, 17% (26-35years), 32% (36-45years), 26% (46-60years) and 16% are

60years and above. The spread of the respondents among the religious divide indicates that 58% are Christians, 39% are muslim while 3% are of other traditional religions.

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** Religious diversity and vigor are negatively related.

**Correlations**

			Religious Diversity	Vigor
Spearman's rho	Religious Diversity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.821
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.029
		N	100	100
	Vigor	Correlation Coefficient	.821	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.
		N	100	100

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of 0.821 at a significance level of 0.05 demonstrates a substantial and significant inverse association between religious diversity and vigour. This backs the alternative hypothesis, indicating that

increased religious diversity in the public domain is linked to reduced levels of vigour or participation. Hence, the null hypothesis, suggesting no correlation between these variables, is dismissed in favour of this significant and positive link.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** Religious diversity and dedication are negatively related.

**Correlations**

			Religious Diversity	Dedication
Spearman's rho	Religious Diversity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.674
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.012
		N	100	100
	Dedication	Correlation Coefficient	.674	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.
		N	100	100

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

At the 0.05 level of significance, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of 0.821 indicates that religious diversity and vigour are significantly and strongly inversely correlated in a negative direction. This finding provides support for the alternative

hypothesis, which posits that increased religious diversity in the public sphere is linked to diminished levels of enthusiasm or involvement. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which postulated the absence of any association between these variables, is

denied in support of this significant and affirmative correlation.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Religious diversity and absorption are negatively related

#### Correlations

			Religious diversity	Absorption
Spearman's rho	Religious Diversity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.809
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	100	100
	Absorption	Correlation Coefficient	.809	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	100	100

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The significant and robust negative correlation between religious diversity and absorption is supported by the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of 0.809 at a significance level of 0.039. This indicates that absorption tends to decrease in correlation with religious diversity. Therefore, the results provide support for the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between religious diversity and absorption and in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there is a negative association between the two.

#### Conclusion

On the basis of the findings concerning the relationship between religious diversity and employee engagement dimensions (vigour, dedication, and absorption), it is possible to conclude that religious diversity has a substantial effect on employee engagement in the workplace. The identified negative correlations suggest that there is a tendency for levels of engagement, enthusiasm, and absorption in work-related activities to decline in tandem with the increase in religious diversity. The findings of

this study indicate that in order to increase employee engagement and productivity, it is critical for businesses to effectively manage religious diversity and promote belongingness. Moreover, it emphasises the necessity for additional investigation and execution of approaches to tackle the intricacies associated with religious diversity in professional environments.

#### Recommendations

1. Organizations should encourage employees to engage in open dialogue and communication in order to promote appreciation and comprehension of diverse religious viewpoints.
2. They should establish adaptable policies to accommodate religious activities and observances.
3. Leadership should lead by example in promoting diversity and inclusion.

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